

## Chapter 6

### Sea Peoples & Natural Disasters

#### *Hatti*

Scholars are not agreed on precisely how the Hittite Empire ended, although the consensus view holds that invaders were responsible, and further, that the invading peoples are perhaps the same mixture of warfaring Sea Peoples that attacked Egypt in the days of Merenptah and menaced Egypt in the days of the 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty king Ramses III.

The scholars are undoubtedly correct, at least in their belief that invading hordes dealt the coup-de-grace to the Hittites. And it is almost certain that the death blows were administered around the year 760 B.C. in the revised history. We have argued previously that the Hittites were succeeded immediately by the Muski/Phrygians ruled by a king Midas, perhaps but not certainly the king who later became a legend. According to our earlier reasoning this king began his rule around 765 B.C., the time of the Santorini explosion. The 760 B.C. date we have assigned to end of the Hittite empire falls only five years later. It is a date supported by the entire weight of argument in the three books dedicated to this revision. The Muski were at least the beneficiaries, if not the immediate cause of the Hittite collapse.

We cannot credit the invaders totally for the Hittite collapse. There is no doubt that some, if not most of the destruction inflicted on Hittite cities was caused by warfare, but we must point out that the collapse of the walls of Hattusas, and the havoc wrought elsewhere at the bend of the Halys, suggests that natural causes, including volcanic activity and earthquake, was a contributing factor. Most Hittite sites show evidence of destruction by fire. They are inevitably found buried in a layer of ash. But this does not necessarily imply warfare. As we will soon observe in the case of Syria, where destructive fire fell from heaven around this time, much of the burning may have resulted from molten cinder and ash falling from the sky, not the deliberate action of conquering hordes. We wonder how many Hittite cities were burned and buried the day Santorini erupted and sent storms of fiery lava and pumice

raining throughout the ancient world. The surviving population, weakened by the natural disasters, soon succumbed to marauding and opportunistic hordes.

In the traditional history scholars agree that king Suppiluliumas II was the last king of the Hittite Empire. Little is known about his reign, though one letter from Ugarit, found in the kiln of the destroyed city, suggests that famine plagued the Hatti land for much of his reign. Does this imply that Hittite crops had been recently destroyed? It is of some interest that in his brief reign Suppiluliumas II was compelled to fight off invaders coming to the southern shores of his kingdom from Alashiya (Cyprus). In the words of Johannes Leymann:

The Sea People, this time genuinely sea-borne, had by now reached and occupied Alashiya (Cyprus) on their way to Syria. Suppiluliuma made a last desperate attempt to recapture the island. 'I mustered ... and swiftly reached the sea - I, Suppiluliuma the Great King. But ships from Alashiya opposed me three times in battle in the midst of the sea. I destroyed them. I seized the ships and set them ablaze in the midst of the sea. But when I came on to dry land, the foes from Alashiya opposed me in battle. *The Hittites* 296

According to Leymann "We do not know the sequel".

At least one other hint that these were troublesome times is found in a sequence of oaths of loyalty, recorded on tablets, required of multiple Hittite subjects. Such oaths were common in treaties with foreign kings. They are otherwise unknown among the rank and file. Once again we follow Leymann:

Thanks to a discovery made in 1953, we know that the last Hittite king was another Suppiluliuma ... A brother of Arnuwanda, he reigned ca. 1200 during a period of such turmoil and dissolution that he was obliged to make his subjects swear an oath of allegiance in order to assert his authority. The following declaration was made by a senior scribe on wooden tablets at the Hittite court: "I shall defend the issue of my lord Suppiluliuma alone. I shall not support another man, descendant of Suppiluliuma the First, descendant of Mursili, descendant of Muwatalli and Tudhaliyas' This is only one of several such oaths of allegiance, most of them cursorily inscribed. *The Hittites* 295

We hear no more from Suppiluliuma. The Hittite Empire is silent. It is sometime around the year 760 B.C.

*Ugarit*

The ancient city of Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra) was situated less than 100 km from the southern border of the Hatti land. Throughout much of the Hittite Empire period it headed a vassal state, bound by treaty to the Hittites. It is not surprising that its end coincided with that of its parent. Evidence from the ruins of Ugarit suggests that it fell at the hands of the same rebels who dealt the killing blows to the Hatti land. Margaret Drower provides the consensus view of the end of the city in her *Cambridge Ancient History* article on the topic. She quickly glosses over the reigns of the predecessors of Amurappi, the last king of the city. Little is known about them.

Ibiranu was a contemporary of Tudkhaliash IV and probably also of his successor Arnuwandash III. The next king of Ugarit, Ibiranu's son Niqmaddu III, can have had only a brief reign; whether 'Ammurapi, who followed him, was of the royal line or no is uncertain, for, contrary to the usual custom, his parentage is nowhere mentioned; he is likely to have been of the same generation as his predecessor. CAH II.2 145

Several years after the reign of Amurappi began, Suppiluliumas II began his reign in Hatti. If we are correct, his coronation may have coincided with the eruption of the Thera volcano. Almost immediately, we see signs of insurrection in the kingdom. Troops are sent from Ugarit to assist the Hittites. Famine also grips the Hatti land. Famine apparently also threatens life in Alashiya, perhaps precipitating the naval migration from the island (in search of food?) referred to earlier. Ugarit was summoned to assist both the Hittites and the Alashiyans. Drower discusses the events.

