

## Historicity of *When Cities Sink Howling in Ruin*

This document is for readers who are curious about how historically accurate *When Cities Sink Howling in Ruin* is. The short answer is: *It is*. As the novel's front matter says: "Among scholars there is limited consensus on the events of the Late Bronze Age. All of the significant events in this novel have been affirmed by one academician or another; and many of the details have been disputed by one academician or another."

While I do not cite the sources of my information in this document—if I did, I'd be an academic making lots more money than I do as a novelist—I provide a partial Bibliography at the end, for those wishing more formal information.

**For a 27-page monograph on "The Historicity of the Trojan War and Homer," see the "FREE NON-FICTION" tab of this web site. I won't repeat that information here.**

The novel takes place 3200 years ago. Facts about that time are hard to come by. For example:

- Some cultures described in the novel were not literate at that point in history, so we have no written records.
- The records of some that *were* literate have not yet been deciphered (e.g., Minoan Linear A).
- And of course, even for those languages who kept records and have been deciphered, 3200 years provides lots of time for records to be lost.

See the end of the novel for which characters are historical, i.e., factual. I won't repeat that information here, either.

Note the following definitions in the text that follows:

- "Historical" means it's a true, more-or-less accepted fact of ancient history.
- "Fictional" means I made it up.

### Historicity

**Chronology** The Greeks did have 12 months in the year, but naturally they didn't correspond to ours, i.e., a Greek month would have spanned parts of two current Western months. I was careful to ensure that the time taken to sail or row from one place to another was accurate, given the weather conditions. But for clarity, I used modern Western month names.

**Tin and bronze** The information in this book is factual. Explaining the Collapse of the Bronze Age is a cottage industry for academicians. Disruption of the tin/bronze trade is probably the most oft-cited cause.

**"Money"** This is a very complicated subject. For example, for an amount of gold, Homer uses the term translated as "talent." Elsewhere in ancient history, this is within spitting distance of 67 pounds. But Homer is clearly not using the term this way. For example, on occasion, winners of athletic contests win ten talents of gold. 670 pounds of gold? I don't think so. I'm using a scholarly interpretation that Homer uses "talent" to represent the value of one ox.

Also: Long-ish rods of copper or bronze called "obols" were used in parts of Greece as a medium of exchange prior to coinage, i.e., prior to the 6<sup>th</sup>-century B.C. For narrative coherence, I needed some object that represented "something used for exchange of goods that have a relatively low value"—sort of like "\$10" or whatever. I adapted/invented the term "bronze obol-rod."

I likewise needed a unit of exchange that represented a very high value. I use “fractional weight of a standard oxhide ingot of tin,” e.g., “a quarter ingot of silver.” Note that oxhide ingots of tin tended to be similar in size, shape, and weight—but there was no such thing as a “standard weight of ingot.”

#### Battle tactics

I believe most ancient accounts of tactics are not credible. For example:

- It’s inconceivable that Hittite chariot warriors did not use the bow. A chariot is essentially a mobile bow-and-arrow platform, and the Hittites were bowman. The “evidence” that they did not use bows to my knowledge comes entirely from an Egyptian relief carving depicting the Battle of Kadesh. Besides the fact that in their royal records the Egyptians were inveterate liars, it would be to their artistic advantage to be able to clearly differentiate an Egyptian chariot from a Hittite one. Showing differences in weapons is an easy way to do so.
- To me, Homer’s description of mass warfare as a bunch of individual chivalric duelists (“*promachoi*”) is not credible. When a thousand men meet to hack each other into submission with edged weapons, it’s mind-numbing chaos, not formality. You’re packed together among friend and foe, your life is on the line, and there’s no rule book. If someone nearby can stab you in the back while you fight someone else, they’ll do it.

In essence, all depiction of battle tactics in the novel is my theory of how battle logically would have really taken place—including the description of chariot warfare.

