



# WHO WERE THE SEA PEOPLE?

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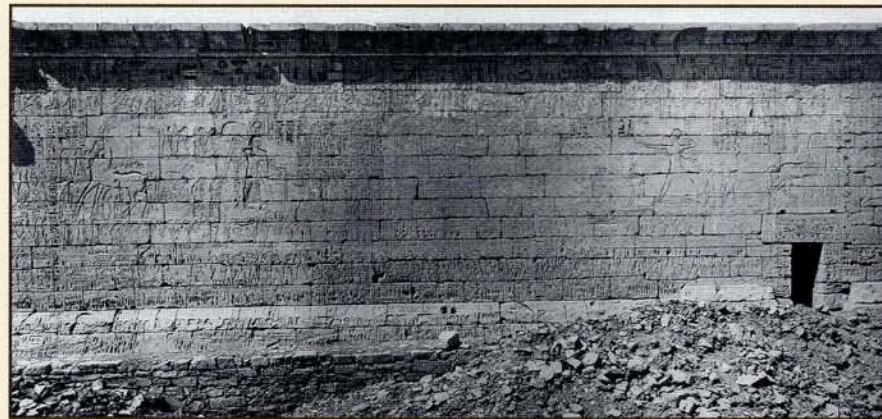
Through the epics of the Greek poet Homer, tales of an "age of heroes" have been passed down through millennia. In *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* the poet told of an era dominated by aristocratic warlords who bore ornamented weapons and commanded well-organized, armored chariot troops. This "golden age" culminated in the legendary Trojan War, fought between Troy, located in what is now northwestern Turkey, and Mycenaean Greece.

**H**omer himself, however, lived four centuries after the Trojan War, in a time when the communities around the Aegean were populated by little more than farmers and shepherds. The tools of the day were not finely-wrought gold nor silver nor bronze, but crudely forged of iron. Nevertheless, Greeks of Homer's time—the eighth century BC—were surrounded by powerful reminders of a more magnificent, more prosperous past. Mighty walls, some more than seven meters (22') thick, built of boulders two meters in diameter, jugged out of the soil in some places. Every now and then, a collapsed grave would reveal treasures of gold jewelry, silver vessels, beautifully painted pottery and decorated weapons.

supported by the relatively new development of writing. In nearly all, autocratic rulers oversaw professional armies and carried out the exploitation of economic opportunities at home and abroad. Most had well-developed social hierarchies in which specialized professions produced goods of extraordinary quality. This stimulated far-reaching international trade throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

Modern excavations in the eastern Mediterranean region have also provided evidence of the sudden, violent demise of these otherwise thriving civilizations of the Late Bronze Age. Within a few years—or decades, at the most—some of these nations collapsed completely, with the large and powerful Hittite state in central Anatolia disappearing most suddenly

of all. From Troy in the northwest, to Ugarit on the coast of Syria, and southwest to the Nile Delta, unidentified attackers razed and burned international trade centers and port cities. After the assaults, most of the shattered cities were either abandoned or



A relief on the north wall of the mortuary temple of Ramses III at Medinat Habu, west of modern Luxor, depicts the Sea People's second attack on Egypt in about 1177 BC. It provides the only global account of the radical reshaping of political civilization that took place throughout the eastern Mediterranean around 1200 BC. States affected are shown on the upper map, opposite. The lower map indicates the approximate path of the attacks that opened the "crisis years."

Since the Middle Ages, however, Homer's historical accuracy has been in question. It was not until late in the last century that archeological excavations around the Mediterranean began to show that Homer had indeed drawn, at least in part, on real events.

