



# Destruction and Its Impact on Ancient Societies at the End of the Bronze Age

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## Abbreviations

### *General*

LC	Late Cypriot
LH	Late Helladic
LM	Late Minoan

### *Bibliographic*

AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>
AAA	<i>Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology</i>
AAAS	<i>Annales archéologiques arabes syriennes</i>
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
ABSA	<i>Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
ADAJ	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
ADOG	Abhandlungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
AeL	<i>Ägypten und Levante/Egypt and the Levant</i>
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AfOB	Archiv für Orientforschung, Beiheft
AHL	<i>Archaeology and History in the Lebanon</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AJASup	American Journal of Archaeology Supplement
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
AmJT	<i>American Journal of Theology</i>
AnAnt	<i>Anatolia Antiqua</i>
ANESSup	Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement
AnSt	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
ArchDelt	<i>Archaiologikon Deltion</i>
ArRep	<i>Archaeological Reports</i>
ASORAR	American Schools of Oriental Research Archaeological Reports

AuOrSup	Aula Orientalis Supplementa
AW	<i>Antike Welt</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAAL	Bulletin d'archéologie et d'architecture libanaises
BaM	<i>Baghdader Mitteilungen</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Report</i>
BARIS	British Archaeological Reports International Series
BArte	<i>Bollettino d'Arte</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i> (from 2020 <i>Bulletin of ASOR</i> )
BCAW	Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World
BCH	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
BCHSup	Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique Supplément
BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CA	<i>Current Anthropology</i>
CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
CCEM	Contributions to the Chronology of the Eastern Mediterranean
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
COS	Hallo, William W., and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds. <i>The Context of Scripture</i> . 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2016.
CRAI	<i>Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i>
DamM	<i>Damaszener Mitteilungen</i>
DMOA	Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui
EAEHL	<i>Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . Edited by Michael Avi-Yonah. 4 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1975–1978.
ESI	<i>Excavations and Survey in Israel</i>
HANEM	History of the Ancient Near East, Monographs
IAAR	Israel Antiquities Authority Reports
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JArS	<i>Journal of Archaeological Science</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KUB	Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi
MDOG	<i>Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft</i>
MRS	Mission de Ras Shamra

NABU	<i>Nouvelles Assyriologiques Breves et Utilitaires</i>
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEAEHL	Stern, Ephraim, ed. <i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . 5 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993, 2008.
NS	new series
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OEANE	<i>The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East</i> . Edited by Eric M. Meyers. 5 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OJA	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OpAth	<i>Opuscula Atheniensia</i>
OpAthRom	<i>Opuscula</i>
Or	<i>Orientalia</i> NS
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
PAe	Probleme der Ägyptologie
PIAE	<i>Praktika tēs en Athēnais Archaialogikēs Hetairias apo ... mechri</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
pl(s).	plate(s)
QDAP	<i>Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine</i>
RA	<i>Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RAr	<i>Revue Archéologique</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RDAC	<i>Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus</i>
RSFSup	Rivista di studi fenici Supplemento
RSO	Ras Shamra-Ougarit
SAHL	Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SCAn	Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology
Sem	<i>Semitica</i>
SHAJ	<i>Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan</i>
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SMEA	<i>Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici</i>
SMNIA	Tel Aviv University Soia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology Monograph Series
StBoT	Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten
StMed	Studia Mediterranea
StPhoe	Studia Phoenicia
TA	<i>Tel Aviv</i>

<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philosophical Society</i>
<i>TMO</i>	<i>Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>WAW</i>	<i>Writings of the Ancient World</i>
<i>WAWSup</i>	<i>Writings of the Ancient World Supplement Series</i>
<i>ZÄS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

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Mycenean pottery is for the most part negligible and chronologically dispersed across two centuries.<sup>10</sup> While there certainly was contact between these regions, there is not sufficient evidence to say that they had a tightly connected political and economic system, one in which the failure of one would cause a breakdown in the others. Nevertheless, even if one assumes there was a system to collapse, it is clear that destruction could not have been a causal factor in that collapse.

### **Destruction, the End of the Late Bronze Age, and Where We Go from Here**

This study has sought to challenge the more than a century of research and excavations that have erroneously embedded destruction into the core of the end of the Late Bronze Age narrative. But it also brings to the fore several other important points that need to be taken into further consideration. The first is, as stressed in chapter 2, there is the need for a strict definition of what constitutes a destruction, as well as a systematic method to define and describe destruction events. None of the following suggestions will bear any fruit if there is no accepted concept for what is or is not a destruction. Until such a time when a definition and system for demarcating destruction is broadly accepted, such as the one presented here, there can be no hope of having an informed conversation on the subject, as everyone will continue to talk past each other, much as they would if there was no standard typology of Late Helladic pottery. If a system such as this one can be widely adopted then we can address the following issues to help bring more clarity not only to the end of the Late Bronze Age, but to the ancient world in general.