#### Spear throwing

The warriors in *The Iliad* are overwhelmingly spear throwers. It has been said that in that poem, as many men are killed by stones as by swords. The problem is, as *When Cities Sink Howling in Ruin* says, spears aren’t for throwing, they’re for spearing. Javelins are for throwing. I chose to reconcile this ambiguity by having Aithon invent a heavy spear that can be thrown, but only short distances and in circumstances where retrieving it is not an issue.

#### Natta’Isha

Fictional. This is a Hittite phrase of thematic importance. A very clever person with a large amount of time on their hands could search the text for instances of the two words, scan the translation to see what they mean, and achieve total spiritual enlightenment. So they’d have that going for them ....

#### Brothels

All remarks about brothels are fictional. But if I were a betting man ....

#### “Sea peoples”

Along with disruption of the tin/bronze trade, depredations by “sea peoples” (an Egyptian term) is the other most oft-cited cause of the Collapse of the Bronze Age. What we know about them comes primarily from written Egyptian sources, which of course give these people different names than any we have today. The subset of sea peoples I cite, and the historical consensus regarding them, are as follows:

- *Akwash, Ahhiyawans*: Over the last few decades, a consensus has more or less arisen among scholars that these terms, Egyptian and Hittite respectively, are their representations of “Achaean.”
- *Denyen*: I use this as the Egyptian term for “Danaans.” There is some scholarly support for this, but nowhere near a consensus.
- *Sherden*: I use this as the Egyptian term for “Sardinians.” There used to be a fair amount of scholarly support for this, but more modern scholarship is dubious.
- *Shekelesh*: I use this as the Egyptian term for what I call “Sikilians,” a euphemism for “Sicilians.” As time goes by, you find fewer and fewer scholars who buy this argument.

- *Turesh*: I use this as the Egyptian term for “Tyrrhenians,” i.e., a generic name for Sikilians and Sardinians. Fictional.

- Page iv           The map was drawn freehand by myself. I don’t advise using it to sail about the Mediterranean.
- Page 11 - 12      The description of the various scripts is accurate.
- Chapter 2         Most of the characters in this chapter are Homeric.
- Levies (taxes): Fictional, as far as I know. But I wouldn’t be surprised ....
- Tiryns army: Some of Homer’s characters use weapons that were obsolete by the time of the Late Bronze Age, i.e, by the time of the Trojan War. For example, Odysseus’ boars tusk helmet. To reconcile Homer and archaeology, I have posited that Tiryns’ army is behind the times.
- Page 15           The description of the citadel of Tiryns is accurate, to the limits of my understanding.
- Page 16           Brotherhood of Fifty: Fictional. It might be enlightening to give some thought to what modern political entity is a conglomeration of fifty sub-entities. Or not.
- Page 16           Dorians: I will take some flack on this, if any scholars read this book, which is unlikely. My logic was as follows: Homer’s Phthians, of whom Achilles is the military leader, came from the north, beyond Attica. One or two hundred years after the Collapse of the Bronze Age, Dorians from the north moved south into the Peloponnese. They were ethnically/linguistically different from the Ionic Mycenaeans. Call my conflation of the two “fictional” or “a stretch,” whichever you prefer.
- Page 16           Purple and murex: Factual.
- Page 26           War of the Seven Allies: Based on the “Seven Against Thebes” myth.
- Page 27           Eurybates: Strange as it may seem, Eurybates *is* African in Homer and in fact is Odysseus’ herald.
- Page 41           Tiryns leader’s armor: This is based on the “Dendra panoply,” which pre-dates the Trojan War. Again, the Tiryns army is depicted as behind the times.
- Page 45           Yes, Late Bronze Age Greeks did practice human sacrifice in religious contexts. Both men and women were sacrificed. It was a common practice in the eastern Mediterranean at the time.
- Page 47           The Keftiu and the Philistines: “Keftiu” is an Egyptian name, and the *Bible* calls Crete “Caphtor.” It is generally accepted that this term refers to what today we would call the Minoans—what Homer calls the “True Cretans.”
- Likewise, the biblical Philistines believed that Crete was their homeland. (As a matter of fact, it was this amazing fact that led me to write the novel.) In addition, Philistine pottery has undeniable Greek attributes. My depiction of them as direct descendants of the Keftiu is, as far as I know, fictional.
- The Keftiu had a much larger role in early drafts of the novel. But unfortunately, of all the subplots, theirs had the least to do with the book’s premise. So I cut it.
- Page 49           Cargo ship and warship: The cargo ship is based on the Uluburun shipwreck. The warship is Homeric.
- Page 54 – 55      High and Low Danaan: Fictional.
- Page 56 - 58      Brail rigging: Historical. It was invented circa 1200 B.C., right at the time the novel takes place.
- Page 62           The description of the Egyptian ship is accurate.