Shuppiluliumash II now ascended the Hittite throne and, facing a mounting tide of threatening disaster, found himself relying more and more on the fleet of his most important vassal on the Levant coast. The blow was not long delayed. In the ruins of the latest level of the palace at Ras Shamra, the kiln used for baking tablets was found to be packed full of documents, a batch of about one hundred brought by the scribes when freshly written; many are transcriptions into alphabetic Ugaritic of letters and despatches which must have been received in the weeks - even the days - before the fall of the city: there had been no time to take them from the kiln. The immediacy of the danger facing Ugarit is implicit in the wording and content of some of these and other tablets. The Hittite king asks urgently for a ship and a crew to transport grain from Mukish to the Hittite town

of Ura in Cilicia, as a 'matter of life and death' since there is famine in the area. In making this demand, the Hittite refers to an act of liberation whereby he has formally released the king of Ugarit (probably 'Ammurapi) from vassalage, but he makes it clear that Ugarit has not been absolved from all her obligations towards her former overlord. Famine may also have afflicted Alashiya at this time: a certain Pagan whose letter to the King of Ugarit was one of those found in the kiln, calls the Ugaritian 'my son', perhaps indicating that a dynastic marriage linked their houses; he asks for a ship to be sent with food supplies for the island. In reply, 'Ammurapi informs his 'father', the king of Alashiya, that he has not a ship to spare, since the enemy has plundered his coasts, while his own fleet is in the Lukka lands and his troops in the land of the Hittites. CAH II.2 145-6

According to Drower "only one known situation fits this predicament: the approach of the 'Peoples of the Sea' whose destructive progress by way of Qode (Kizzuwadna), the Khatti-land, Carchemish, Alashiya and Amurru is all too briefly related by Ramesses III in his inscription on the north wall of the temple of Medinet Habu." (op. cit. 146)

We disagree. The Medinet Habu text to which Drower refers, the same text which caused Johannes Leymann to identify this same group of "Sea Peoples" as the cause of the Hittite collapse described above, belongs to a later phase of the social disruption caused by the eruption of the Santorini volcano. In the revised history we have dated the beginning of the reign of Ramses III around the year 757 B.C.. His fifth year, in which these particular sea-peoples invaded Egypt for the first time, must be dated around 752 B.C., about a decade after the dual problems of famine and insurrection mentioned in the Ugaritic documents. We will return to this subject momentarily when we discuss the Egyptian situation.

Then who are the enemy who threaten the Hatti land and are plundering the coastline around Ugarit? The answer is suggested by the historical context in which we have placed the event, one in which a widespread devastation of crops has caused panic and looting. Most of the rebels are probably local. Others may originate from neighboring states where famine has prompted an exodus in search of food. The situation in Ugaritic described by Drower raises many questions in support of this thesis. Why is an island nation like Alashiya unable to muster a single ship to feed its population? And why is a port city like Ugarit unable to supply ships in response to urgent requests for help? Granted that its military fleet (or what was left of it) was assisting elsewhere; surely a

thriving port city such as Ugarit harboured hundreds of commercial vessels at any one time. Where were they? And how did a shortage of food occur so suddenly and simultaneously both in the Hatti land and on Alashiya? The answer is provided by the revised history of the period in question.

When Santorini erupted in 765 B.C. vast tidal waves must certainly have overwhelmed both Alashiya and Ugarit. Not only were ships destroyed overnight, but stored food supplies as well. Ugarit had recourse to inland resources to resupply its population. Alashiya did not. Additionally, both the island and the city, indeed all of Anatolia, were suddenly overwhelmed with fiery ash hailing from the heavens. Earthquakes toppled walls, building and crops alike were destroyed by fire, a layer of ash blanketed the ground. We assume that the letters in the ovens of Ugarit were written less than a year following the Thera explosion. In the interim peoples throughout the Near East scrambled frantically to obtain food. What they could not obtain by negotiation they attempted to attain by force. We assume that the enemy that was confronted in the Lukka lands by Suppiluliumas was local, his army acting to suppress acts of civil disobedience on the part of the local population, or pillage by neighboring peoples. It is significant that the texts do not name the enemy.

We also assume that the texts from Ugarit predate the one mentioned by Leymann earlier, that which speaks of a conflict between ships controlled by Suppiluliumas (probably originating from Ugarit) and those acting on behalf of Alashiya. This later conflict assumes that Alashiya has by this time obtained a few ships and is attempting to pillage supplies from the Anatolian coastline. It is a battle for survival. Both nations are desperately in need of food.

Around this same time, Ugarit itself is ransacked and plundered. There is at least one letter that suggests that the vandals may have come from the east, through Cilicia, and attacks Ugarit from the north. We quote Drower once again.

At the approach of the enemy, Shuppiluliumash must have summoned his vassals in North Syria to his aid, and Ugarit, loyal to the last, must have sent her whole army. One of the letters found in the kiln appears to be an urgent dispatch sent to

the king in Ugarit from the commander of the army in Lawasanda (Lawazantiya) in Cilicia, which his troops had fortified in anticipation of attack. The enemy is nowhere mentioned by name, probably because so motley a horde had no collective name. Their presence in Mukish only a few dozen miles from Ugaritian territory, is indicated in a letter of Ewir-Sharrum, another of the Ugaritian generals in the field, to the queen or queen-mother, in the absence of the king at the front. Part of the letter is unfortunately damaged, but it sounds the note of extreme urgency and makes a reference to Mount Amanus, though a contingent of two thousand horses (equivalent to a thousand chariots, a very formidable force) is apparently still at the king's disposal. Other letters which may well date from this time of crisis tell of looting and burning. CAD II.2 146

Drower is careful to point out later in her article that there are "many obscurities" in this letter from the general; "moreover in script and language it differs from the other tablets in the archive and its date is therefore problematical". We should therefore not read too much into it. All we know for certain is that Ugarit ultimately succumbed to unnamed marauders. Already severely damaged by earthquake and fire the city was ransacked by opportunists in search of food and fortune. Its demise may be dated less than a year after the Santorini eruption. Small wonder that archaeologists are divided on the cause of its downfall. Here the earthquake and fire, and subsequent ransacking, came in such quick succession that scholars are unable to tell which preceded and which followed. Schaeffer, the first to excavate the city, was confused.