One of the issues that needs to be addressed in the future is the subconscious assumption that periods of transition are fraught with more destruction than the periods before the transition or collapse. This is obvious, as most periods of transition are oftentimes assumed to be accompanied by a string of destructions or “destruction horizon.”<sup>11</sup> However, it is my opinion that it is unlikely that only the end of the Late Bronze Age suffers from false destructions in any of their three forms. Indeed, this has already been demonstrated for another period in the southern Levant, as Jodi Magness (1993, 43, 53, 66–71, 86–88, 90–91, 118) has uncovered that many of the destruction events associated with the Muslim conquest of Palestine were misdated by more than a century and had only been artificially constricted into a single chronological horizon. Like-

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10. For further details, see the discussion in Millek 2019c, 122–40, 200–204.

11. This is indeed the case for the southern Levant, which has a “destruction horizon” at the end of the Early Bronze Age, Middle Bronze Age, and, as discussed in this book, Late Bronze Age. For the Early Bronze Age, see Butzer 1997, 271–72; Richard 2014, 343; Prag 2014, 388; Gallo 2014. For the Middle Bronze Age, see Burke 2014, 411.



wise, Ryan Boehm (2013, 319–25) has demonstrated that, despite the traditional view that the *synoikismos* in the late fourth and third centuries BCE in northern Greece and western Asia Minor was a period of widespread destruction, in fact there is an overwhelming lack of evidence for destruction at this time. It is more than likely that many of the supposed “destruction horizons” are either generally false, as is the case for the end of the Late Bronze Age, or that at the least there is less destruction than has oftentimes been presumed to be the case.

Much of the reason for this theoretical supposition that destruction was rampant in periods of transition likely stems from the assumption that the end of a period or age must be preceded by violent destruction. Thus, as was the case with many of the assumed or false citations discussed in chapter 3, sites were presumed destroyed not based on any evidence, but rather because the site had a layer dated to ca. 1200 BCE. Since the underlying assumption dictated that all or almost all sites were destroyed ca. 1200 BCE many sites were presumed destroyed, even if there was a general lack of evidence, or what was found likely represented burning in only a single room or the day-to-day use of a hearth.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, in many cases of false destruction ca. 1200 BCE, the theory superseded the physical archaeological evidence. It is more than likely that this is also the case in other periods and regions that have lists of sites destroyed ca. any given date.

Moreover, in many instances where destruction was uncovered, it was simply assumed that the destruction was caused by violent warfare or by an earthquake, depending on the theoretical leaning of the excavator interpreting the material. Because of this, other possible causes were overlooked or ignored, as the evidence had to fit into a preconceived theoretical mold that did not allow for accidental fires, structural engineering failures, or even evidence of warfare in sites that were supposedly destroyed by an earthquake. Thus, there needs to be a reappraisal of all so-called destruction horizons, to see what sites actually have evidence of destruction, when the evidence dates to, whether there is evidence of abandonment or crisis prior to the destruction event, and what the scale and possible causes for the destructions are. Until this work is undertaken, any discussion of a “destruction horizon” should be taken with a measure of caution, as it is more than likely that these other “horizons of destruction” too are rife with errors that need to be expunged.

This leads to two other vital points. The first of these is that typically during these periods of crisis, collapse, transition, or change, depending on how one chooses to view it, there is the undercurrent in the literature that these were more violent points in history than in the times preceding them. Thus, not only is there supposedly more evidence for widespread destruction, but violence and

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12. I have provided several quotations in the previous chapters where many have stated just this, that all sites in a given region were destroyed.

unrest is typically assumed to be at greater levels than in the preceding decades. The end of the Late Bronze Age is an excellent example of this assumption, yet, there is nothing to suggest that the years surrounding 1200 BCE were any more violent than the previous centuries. If we were to ask the people of the Levant if the LB I or LB II were without violence, the inhabitants of Megiddo would likely answer no, as they were utterly defeated by Thutmose III and put under Egyptian subjugation along with the majority of the Levant. The Amarna Letters do not provide a picture of peace and tranquility during the fourteenth century BCE in Canaan and the central Levant, but rather portray fighting between petty polities who were also harassed by groups of Habiru (Ahlström, Rollefson, and Edelman 1993, 239–71). The situation at Qatna certainly challenges the notion that the period during the Late Bronze Age was less violent than its end, as the site suffered a massive destruction, likely at the hands of Suppiluliuma I, and it never regained its former glory. Ugarit was caught in a tug of war between Egypt, Mitanni, and the Hittites, while Mitanni itself was completely obliterated as an entity by the Hittites and Assyrians.