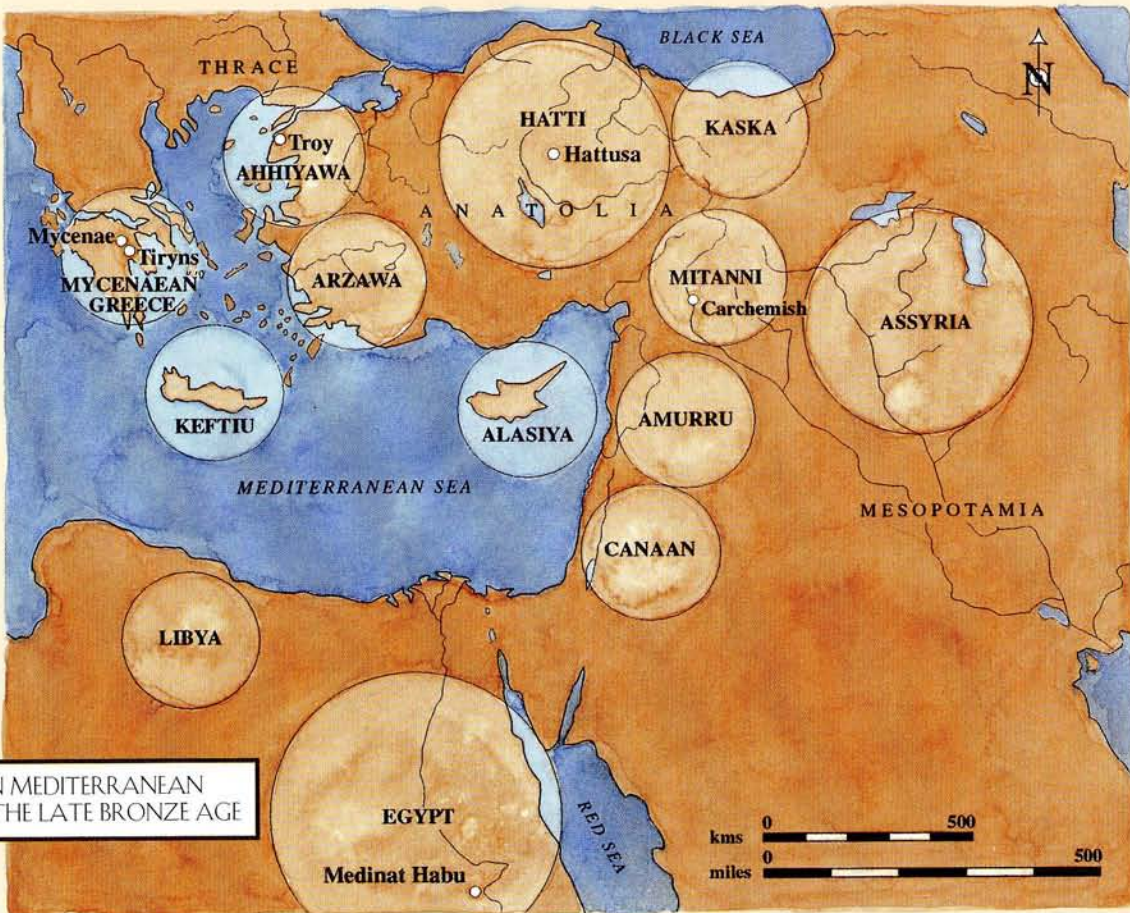
Today, we know that many sophisticated feudal societies ruled the lands around the eastern Mediterranean between 1700 and 1200 BC, the Late Bronze Age. The interior of Anatolia—now part of modern Turkey—was controlled by the centrally organized Hittite state, whose Great King resided in Hattusa near the Kızılırmak River (See *Aramco World*, September-October 1994). It was also in this era that in Egypt, the pharaohs of the New Kingdom began construction of the famous temples at Luxor, Karnak and Abu Simbel. In Greece, small yet rich and influential kingdoms made up the Mycenaean civilization, which we have named after its most famous archeological site, Mycenae. Likewise, Syria and Palestine were the home of numerous states ruled by aristocrats and lesser chieftains.