Of the anxiety of the king and people of Ugarit in the face of impending danger the tablets leave us in no doubt. Whether or not the destruction of the city was due to enemy action is less certain. M. Schaeffer, the excavator of Ras Shamra over more than forty years, who long held the view that the Peoples of the Sea were responsible for the final pillage and burning of Ugarit, has now reached a different conclusion. Ugarit, he suggests, may have come to terms with the invaders and persuaded them to bypass the city. CAH II.2 147

We understand the dilemma confronting Schaeffer. There is overwhelming evidence that earthquake and fire destroyed the city, covering it with a thick layer of ash. There is also evidence that marauders ransacked, and perhaps burned the city. Which event came first? We believe that Schaeffer should have maintained his original position. It is the historical context, not the archaeology, that informs our conclusion. That context was denied to Schaeffer by the errant

chronology of the traditional history. Ugarit was partially destroyed in 765 B.C. as collateral damage of the great Santorini eruption. It was ransacked and looted perhaps only months, certainly less than a year later, as famine and frenzy gripped the population of the entire near east. No wonder there is confusion.

### *Syria/Israel/Judah*

There exists a secure link between the end of the Hittite Empire, the ultimate destruction of Ugarit, and the mass movement of migrant peoples in the final days of the 19th Egyptian dynasty and the early years of the 20th. When we lowered the dates for the Egyptian 19th dynasty by 450 years, the dates for Hatti and Ugarit necessarily moved in tandem. It follows that our argument thus far, with the exception of the late date, might ultimately appeal to scholars. There is no fundamental reason why the migrations of "sea peoples" or the activity of vandals in the last days of Ugarit could not have resulted from a disruption in the food supply consequent to a massive eruption of some volcano in the Mediterranean. Nor is there any great contradiction in identifying the cause as the Santorini explosion. What scholars will dispute most vehemently is the 8th century date we have assigned to the event. It is for this reason that our discussion of happenings in Syria, Palestine and Assyria are critical aspects of our argument. Our revision has left the chronologies of these three countries intact. It is therefore of paramount importance that we find evidence that a massive explosion of the Santorini variety, accompanied by tandem destructions by earthquake and fire such as we have observed elsewhere, was felt along the eastern Mediterranean coastline. It is also vital that the event can be dated with some certainty around the year 765 B.C. We hope to find confirmation that the coastline was subject to gigantic tidal waves, that the land suffered a deluge of volcanic molten rock and that the atmosphere was polluted with ash, obscuring the sun for a considerable time. There should be evidence of mass starvation and social unrest. If not, there is something amiss in our chronological reconstruction.

We are not disappointed.

## The Great Raash

Around the year 765 B.C., during the reign of Uzziah king of Judah, the eastern Mediterranean experienced the trauma of what the Hebrew Bible calls "a great raash", generally translated earthquake, but with much broader meaning. Upheaval or disruption might be a better translation. The Jewish prophet Amos devotes an entire prophetic book to a detailed summary of what transpired in Syria. The prestigious *International Critical Commentary* dates the ministry of this prophet to the years 765-750 B.C. That is only an estimate. We assume it began several years earlier. The vision recorded in the *Book of Amos* in the Hebrew Bible must be dated to the beginning of this prophet's ministry. This important book has been the subject of much scrutiny. It deserves yet another look.

The introductory byline of the *Book of Amos* sets the stage:

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake (raash). (1:1)

Amos' reference to the *raash* does not function merely to date his prophetic word. It is rather an announcement of his intention to describe the event. What follows is a panoramic vision of the *raash* as it devastated the key centres of population from Damascus to the Gaza strip, its arrival announced with a thunderous roar in Jerusalem (1:2). From north to south the identical scene played out, fire (from heaven) consuming the citadels of Damascus, bringing to an end the royal line of Hazael and Ben-Hadad (1:3-5); and fire (from heaven) consuming the walls and citadels of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron (1:6,7) all but ending Philistine civilization (1:8). Elsewhere the scene is repeated. Tyre on the Mediterranean coast suffered the identical fate as Damascus and Philistia (1:9,10). Likewise Edom and Ammon further inland (1:14,15). This was no mere earthquake; it was rather a holocaust. We should not be deceived by the brevity of the description. Significant for our revision, these events are clearly dated around the year 765 B.C.



The description continues for nine chapters. All of the anticipated elements are present. The coastline shudders and the earth shakes, causing city walls and buildings to fall. A gigantic tidal wave or multiple waves vent their fury on the land, punishment, according to Amos, for the sins of the nations. By degrees the sky is blackened by molten ash and cinders. Fire fell from heaven, turning cities into raging infernos. All this was viewed as a judgment from the Lord for multiple national sins.

He who made the Pleiades and Orion  
 And changes deep darkness into morning  
 Who also darkens day into night  
 Who calls for the waters of the sea  
 And pours them out on the surface of the earth  
 The Lord is His name  
 It is He who flashes forth with destruction upon the strong  
 So that destruction comes upon the fortress (5:8,9; cf. 9:5-6)

Tidal waves came like a torrent, sweeping away even those most securely sheltered, depositing their remains on the highest elevations.