Other sites that could challenge the prevailing view of the intra Late Bronze Age periods are Troy VIh, Beycesultan, Maşat Höyük, and Kuşaklı, which all suffered greater damage during the course of the Late Bronze Age than at its end ca. 1200 BCE. While historians bemoan the loss of Linear B and writing in Greece at the end of the Late Bronze Age, what is oftentimes lost in the discussion is the complete annihilation of Linear A, which resulted in the disappearance of an entire language group at the end of the fifteenth century BCE (Tomas 2010; Wiener 2015). The loss of Linear A was in many ways worse than the disappearance of Linear B, as at least Greek survived, while whatever language Linear A represented appears to have gone out of existence. From here, the list could go on, as Egypt, Hatti, Mitanni, Babylonia, Assyria, and others were constantly at war with someone, extending their reach through violent and at times destructive conquest, while they too faced threats from uprisings, other kingdoms and empires, as well as from population groups they could not control, such as the Kaska, Habiru, Sashu, Libyans, pirates, and bandits, to name only a few.

Thus, while the end of the Late Bronze Age is typically described as a period of more overt violence and destruction, the historical record does not indicate that it was any more tumultuous than the Late Bronze Age as a whole—that is, unless one reaches into the realm of Greek myth and the bombastic narration provided by one pharaoh on one of his monuments that largely reflects violence done against the Sea Peoples by the Egyptians rather than the other way around.

This then leads into the second point, which is that the assumption that transitional periods such as the end of the Late Bronze Age were fraught with more destruction, and not only that, but also more-devastating destruction than in the preceding centuries, is not based on any factual evidence or systematic

study. It is merely an assumption. If one were to ask how many destruction events occurred during the LBI in the Levant, what was their scale, what were the probable causes, and what resulted after the destruction, no lists or maps exist to answer this question. Destruction during a period or age has gone largely unstudied as a phenomenon. While the amount of destruction at the end of the Late Bronze Age is outwardly compared to destruction during the Late Bronze Age, we simply do not know how much destruction actually took place in any given period for any given region. Consequently, we cannot say that there was more destruction and more devastating destruction at the end of the Late Bronze Age, as we do not know how much destruction occurred before it or after it. Thus, much as all periods of collapse, crisis, transition, and their “destruction horizons” need to be reevaluated, the entire archaeological record requires reexamination, as we cannot compare one data set to another data set that does not currently exist in any tangible form. If there is to be any comparison, we must first understand how destruction affected sites during a period to see if there are drastic differences between interperiod destructions and destructions at the end of a period or age. Until that time, it is fruitless to say there was more destruction at the end of a period such as the Late Bronze Age, as we simply do not know what the rate of destruction was, the average scale, distribution of cause, and the effect of these destructions during any fifty-to-one-hundred-year span of time.

From here it is clear where the study of destruction needs to go. Essentially, every destruction event from every period needs to be critically reexamined, while interperiod destruction events need to be sought out. If Late Helladic pottery had been accumulating over the course of the past one-hundred-plus years from hundreds of excavations without ever being examined under a common rubric or typology, while it would be a monumental task to study this body of material, the effort would be worthwhile. It would reveal troves of information that have gone undetected, challenging theories and upending assumptions.

Likewise, attempting to reinvestigate all destruction events would be a mammoth task; however, it too will be worth the while. Over the course of such an endeavor, theories and reconstructions of the past will be challenged, upended, or shown to be fallacious, while also reaffirming others when the evidence warrants it. We can examine how populations reacted to destructive crises both during and outside periods of transition. The method of analyzing destruction would be refined, improved, and expanded, just as what has been presented here was not meant to be the end of the discussion on examining and interpreting destruction, but merely the beginning. This endeavor of course will not happen all at once, and it will need to be done site by site and destruction horizon by destruction horizon, but if it is completed, the benefits to our understanding of the ancient world will far outweigh the cost in time.

Only by thoroughly studying destruction over the millennia can we come to a better understanding of how destruction in its myriad of forms affected ancient societies and discover what new knowledge lies lurking in the darkness of the unstudied destruction event.