- Page 63 – 64 Steering according to “marks” is fictional.
- Page 80 The famine in Hatti: Egyptian records of the time say that this was occurring, but some scholars dispute it.
- Page 83 The distinction between “slave” and “thrall” is fictional.
- Page 92 Yes, Israelites were a subgroup of Canaanites.
- Page 94 Horn-glue bow: Today we call them “composite bows,” and they’re no longer made of horn, glue, and other materials.
- Page 118 Yes, strange as it seems, the Keftiu did practice trephination; we have the skulls to prove it. And yes, Keftiu healers were considered perhaps the best in the Mediterranean—apart from perhaps the Egyptians, due to the latter’s magical spells. Their sanitary hospital practice is fictional.
- Page 120 I probably shouldn’t give it away—but then, no one’s going to read this document anyway. Some scholars believe that the etymology of “Penelope” implies that the name is derived from a pre-Greek term for a bird of prey and would have been pronounced something like “poo-noo-lo-pay-yuh.”
- Page 122 The “western island” of Aithon’s birth: No, I’m not going to tell you. You should be able to figure this out for yourself.
- Page 124 Eleni of Sparta and Troy: I’m not going to explain this to you, either. Hint: What is the English equivalent of the name “Eleni?”
- Page 134 Nor am I going to explain why Kwaanazulu’s perfume has such an aphrodisiac effect. Read Iakos’ description of what he thinks it smells like on pages 274 - 275 and figure it out.
- Page 138 – 139 The description of the Syrians being so obsequious is based on the “Amarna letters” of roughly 150 years prior to the events of this novel. It’s not meant to be a contemporary description.
- Page 153 Metrics for oxen versus donkeys: This comparison is true. Believe it or not, I found the necessary data and computed how many donkeys it would take to haul that much grain to Hattusa and how long it would take. The results surprised me. In early drafts I had Iakos explain the calculations, but it was so boring I cut it.
- Page 157 – 161 The descriptions of the various cultures’ afterlives are accurate, to the limits of my understanding. However, I just give the tip of the iceberg of Egyptian beliefs.
- Page 163 The volcano is Mount Erciyes.
- Page 165 The Hittites did wage war at least partly for the purpose of securing agricultural workers. They often / usually transplanted conquered peoples into the Hittite homeland to work the land.
- Chapter 17 & 18 Yes, the Hittites and Egyptians brewed beer. The Mesopotamians and Wisconsinites too, as a matter of fact.
- The description of Hattusa is accurate, to the limits of my understanding.
- All of the Hittite laws and punishments cited are true, including the hurkel laws. A specific “Time of Atonement” is fictional.
- Hittite ultra-cleanliness: This is fictional, but seems quite plausible, given their laws on ritual purity.
- Page 171 Yes, the Hittites had grand temples to their gods; and the Greeks of this period did not establish temples.