You will go out through breaches in the walls  
 Each one straight before her  
 And you will be cast to Harmon, declares the Lord (4:3)

Ash swept in like a fog. The sun was obscured. Darkness and gloom prevailed, awesome and frightful.

Will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light  
 Even gloom with no brightness in it. (5:20)  
 And it will come about in that day, declares the Lord God  
 That I shall make the sun go down at noon  
 And make the earth dark in broad daylight (8:9)

A great earthquake shocked the land; aftershocks continued, the land rippled like a wave.

Because of this will not the land quake  
 And everyone who dwells in it mourn  
 Indeed, all of it will rise up like the Nile,  
 And it will be tossed about  
 And subside like the Nile of Egypt. (8:8)

Death and destruction were immediate and widespread. Property and crops were destroyed in minutes (5:3,11). Entire cities were all but exterminated. Ninety percent of the population died.

For thus says the Lord God  
The city which goes forth a thousand strong  
Will have a hundred left  
And the one which goes forth a hundred strong  
Will have ten left to the house of Israel. (5:3)

Scholars have been confused by the language of Amos, perplexed at how to explain the absolute devastation he describes. Most interpreters view the entire book as a metaphor, believing that the devastation thus described was the result of warfare. They point to the fact that twenty years after the prophecy the Assyrian armies of Tiglath Pilezer III did in fact invade the Levant, causing indeterminate damage and inflicting innumerable casualties. There are in fact several indications in the text that warfare did accompany the events described elsewhere.

Therefore, thus says the Lord God  
An enemy, even one surrounding the land  
Will pull down your strength from you  
And your citadels will be looted (3:11)

We argue instead that the few references to war are expected. From the experience of Hatti and Ugarit we anticipate precisely this secondary destruction by rebels/vandal/opportunists. In Syria the house of Ben-Hadad and Hazael ended. A contest for the vacant throne must surely follow. Widespread looting of destroyed cities is predictable. And as we will observe in our discussion of Egypt, a decade after the destruction of the Levant in 765 B.C. Sea-Peoples did invade Syria en mass, and sojourn there en-route to Egypt. But neither these migrant armies, nor the Assyrians later, are known to have wrought havoc even remotely approaching what Amos envisions. The prophet is most certainly attributing the destruction to natural causes and the looting to human intervention following. Any other interpretation is strained.

A half century ago Immanuel Velikovsky recognized that the language of Amos should be taken literally. In his *Worlds in Collision* he attributed a cosmic cause to the earthquake, the tidal waves and the fire from

heaven. But there is no hint in the prophetic writing of Amos of this event is of extra-terrestrial origin. And the date 765 B.C. convinces us that our interpretation is correct.

The great *raash* in Uzziah's day was remembered for centuries. It became the unique symbol of a time when the judgment of God was announced to the world with great natural accompanying wonders, most importantly the pollution of the heavens with clouds of ash and cinders which block out the sun, turning day into darkness. Thus declares the prophet Zechariah speaking hundreds of years later:

And you will flee by the valley of My mountain, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee out as you fled before the *raash* in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord, my God, will come and all the holy ones with Him. And it will come about in that day that there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day known to the Lord ... Zech 14:5-7

The pollution of the atmosphere was without doubt the most vivid and lasting effect of the Santorini eruption. It must have persisted for months, if not years. And its effects must have been felt around the world. If so, then we should expect to see some reference to it in the vast archives of the Assyrians, apart from the Hebrew Bible the best preserved source of knowledge about the Near Eastern world of the 8th century B.C. We should therefore turn our attention eastward to Assyria. But first one final question related to the situation which prevailed in Syria following the great *raash*.

## Rezin

For well over a hundred years prior to the great *raash* Syria was ruled by a succession of kings bearing the dynastic names Ben-Hadad and Hazael. Amos is unequivocal in declaring an end to this succession around 765 B.C. Unfortunately there is no explicit biblical reference to the political situation which prevailed in the decades which immediately followed the *raash*. The next we hear from Syria the country is ruled by an otherwise unknown king named Rezin.

We first encounter Rezin decades later, around the year 745 B.C. At the time he has allied himself with Pekah, king of Judah, and is proceeding to attack Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:5,6). Ahaz, the Judaeen king, responded by seeking the help of the Assyrians, now ruled by the infamous Tiglath-Pilezer III. As a result "the king of Assyria listened to him; and the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and captured it, and carried it away into exile to Kir, and put Rezin to death" (2 Kings 16:9).

We mention Rezin in order to highlight one interesting aspect of his reign. Our only information regarding him in the Jewish historical literature describes his violent end. He is portrayed in this brief vignette as an aggressive military leader. Nothing more is said about him. We believe his reign began twenty years earlier, in succession to the dynasty of Ben-Hadad and Hazael. And we believe that very soon following the *raash* he led an army, perhaps including foreign mercenaries, to successfully attack Egypt, weakened by the same upheaval that decimated the Levant. Surprising as it might seem, for a brief moment in time this Syrian king became an Egyptian pharaoh. But here we are getting ahead of ourselves. We will take up that story in a moment.

## *Assyria*

It is estimated that when Santorini exploded "about 7 cubic miles (30 cubic km) of rhyodacite magma was erupted" and that "the plinian column during the initial phase of the eruption was about 23 miles (36 km) high" (see [volcano.oregonstate.edu/vwdocs/volc.../santorini.html](http://volcano.oregonstate.edu/vwdocs/volc.../santorini.html).) Much of that material must have remained in the atmosphere for years, blocking out the sun around the world. The heavier molten ash would have dissipated in the first few days following the explosion, and depending on wind conditions would have spent its fury within a radius of three or four hundred miles. The eastern shores of the Mediterranean might have been its limit.