At times these states of diverse sizes and powers were allied to one another, and at other times they fought. In most, the political system was characterized by a palace administration

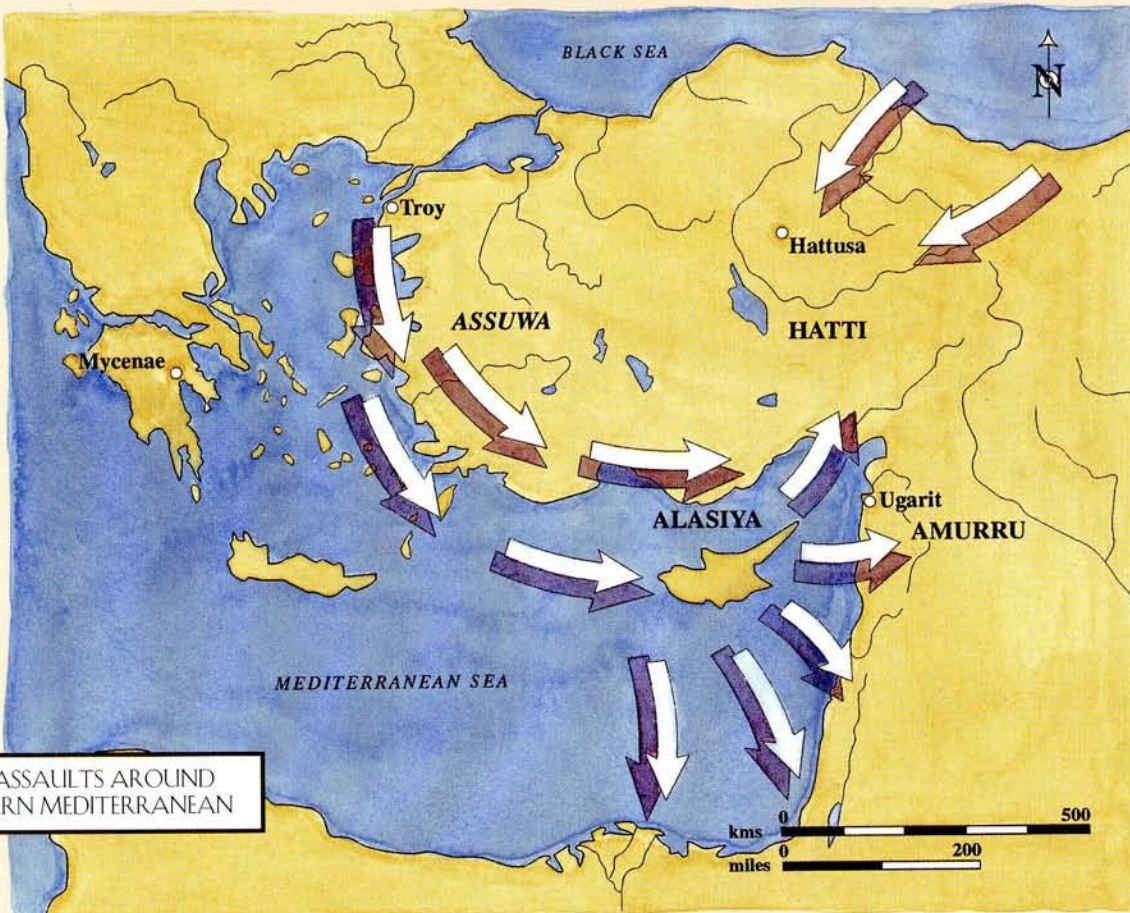
rebuilt only on an insignificant scale. All across the eastern Mediterranean, civilizations that had been shaped by aristocrats became societies of herdsmen and shepherds. When the fighting was over, entire languages and scripts had vanished.

This sudden collapse is one of the most dramatic events in the early history of the Mediterranean, and many archeological mysteries surround it. First, there is the Homeric account of the Trojan War, which would have to be placed within this time of crisis if one accepts that *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* contain at least a kernel of historic truth. The second group of events that connects logically with this historical turning point is the invasions of the so-called "Sea People." Coming, it seems, out of nowhere and lacking any obvious motive, it was these united clans that so successfully attacked throughout the region. Despite numerous scholarly attempts to identify them, we still do not know exactly who the Sea People were, where they came from, why they attacked, and, finally, where they disappeared after their raids. Scholars are even uncertain whether the Sea People's existence was a cause or an effect of the political collapses. Were the Sea People conquerors, pirates, deserters, or refugees?