- Page 171 Yes, the Hittites built grand temples to their gods; and the Greeks of this period did not build temples.
- Page 172 & 178 Yes, unlike Greek women of this or later times, Hittite women were free to practice a number of occupations and were not kept behind closed doors.
- Page 179 Luzzi men: Yes, civilians were conscripted to build city structures and conduct religious festivals.
- Page 187 Yes, at this time in history, Hatti was beset by all these external enemies.
- Page 191 Yes, horses of this period were very small and probably couldn't bear a grown man for any distance; but this is not universally accepted.
- Page 196 Chariot runners: Yes, there were such soldiers.
- Page 197 Wilios/Wilusa: This etymology is true. And in fact, Greece later lost the W sound, so Wilios became Ilios, which became Ilium by Roman times. And so were burnt *the topless towers of "Ilium"* ... (*Christopher Marlowe*)
- Page 211 Funeral pyres: To my knowledge, the Hittites did at least occasionally burn their dead. To my knowledge, there is no evidence that the Trojans did. In spite of what Homer says, to my knowledge there is no evidence that the Greeks of this period did either.
- Chapter 21 – 23 The logic here is that the Troy in the novel is the one identified by archaeologists as Troy VIIa, and the Troy destroyed a generation earlier when Eleni was getting married is Troy VI. See “The Historicity of the Trojan War and Homer” in the “FREE NONFICTION” tab of this web site for a fuller discussion. My depiction of them as being one generation apart is the absolute minimum of time specified in all of the sources I examined. Most sources would place the destruction of Troy VI earlier in time than I depict, i.e., further back in time before the destruction of Troy VIIa.
- The physical descriptions of Troy (VIIa) here and in Chapter 34 are accurate, to the limits of my understanding.
- The Trojan history cited is speculative but plausible and meets what little facts we have. Troy was non-literate, so little is actually known about them.
- Page 218 “Spartan” meals: Remember, Bronze Age Spartans were not the same Spartans as the more famous ones of the Archaic and Classical Periods. Bronze Age Spartans were Ionians; Archaic and Classical Age Spartans were Dorians. Today, we use “Spartan” as an adjective to mean (among other things) “plain, frugal, severe, devoid of luxury.” But there’s no reason to think that Bronze Age Spartans would be described this way.
- Page 219 Heinrich Schliemann, the first archaeologist of Troy, did consider the Trojans dour.
- Page 219 Troy being kingless is fictional and almost certainly incorrect. This is a novel.
- Page 224 Kingdom of Achaea: Fictional. However, as late as circa 1250 B.C., the Hittite King Hattusili III referred to some Greek overlord of the region that includes Miletos as a “Great King.” It’s not credible to me that this could be a king on the other side of the Aegean—the distance is too great to administer such a kingdom. So I posit a more local Greek-based political entity.
- Page 239 Northern sword: This is the *Naue Type II* sword, which, like brail rigging, was invented circa 1200 B.C., right at the time the novel takes place. It swept the Mediterranean region and was in widespread use till the Roman gladius.