Assyria lies five hundred miles further east, and was spared the fury of the fiery downfall. But the ash remained. The sun was obscured. Day turned to night as it did in Amos's world. And the event was duly noted.

As a rule the Assyrian annals are not interested in astronomical events. Lists of kings and their exploits were produced in abundance, citing fact upon fact in concise and monotonous sequence. But in the most innocuous of places and in the most matter of fact manner, one scribe at one moment in time made an exception to the rule, and remarked on the fact that the light of the sun was obscured. His remark was recorded around 765 B.C. Unfortunately for history, Assyriologists have misconstrued his remarks.

One of the most important sources for the determination of Assyrian dynastic history is the Eponym Canon, a document which itemizes, year by year, the reigns of the rulers of the country over two centuries, associating each year with some notable person (eponym) or event. Its relative chronology is extremely precise, affording scholars the opportunity to establish with precision the sequence of Assyrian kings together with their reign lengths for much of the 9th and 8th centuries B.C. And since several of these Assyrian kings interacted with the kings of Syria and Israel, it is possible to link Assyrian and Syrian chronologies with that of Israel with some degree of accuracy. By comparing the biblical and Assyrian data it can be determined with some certainty that the reign of the Assyrian king Ashur-dan III should be dated roughly in the years 773-755. The Santorini explosion of 665 B.C. must therefore have taken place approximately a decade into his reign.

Hugo Winckler, one of the most notable Assyriologists from the pioneering days of this discipline, wrote his *History of Babylonia and Assyria* early in the 20th century, following closely the data provided by the Eponym Canon. Concerning the reign of Ashur-dan III (773-764?) he writes:

He marched three times into Syria, the first time against Damascus, and the second against Chata-rikka to the north of it. Twice he advanced into Babylonia, in 771 and 767, where he sought to oppose the Chaldeans. The second half of his reign witnessed a weakening of his kingdom which compelled concentration of effort upon the maintenance of that which had been slowly accomplished in the tributary states. In 763 an insurrection broke out which, in the years that followed, was repeated in different quarters until by degrees a large part of the kingdom was involved. The Eponym Canon puts a division line before this year (the year which it tells us the eclipse of the sun occurred - a valuable notice for the determination of the old chronology) as it does before the beginning of a new

reign; for, since the insurrection took place in Ashur, a rival king must have been called forth.... The Eponym Canon does not name the king who was raised to the throne by the insurrection, but from various statements it is clear that he was recognized as king. He was Adad-Nirari IV (763-755). HBA 234-5.

Several aspects of Winkler's summary of the reign of Ashur-dan require explanation. We begin by reminding readers well versed in ancient history that the reference to the obstruction of the sun noted in the Eponym Canon in the 10th year of Ashur-Dan has from the outset of Assyriological studies been interpreted as a solar eclipse. And since comparison with Jewish historical literature places Ashur-dan "roughly" in the third to fifth decades of the 8th century, scholars from the outset sought to determine the date of the event by astronomical means. They were immediately successful. The fact that a solar eclipse took place in the near east in 763 B.C. clinched the identification, and with the Eponym Canon in hand Assyrian chronology was rigidly secured in its present position before the end of the 19th century. The reign of Ashur-dan must have begun in 773 B.C. and it ended, according to the Canon, eighteen years later, in 755 B.C. But this interpretation of the "obliterated sun", and the results which issued from it, should be seriously questioned.

Several challenges should be issued to Winckler's remarks, quoted above. In the first place the Assyrian text merely states that in the eponym year in question the "the sun did not shine". The reference is to an event of considerably more importance than a momentary darkening of the sun, an eclipse lasting for at most a few hours. The Assyrians were not a backward people, awestruck by an unexpected and terrifying celestial event. Assyrian astronomers were well aware of eclipses of both moon and sun and able to predict their arrival with some degree of accuracy. The eclipse of the sun would hardly deserve mention in a document concerned to uniquely identify the regnal year of a king. Rather, we suspect, this was the year that day turned to darkness, the beginning of a prolonged period of dusk and gloom that lasted for months, and perhaps for years. There is evidence in the Canon itself that we are right.

Winckler notes the fact that before mentioning the year in which the sun ceased shining "the Eponym Canon puts a division line", something it is

careful to do elsewhere only at the end of the reign of an Assyrian king, the end of an era so to speak. The presence of a line before the 10th year of Ashur-dan is unexpected and unprecedented, since his reign continued for another decade. Winkler attempts to explain its presence by inventing and inserting at this stage his king Adad-Nirari IV and assigning to this king the years 763-755 B.C., thus ignoring the plain witness of the Canon. We understand his reasoning. Something extremely important must have begun in the 10th year of Ashur-dan III. But what? We suspect, though admittedly we cannot prove, that there began this year a period of prolonged darkness, unprecedented and unexplained. We believe it continued for years. And we date the event to 765 B.C., not 763 B.C. We should perhaps point out, in passing, that altering the date for the 10th year of Ashur-dan by several years implies that all chronologies for near eastern civilizations which are referenced to Assyrian chronology are off by the identical two years, since this date was pivotal in assigning an absolute chronology to the Assyrian kings. This means, in turn, that every 1st millenium date used in our revision to this point in time would need to be moved backward two years, to agree with a revised Assyrian chronology. Needless to say we have no intention of turning back the clock. There remains some doubt that our interpretation of the Eponym Canon is correct, and our date for the Santorini explosion was only approximate. What is noteworthy here is the fact that the Canon reference to an obscured sun provides a possible parallel to events taking place elsewhere in the near east around the identical time. And as coincidences multiply, certainty grows.