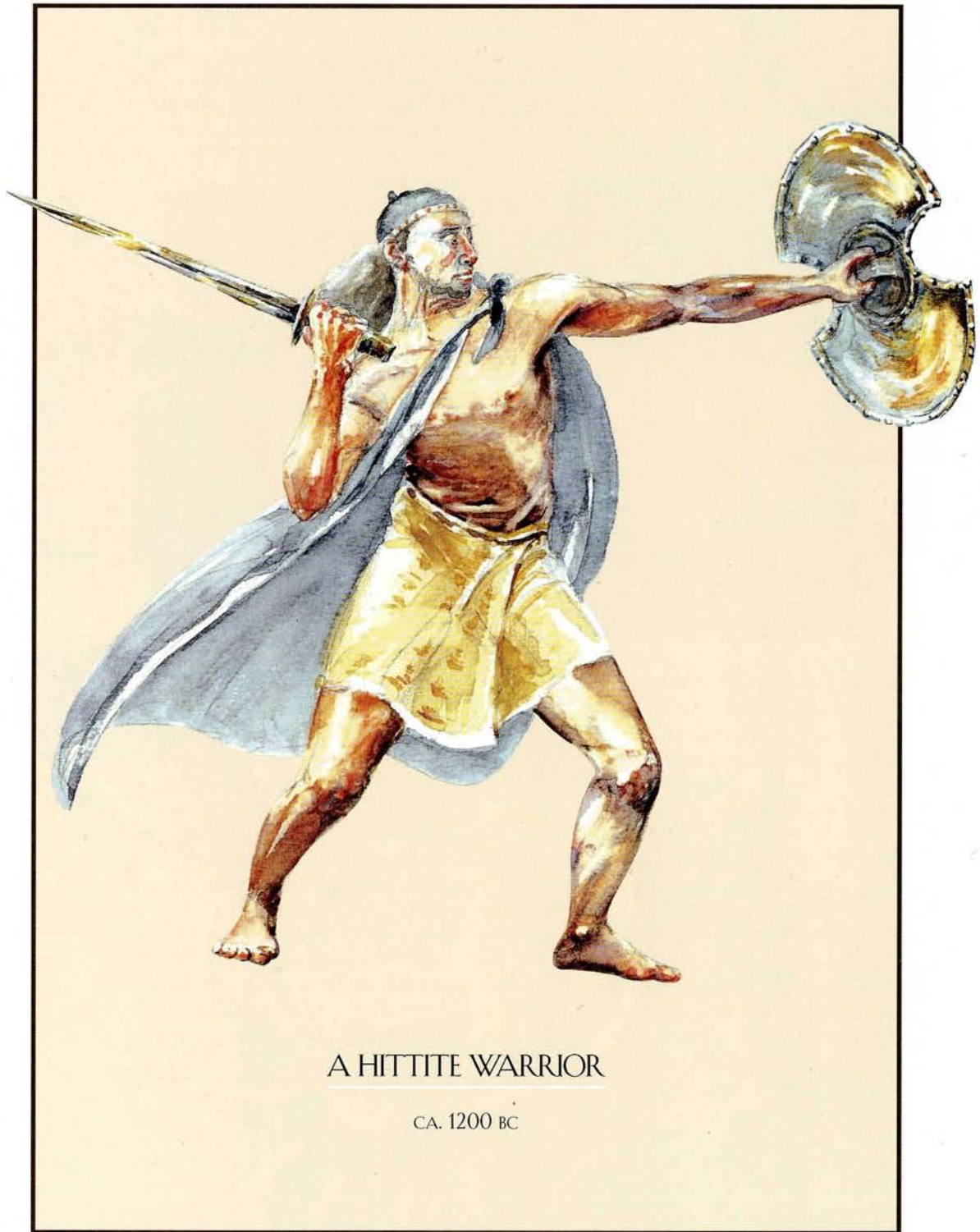
Previous spread: The Medinat Habu relief shows Sea People, identifiable by their "feather crown" headdresses, with bound hands, captured by Egyptian forces.



EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN STATES OF THE LATE BRONZE AGE



MAJOR ASSAULTS AROUND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN



A HITTITE WARRIOR

CA. 1200 BC

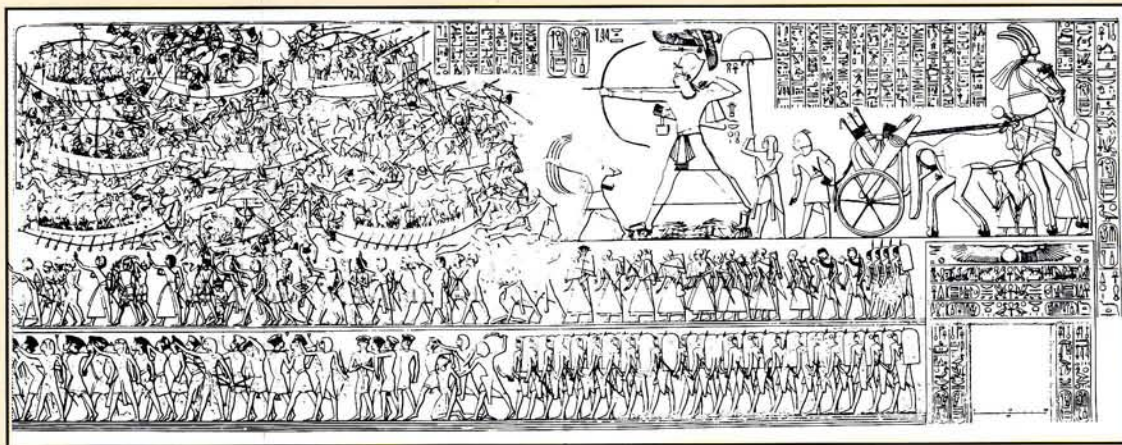
**O**ur knowledge of the Sea People's raids rests on texts from Anatolia, Syria and Egypt. The name "Sea People" is, however, a modern expression introduced in 1881 by the French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero. The Egyptian inscriptions themselves usually refer to the names of the individual attacking tribes, who are said to have come "from the midst of the sea" or "from the islands." What we are calling "Sea People" were clearly separate states or tribes who had formed a military alliance to attack the Near East and Egypt.

The reliefs depicting the attacks of the Sea People, carved on the walls of the mortuary temple of Pharaoh Ramses III in Medinat Habu, near present-day Luxor, are also the earliest known illustrations of naval battle scenes. From these walls we know—at least approximately—what the Sea People looked like, how they dressed, what kinds of weapons they used, and what kinds of ships they sailed. We even know some of their names. But to learn anything of their motives we have to examine the historical context of their raids.

According to the inscriptions, the Sea People first appeared in about 1208 BC, the fifth year of the reign of Pharaoh Merenptah. At this time, Egypt was facing attacks by Libya, its arch-enemy to the west, which was approaching the frontier accompanied by a number of allies described as "northerners." On the famous Victory Stela, found in 1896 at the Temple of Merenptah in Thebes, Merenptah declared he had overwhelmed the enemy, and provided a list of the allies of Libya, whom we now refer to collectively as the Sea People: Shardana, Lukka, Meshwesh, Teresh, Ekwesh and Shekelesh. Most of these tribes apparently came from the Aegean, and we do not know why they fought on the side of Libya. Nor can we be sure Merenptah's claim to have overpowered them is fully justified because, after this battle, Egypt's domestic affairs gradually degenerated nearly to the point of civil war. Possibly because Egypt was so preoccupied with its internal problems that it failed to fulfill its treaty obligations to come to Hatti's aid, it managed to survive relatively unharmed the upheavals that took place shortly thereafter all around the eastern Mediterranean.