- Page 246 – 247 Israelite versus Canaanite Asherah idols: True.
- Chapter 25 - 26 Everything said about Akhen-Aten and the Aten is true. Insofar as Pharaoh Akhen-Aten could influence the country generally, Egypt at the time was monotheistic.
- See “Historical Figures” at the end of the novel; and keep in mind that most of ancient history, including Egyptian, is disputed to various extents by scholars, ensuring near-full employment in the world of academia. But unbelievably, the historical events in Atenkamenwati’s tale are plausible in all cases, and generally accepted as true in many or most. Granted, I cherry-picked dates and facts to stitch together the story—but they all are dates and facts maintained by one academician or another. It really was possible to create a factually-based story where there are two steeped-in-incests, two light-of-Egypt, two filth-of-Egypt, two boy kings, and two buffoons.
- I for one was amazed this was possible.
- Page 258 – 259 Yes, Siptah was physically crippled; his mummy proves it. His mental crippling is fictional.
- Page 283 – 284 The description of the Pylos palace is accurate to the limits of my understanding.
- Chapter 29 As the map at the end of the novel indicates, the depiction of destroyed cities is factual, although they certainly didn’t all take place in a single year. This is called time compression and is a common fictional device. I paid my poetic license fee and am fully authorized to do this.
- Trechos’ narrative about the state of Egypt: Not counting Satduatneferet, this is all true, including the fact that “Palestine” was the Egyptian term for “land of the Palesets (Philistines)”.
- Page 303 During the Collapse of the Bronze Age, Cretans fled the cities and retreated to mountaintop “mountain refuges.” Mount Karphi was perhaps the most populous.
- Chapter 32 Sacking of Ismaros: This is Homeric and was the second of the two reasons I decided to write this novel.
- Explosion of the granary: Here in the Midwest, we are well aware of the dangers of grain silos exploding because the grain dust in them ignites. If this is foreign to you, I recommend Googling it.
- Chapter 34 Sack of Troy: This is almost certainly how Troy VIIa was destroyed. Homer’s ten-year siege by 50,000 men at that point in history is ludicrous. But not everyone agrees with me.
- The horse of gold, created by a Trojan sculptor: It enables Greeks to penetrate the walls of Troy. Think about it.
- Page 356 We do have clay tablets baked hard in the fires of Pylos that document in detail Pylos’ attempt to ward off seaborne invasion. They never name the invaders’ homeland, though. Non-baked clay tablets wouldn’t be around in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So this is all plausible.
- Chapter 38 Presumably you didn’t notice, but 80% - 90% of the words spoken by the ancient man are in iambic octometer. (If that’s a word.)
- Page 418 The Italians of this period worshipped Diespiter, whose name over time morphed into the Roman “Jupiter.” I have no idea whether the Sicilians and Sardinians likewise worshipped him. This is a novel.
- Chapter 43 Naval ramming was not widespread till the Classical Period (roughly 500 - 300 B.C.), though it’s possible it occurred to a limited degree in the Archaic Period (roughly 800 - 500 B.C.).

## Partial Bibliography

The following list includes just whole books, not smaller articles.

- Bob Brier, *The History of Ancient Egypt*, a Great Courses DVD series, 1999
- Trevor Bryce, *Hittite Warrior*, Osprey Publishing, 2007
- Trevor Bryce, *Life and Society in the Hittite World*, Oxford University Press, 2002
- Trevor Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, Oxford University Press, 2005
- Trevor Bryce, *The Trojans and Their World*, Routledge, 2006
- John Chadwick, *The Mycenaean World*, Cambridge University Press, 1976
- Eric H. Cline, *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed*, Princeton University Press, 2014
- William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005
- Adrian Dodson, *Poisoned Legacy: The Fall of the Nineteenth Egyptian Dynasty*, The American University in Cairo Press, 2010
- Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age*, Princeton University Press, 1993
- J. Lesley Fitton, *The Minoans*, The British Museum Press, 2002
- Jonathon M. Golden, *Ancient Canaan and Israel*, Oxford University Press, 2004
- Di Goodman and Ian Brodie, *Learning to Sail*, The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1994
- Hans G. Güterbock, Harry A. Hoffner, and Theo P. J. van den Hout, *The Hittite Dictionary Volume Š*, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2013
- Harry Hoffner, Jr., *Hittite Myths*, Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World, 1998
- Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Richard Lattimore, University of Chicago Press, 1951
- Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated by Richard Lattimore, University of Chicago Press, 1951
- Maurice Obregon, *Beyond the Edge of the Sea*, Modern Library, 2002
- Simon B. Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World, 1997
- Donald Preziosi and Louse A. Hitchcock, *Aegean Art and Architecture*, Oxford University Press, 1999
- Manuel Robbin, *Collapse of the Bronze Age*, Authors Choice Press, 2001
- Louise Schofield, *The Mycenaeans*, The British Museum Press, 2007
- Ian Shaw, *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, 2000
- A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armor of the Greeks*, Thames and Hudson, 1967
- Anthony J. Spalinger, *War in Ancient Egypt*, Blackwell Publishing 2005
- Barry Strauss, *The Trojan War*, Simon and Schuster, 2006

- Jonathon N. Tubb, *Canaanites*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1998
- Theo van den Hout, *The Elements of Hittite*, Cambridge University Press, 2011
- Michael Wood, *In Search of the Trojan War*, BBC DVD, 1985
- Various contributors, *From the Land of the Labyrinth*, Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2008