We should also note in passing one further curiosity. Not only does a new era begin in the 10th year of Ashur-dan, whether 765 B.C. or 763 B.C. in absolute terms, but there is clear evidence that this era ended around the year 747 B.C. when a new age began. Many Assyrian documents are referenced to this new age, well known to scholars as the "age of Nabonidus" Why it began and what were its characteristics has never been determined. Immanuel Velikovsky makes the following insightful comments:

In -747 a new calendar was introduced in the Middle East, and that year is known as "the beginning of the era of Nabonidus." It is asserted that some astronomical event gave birth to this new calendar, but the nature of the event is not known. The beginning of the era of Nabonassar, otherwise an obscure

Babylonian king, was an astronomical date used as late as the second Christian century by the great mathematician and astronomer of the Alexandrian school, Ptolemy, and also by other scholars. It was employed as a point of departure of ancient astronomical tables. WC 210

Quoting from Cumont's *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans*, Velikovsky continues:

"This was not a political or religious era ... Farther back there was no certainty in regard to the calculation of time. It is from that moment that the records of eclipses begin which Ptolemy used." (Cumont 8,9) What was the astronomical event that closed the previous era and gave birth to a new era? WC 210

Velikovsky corrects concludes that the great *raash* of Uzziah's day must have been the ultimate cause. But he wrongly concludes that the *raash* happened in 747 B.C. We maintain that the sun was first obstructed in 765 B.C. And when the sun was obstructed so also was the nighttime sky. Observation of the movements of sun and moon and stars which guided the calculations of the Assyrian astronomers were precluded. In a very real sense the Assyrians lost the ability to precisely regulate their calendar. If we are correct the sky did not clear sufficiently to resume calendrical determinations for 18 years! Of this we cannot be certain, but the fact that the record of eclipses used by Ptolemy begins only in 747 B.C. agrees with our suggestion.

It is time to turn our attention to Egypt, whence began this lengthy and circuitous excursus. We have come full circle.

## *Egypt*

In our second chapter we outlined the histories of the 18th and 19th Egyptian dynasties, based to a large extent on the chronology represented by the Berlin Genealogy. To Ramses II and Merenptah, the two most notable kings ruling at the end of the 19th dynasty, we assigned the dates 840-774 and 774-764 B.C. respectively. We also said concerning the ephemeral kings Seti II, Amenmesse, Siptah and Twosre, that they almost certainly did not rule in succession at the end of the dynasty, as the traditional history would lead us to believe. In all likelihood their reigns



overlapped the terminal years of Merenptah, as all of them contested simultaneously for the throne.

We repeat our earlier claim that most of the (few) monuments of this period are undated and there is no clear evidence that these kings ruled in succession. In fact, the evidence suggests otherwise. The four terminal kings appear to have been confined to the vicinity of Thebes, where they exercised some limited political power till around 759 B.C., the date we assign to the beginning of the reign of Setnakht (759-757 B.C.), the patriarch of the 20th dynasty kings. These dates allow for the fact, expressly stated by Ramses III, that an interregnum existed in Egypt prior to the advent of his father Setnakht. To Ramses III, by far the most prominent king of the 20th dynasty, we have previously assigned the provisional dates 757-725 B.C.

The confusing evidence attesting the brief reigns of the four ephemeral kings is reflective of the chaotic conditions which prevailed in Egypt both prior to and immediately following the great raash of 765 B.C. The country was threatened from without for much of the reign of Merenptah through to the first decade of the reign of Ramses III. We believe that the series of eruptions culminating in the cataclysmic explosion of Santorini was a primary cause. There are only a few items from this time frame deserving of comment here. We begin with the reign of Merenptah.

### Merenptah (774-764 B.C.)

From the 5th year of Merenptah (770 B.C.) well into the reign of Ramses III Egypt was threatened by marauding Sea-Peoples, though we must distinguish between the early and later phases of this series of aggressions. The early attacks were launched by Lybia, accompanied by other Mediterranean peoples including the Ekwesh, Teresh, Luka, Sherden, Shekelesh, identified only as "northerners coming from all lands." It is interesting to note that the lands involved encircle Santorini like a wreath. Breasted, who has published all the relevant inscriptions from the reign of Merenptah, gives his impressions of the lands of origin of the aggressors.

Since the study of Sardinian art by Perrot and Chipiez, as Muller has shown, we must accept the Sherden as Sardinians; the Teresh may then equally well be the Etruscans (Tyrsenoi), and the Shekelesh might be the Sikeli (if "sh" be an ethnic termination in these western names; ...) Maspero has suggested Sagalassos in Asia Minor. The Ekweh are not impossibly the Achaeans, and from Asia Minor are the Luka or Lycians. BAR III fn. a, 239

It is not necessary to assume that this incursion of foreigners into Egypt was prompted by starvation in or desolation of the respective home countries of these peoples, nor that the desolation resulted from volcanic activity at Santorini. But we do consider that source to be the likely cause. The year is 770 B.C., only five years before the great explosion. We have previously argued that there did exist a lengthy period of volcanism on the island preceding the great eruption of 765 B.C. The coincidence of time and geography is compelling. At least one reference in the Merenptah archives indirectly supports this conclusion.