Thirty years after Merenptah's encounter with the Sea People, around 1177 BC, Pharaoh

Ramses III ordered the construction of his own mortuary temple and residence in Thebes, on whose walls architects and scribes recalled the dramatic events of the preceding decades. According to those inscriptions, the Sea People had returned, this time to attack Mediterranean shores from Anatolia, Cyprus, Syria and Palestine to Lower Egypt. The inscription reads:



As for the foreign countries, they made a conspiracy in their islands. All at once the lands were on the move, scattered in war; no country could stand before their arms. Hatti, Kizzuwatna, Carchemish, Arzawa and Alasiya were cut off. A camp was set up in one place in Amurru; they desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were advancing on Egypt while the flame was prepared before them. Their league was Peleset, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denyen and Weshesh, united lands. They laid their hands upon the lands to the very circuit of the earth, their hearts confident and trusting: "Our plans will succeed!"

But Ramses and his troops defeated the invaders. When the vanquished pleaded for mercy, the pharaoh allowed them to settle on his soil:

I slew the Denyen in their isles; the Tjeker and the Peleset were made ashes. The Shardana and the Weshesh of the sea, they were made as those that exist not, taken captive at one time, brought as captives to Egypt like the sand of the shore. I settled them in strongholds bound in my name. Numerous were their classes like hundred-thousands. I taxed them all, in clothing and grain from the storehouses and granaries, each year.

Such Egyptian inscriptions, however, have to be taken with a grain of salt. Neither the scribe's intentions nor his instructions required him to

*The Medinat Habu relief, shown above clarified by the "Chicago House" process, is the first Egyptian depiction of a naval battle. Sea People and their ships are at left in the upper register, Egyptians at right.*



*A Sea People warrior taken prisoner.*

report historical truth; for him, the laws of symmetry, esthetics and religion had priority over factual accuracy. Egyptian regnal accounts often begin with the state of disarray prevailing in the country until the pharaoh whose reign is being described appears to re-establish order—that was, after all, the function of kingship. Yet, the widespread destruction all around the eastern Mediterranean, and many contemporary documents from Ugarit and Hattusa reporting similar onslaughts by mysterious attackers, confirm the gist of the Medinat Habu inscriptions.

At the time of the Sea People's second raid on Egypt, most areas mentioned in the Medinat Habu inscriptions were either occupied by or allied to the Hittite kingdom in central Anatolia. Hence, the purpose of the raids may well have been to weaken the Great King of Hatti from his periphery, by attacking his allies. From royal correspondence from Ugarit and Cyprus, it appears that the combined fleets of the Sea People massed off the southwestern tip of the Anatolian peninsula, from where they first attacked the western coast of Cyprus.

Battles directly between the Sea People and Hittite troops may also have taken place on the Anatolian mainland, however, because extant clay tablets inscribed with diplomatic notes show how the Great King of Hatti had to turn to his vassals at the port city of Ugarit, in northern Syria, to demand additional troops and food.

But by then, Ugarit itself was threatened by the Sea People. Desperately seeking support in his turn, the adolescent king of Ugarit wrote to his royal colleague on Cyprus:

The enemy ships are already here. They have set fire to my towns and have done very great damage in the country.... Did you not know that all my troops were stationed in the Hittite country, and that all my ships are still stationed in Lycia and have not yet returned? The country is thus abandoned to itself.... Consider this, my father, there are seven enemy ships that have come and done very great damage. Now, if there are more enemy ships, let me know about them so that I can decide what to do.

This letter never left Ugarit. Archeologists found it there in a kiln, where it was supposed to be fired before the courier departed with it. At the peak of its economic and cultural success, and showing no signs of decay, Ugarit was wiped out and was never resettled again.

The pressure on the Great King of Hatti increased further. His scribes wrote one more text illustrating the Sea People's assaults and what turned out to be a successful Hittite counterattack:

I called up arms and soon reached the sea—  
I, Suppiluliuma, the Great King—and with

me ships of Alasiya joined battle in the midst of the sea. I destroyed them, catching them and burning them down at sea.

Soon thereafter, however, enemy forces indeed reached the Hittite capital of Hattusa. It is doubtful that they were Sea People forces; and in fact their identity is still uncertain. There may have been internal strife in Hatti, for an inscribed bronze plate found in 1986 indicates that two members of the royal family had competed for the throne. Most scholars, however, accept that a path of destruction leads out of the northeast into Hattusa, meaning that the city was most likely destroyed by the Kashka, its neighbor and bitter enemy of several centuries' standing. The Kashka had already destroyed the Hittite capital on one occasion and forced the king to move temporarily; this time, they annihilated the 600-year-old civilization.

A similar pattern of destruction appears in most of the cities attacked by the Sea People. By targeting government buildings, palaces and temples while leaving the residential areas and countryside mostly unharmed, the attackers aimed at the control centers of the aristocratic rulership. This tactic foreshadows the strategy of today's warfare, and is one of the earliest known examples of it. Concentrating attacks on such centers, the Sea People must have realized, preserves strength and shortens the war.

After Hattusa and Ugarit, many other cities in Anatolia, Syria and Palestine fell to the invaders. The Sea People continued their sweep to the south until they met the Egyptian army.

This generally accepted outline of the Sea People's incursions leaves many of its most significant questions unanswered. We still do not know either the origins or the motives of the Sea People. It is also hard to understand why they did not attempt to permanently subdue the countries they overwhelmed. Finally, virtually nothing is known about the fate of the Sea People themselves following these crisis years.

**N**ow that there is a wealth of highly specific information in hand from numerous excavations and text sources relevant to those years, scholars have become more and more inclined to think that the time has come to begin solving some of these riddles. Although a search for a unifying explanation began some time ago, and academic conferences abound on the crisis years, the Sea People, and the Trojan War, there has still been little progress toward a plausible explanation for this watershed in history. Some archeologists suggested that the Sea People may have been invaders from central Europe. Others saw them as scattered soldiers who turned to piracy, or who had become refugees. For a long

time, researchers sought to explain the transformations around 1200 BC by invoking natural disasters such as earthquakes or climatic shifts, but earthquakes on such a broad geographic scale are unheard of, and no field evidence has indicated significant climatic change. Currently, very few—if any—archeologists would consider the Sea People to have been identified.

I stumbled on these problems, mostly by accident, in an unlikely place. In the spring of 1990, I was writing up the conclusions of my dissertation research, which had involved several years of investigation in the Mycenaean heartland, searching out clues to determine what the landscape of the Bronze Age had been. The work had little to do with the Sea People.

Studying numerous earth cores taken by hand augers and power drills, I had discovered that parts of the lower town of Tiryns, one of the Greek citadels from the era of the Trojan War, had been buried under several meters of mud deposited by a flash flood that had occurred around 1200 BC. This catastrophe coincided with an earthquake, for which evidence was found in the archeological record of the Tiryns citadel. Both of these events occurred shortly after 1200 BC, precisely at the time when the Mycenaean civilization suddenly collapsed.

When summarizing these conclusions, I remembered that earthquakes, floods, and the demise of a brilliant culture are also mentioned in Plato's dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*. When I turned to reread these, I noticed that the philosopher's story may well represent yet another account—thus far unrecognized—of the events of the crisis years. Plato describes two prehistoric civilizations that possessed bronze weapons, chariots and writing, and he describes how a devastating war broke out between them. Those facts, and numerous additional elements of the account, have much in common with the Trojan War: Plato mentions a navy of 1200 ships; Homer, adding up the vessels of the united Greek army, reached a total of 1186 ships. Both Plato and Homer described the opposing armies as consisting of many allies. Both also allude to severe internal problems in the Greek camp, and both relate how the attacking Greek contingents, in the end, overwhelmed the defenders.

If applied to the Trojan War, however, Plato's account would attribute far more political, economic and military power to Troy and its allies in western Anatolia than anyone has yet credited them with. Yet, if Troy is understood to be an equal opponent of the united Greek army, then the traditional, Homeric account of the Trojan War becomes far more plausible. According to Homer, it took 100,000 Mycenaean soldiers a decade of siege to subdue Troy, a city that has thus far been believed to

have been the size of a modern athletic field.