It is at least interesting to observe that Merenptah, in his Great Karnak Inscription, in the same breath in which he mentions with scorn the invading Libyan chief, remarks on how he had recently sent "grain in ships, to keep alive that land of Kheta." This action is most naturally connected to the famine which plagued the Hittites under Suppiluliumas II. It follows therefore that it should be attributed to the same cause, which we have identified as the volcanism at Santorini. Breasted is convinced that Merenptah is here blaming the Hittites for complicity in the recent attacks, thus accusing them being ingrates as well as aggressors. Considering that the Luka were allied with the invaders, and that the Luka were a tributary nation of the Hittites during the late Empire period, he is probably correct.

We move quickly from the beginning to the end of the series of invasions of Sea-Peoples, i.e., those which plagued Egypt in the early days of Ramses III.

## Ramses III

Ramses III ruled, according to our revised chronology, from 757-725 B.C. In his 5th, 8th and 11th years he faced three separate hordes of invading nations, the first led by Libya, assisted by the Philistines (Peleset) and the Thekel (Sicilians?); the second by a northern confederacy "disturbed" from their isles, who are said to have set up camp in Hatti and Syria, en route to Egypt; and the third by another Libyan confederacy. It would be of some benefit to discuss these invasions in some detail, but the principal of marginal returns would soon set in. Rather, we focus our attention on the invasion of the 8th year, 750 B.C. if we have correctly dated Ramses III.

It is generally agreed that all of these invasions were provoked by a common cause, some disaster in the countries of origin of the invading peoples. Something or someone "disturbed" these confederates "in their isles", this according to the Medinet Habu inscriptions in which Ramses has recorded the events. In the case of the 750 B.C. invasion we read:

The countries - - , the [Northerners] in their isles were disturbed, taken away in the [fray] - at one time. Not one stood before their hands, from Kheta, Kode, Carchemish, Arvad, Alasa, they were wasted. They set up a camp in one place in Amor. They desolated his people and his land like that which is not. They came with fire prepared before them, forward to Egypt. Their main support was Peleset, Thekel, Shekelesh, Denyen, and Weshesh. (These) lands were united, and they laid their hands upon the land as far as the Circle of the Earth. Their hearts were confident, full of their plans. BAR IV 37-8

This invasion, according to the inscription, arrived both by land and by sea, as the invading hordes consolidated their strength in Anatolia (Kheta and Kode), moved on to Syria (Carchemish, Arvad and Amor) where they subdued what remained of the northern and southern regions of the country, then on to Egypt. We let Breasted supply the details of what follows in the inscription. He begins by linking this invasion with that which preceded it three years earlier:

Already in Ramses III's fifth year the tribes of the southern coast of Asia Minor and the maritime peoples of the Aegean had sent some of their advanced galleys to assist the Libyans in their war of that year against Egypt. Or, as in Merneptah's day, the plundering crews of their southernmost advance had incidentally joined

the Libyan invasion. These were but the premonitory skirmishing-line of a more serious and more general movement. The peoples involved were probably Cretan Peleset, a settlement of whom later became the biblical Philistines; the Thekel, who may be the Sikeli, later of Sicily; the Shekelesh, the Denyen or Danaoi, and the Weshwesh, who are of uncertain origin. [A footnote informs us that the papyrus Harris adds the Sherden, probably from Sardinia, to the list of invaders]. Owing to pressure from uncertain sources without, large numbers of these peoples, accompanied by their wives, children, and belongings, in clumsy ox carts, left their homes, and moving eastward along the coast of Asia Minor, penetrated Syria. They were accompanied by a strong fleet also. In the author's opinion, this movement was really a "*Volkerwanderung*," not merely an invasion, with a few families of the chiefs. They were strong enough to hold all northern Syria at their mercy; from Carchemish, through the Syrian Hittite conquests to the coast, as far south as Arvad, and inland as far south as Amor, they plundered the country. They had a central camp somewhere in Amor. BAR IV 33-4

Details of the actual invasion of Egypt by this motley horde are of little interest to this revision. We are concerned only to point out the remarkable agreement with our proposed reconstruction of the history of the period. Mainstream scholars are at a loss to explain what is happening. Many questions are left unanswered. What tragic event could possibly explain the mass displacement of peoples from remote geographic regions of the eastern Mediterranean, not at a single moment in history, but at various times spanning at least a twenty year time frame (much longer in the traditional history)? How do we explain how the northerners in the 8th year of Ramses III could encamp in the vicinity of Kheta and Kode and Carchemish and encounter virtually no opposition? Why is Kheta used here as a place name only? Where are the Hittite people? Why are the Philistines involved in this supposedly 13th century event, a nation that first appears in the Hebrew Bible in the days of kings David and Solomon in the 10th century B.C.? And why do we find mention of the Danaanians, occupants of southern Anatolia named in 8th century documents and otherwise known only from oblique references in Homers epic war story. The reader will recall that we mentioned them in an earlier chapter in connection with Suppiluliumas II. Finally, we wonder why the Etruscans are mentioned if this is the 13th century B.C.? Scholars have argued for centuries that this group of European immigrants, ancestors of the Romans, first arrived in Italy in the 8th century.

We have already provided our answer to these problems. The events in question belong to the 8th century, not the 13th. Already in 770 B.C. eruptions of Santorini were causing havoc in the Mediterranean basin. Many Jewish prophets besides Amos, including Isaiah, Micah and Haggai, were well aware of the disasters already experienced by the Mediterranean world. Their prophecies of future catastrophes in part reflect their knowledge of present conditions. Peoples around the Mediterranean had already sought shelter or fled local devastations. The great disruption of 765 B.C. only exacerbated the problem. The damage was monumental. Cloud enshrouded the region for decades; aftershocks and secondary eruptions perpetuated the fear. Drought persisted. Famine caused vast segments of the surviving peoples to migrate and pillage in search of food. As late as 750 B.C., the 8th year of Ramses III, the gloom persisted. Another three years and the skies had opened sufficiently to permit some degree of normalcy to life in the Mediterranean. The Santorini disaster had run its course. In Assyria a new age began. In Egypt the Libyans tried one more time to find habitable domains but by now the Europeans were content to remain in their homelands and rebuild. It was 747 B.C.!

In time Santorini was forgotten. Or was it? Some have argued, in spite of maintaining a second millenium date for the event, that the destruction of the island persisted in the myth of Atlantis, still remembered by Plato in the 4th century B.C. The theory may be correct in essence, though wrong in chronology. But that is a story for another time.

We have but one final observation and with that this segment of our revision ends. If multiple peoples of the near east were dislodged from their homelands as early as 770 B.C., the 5th year of Merenptah, and continued to seek refuge through 750 B.C., the 8th year of Ramses III, then surely there must have been some intrusion of foreigners into Egypt in the years between these dates, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the 765 B.C. explosion. And since Egypt was at this time "ruled" by an ailing king Merenptah, and a succession of weak pharaohs contesting to succeed him, all ill equipped to ward off armed intrusion, we expect that at least the northern regions of the country were overrun during this time. We do not expect to find corroborative evidence of this occupation in the Egyptian monuments left by these rulers, whose preoccupation was

more with survival than posterity. We have dated the death of Merenptah a year after the Santorini outburst. He may have died fighting off the aggressors. In any case he was old and ineffective, having come to power late in life due to the extremely long life of his father Ramses II. The monuments suggest he was busy preparing his tomb for the afterlife. His would be successors were confined to the south of the country. The few inscriptions that remain from this period suggest that times were chaotic, but fail to document the fact that the country was overrun by foreigners. Fortunately one document composed in the immediate aftermath of the occupation survives to tell us what happened. It is more than enough.

The document in question is the so-called Papyrus Harris, "found by the natives at Thebes in 1855". Breasted describes the great papyrus:

This remarkable manuscript is the largest papyrus extant, being no less than 133 feet long, and containing 117 columns, usually of twelve or thirteen lines. Written in a magnificent hand, it is the most sumptuous manuscript left us by ancient Egypt. The content of the document is not less remarkable than its external form. It is a detailed statement of Ramses III's benefactions to gods and men during his entire reign of over thirty-one years. It was compiled at his death by his son, to be placed in the king's tomb, and is distinctly mortuary in its character and purpose. BAR IV 88

As Breasted notes elsewhere, "the closing section, which is a short historical account of Ramses III's reign, has received much attention". In particular it offers us tantalizing detail concerning the interim between the end of the 19th dynasty and the beginning of the 20th. It tells us precisely what we have otherwise anticipated, that the country was in fact successfully overrun by foreigners shortly after the death of Merenptah.

According to the Harris Papyri, when Ramses III came to power ...

"the Libyans and the Meshwesh were dwelling in Egypt, having plundered the cities of the western shore, from Memphis to Kerben. They had reached the great river on both its banks. They it was who plundered the cities of Egowwe during very many years, while they were in Egypt. Behold I destroyed them, slain at one time. BAR IV 201-02

This revelation that the 20th dynasty was preceded by a time of foreign occupation is stated even more explicitly in the introductory paragraphs

of the historical section which precedes this description. We quote Breasted one last time. In the inscription Ramses III is speaking:

Hear ye, that I may inform you of my benefactions which I did while I was king of the people. The land of Egypt was overthrown from without, and every man was (thrown out) of his right; they had no chief mouth for many years formerly until other times. The land of Egypt was in the hands of chiefs and of rulers of towns; one slew his neighbor, great and small. Other times having come after it, with empty years, Yarsu, a certain Syrian was with them as chief. He set the whole land tributary before him together, he united his companions and plundered their possessions. They made the gods like men, and no offerings were presented in temples. BAR IV 198-99.

When scholars first read the papyrus they were dumbfounded by the revelation that Egypt had been overrun by foreigners prior to the beginning of the reign of Ramses III. Particularly disturbing was the information that a certain Yarsu, or Arsu, a Syrian chief, was among the intruders, and that this foreigner had imposed his rule on some portion of the country over several years. No historical antecedents could be found in the 12th century to explain the event. No explanation of what permitted this massive intrusion of a foreign element into Egypt was readily at hand. Scholars were unable to determine if this incursion brought the 19th dynasty to an end, nor for how long the invaders ruled the country. For the traditional history the entire episode is an enigma.

The revised history is more fortunate. Our date for the beginning of the 20th dynasty lies only six years following a massive volcanic eruption which devastated multitudes of countries in the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt included, bringing to an end the 19th dynasty, and opening the country to the invasion of multitudes of opportunistic refugees. Not only are we not surprised by the revelations of the Harris papyrus, but had that document not been preserved to confirm our expectations, we would have insisted that a foreign invasion of Egypt must have taken place in the years immediately following the Santorini explosion, bracketed by those that had occurred five years earlier and those that followed a decade later. But this time there was no strong dynastic leader to resist it.

And it is our good fortune to be able to claim, that at precisely that moment in history, Syria is ruled by an opportunistic and aggressive

chieftain named Resin, of which Arsu is but an Egyptian variant. Coincidence? We think not.

And on that note this segment of our revision ends.