An even more novel idea that emerged from this reading of Plato's account, however, was that it may have been Troy and its allies that in fact triggered the conflicts at the end of the Bronze Age. Plato's source, an Egyptian priest, says:

So this host, being all gathered together, once made an attempt to enslave by one single onslaught both your country [Greece] and ours [Egypt], and the whole of the territory within the Straits.

This passage would argue that Troy and its allies were in fact the aggressors who brought on the crisis. At the same time, the passage is reminiscent of the Sea People accounts at Medinat Habu. Thus I considered a hypothesis based on simple equivalence: *The Sea People may well have been Troy and its confederated allies, and the literary tradition of the Trojan War may well reflect the Greek effort to counter those raids.*

**F**rom this new perspective, I realized that archeology possesses several texts that indeed describe a coalition of Late Bronze Age states in western Anatolia that appears to have played a decisive role during the transformations around 1200 BC. Homer, for instance, lists contingents on the Trojan side in *The Iliad*, saying that Troy's allies came from all along the Aegean east coast between Thrace in the north and Lycia in the south. This coastal strip, including its offshore islands, coincides with the geography of what many scholars think may represent the homeland of the Sea People.

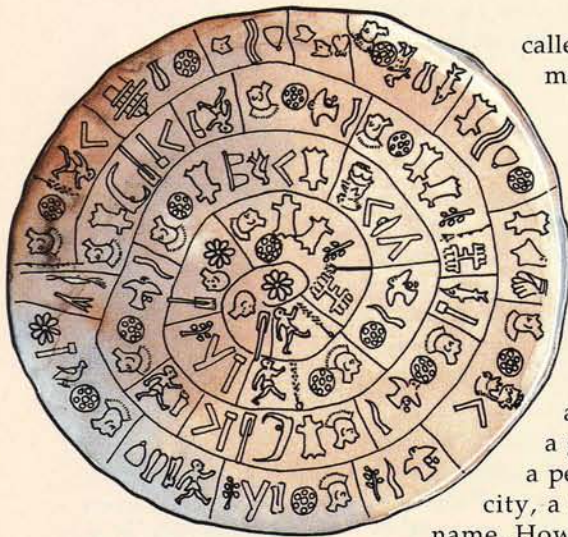
The same kind of alliance is also mentioned in several unambiguous cuneiform tablets from Hattusa. According to these documents, 22 states in western Anatolia formed a coalition against the Hittites as early as the 15th century BC. Other documents provide evidence that such a coalition was forming for a second time a few years before the Hittite state vanished. In a letter to his wife, the Great King of Hatti describes how states to the west were rallying against him, and says that it would be difficult to keep the situation under control if they succeeded. Some texts from Hattusa also show that Hatti felt increasingly threatened by one particular neighbor in the west

*The chaos of what appears to be an unsuccessful amphibious assault by the Sea People, as depicted by the Egyptians.*



## SOME STATES OF THE LATE BRONZE AGE AND THEIR ATTRIBUTES

REGION	PEOPLE	CITY	SCRIPT	NAME
Egypt	Egyptian	Thebes	hieroglyphic	Hekuptah
Upper Tigris	Assyria	Assur	cuneiform	Ratenu
Central Anatolia	Hittite	Hattusa	cuneiform	Hatti
Syria/Palestine	Canaanite	Kadesh	cuneiform	Amurru
Greece	Achaean	Mycenae	Linear B	Tanaja
Crete	Minoan	Knossos	Linear A	Keftiu
Cyprus	Cypriot	Enkomi	Cypro-Minoan	Alasiya
Western Anatolia	Sea People	Troy	Discos of Phaistos (?)	Assuwa



One of the signs on the baffling Discos of Phaistos (at nine-o'clock position above) is a man's head with what could be either a feather crown or a "mohawk" hairstyle.

called Ahhiyawa, a country that many scholars locate in north-western Turkey and which thus may be Troy itself.

To take stock of the mysteries surrounding western Anatolian states at the end of the Bronze Age, we can outline today's knowledge in the table above.

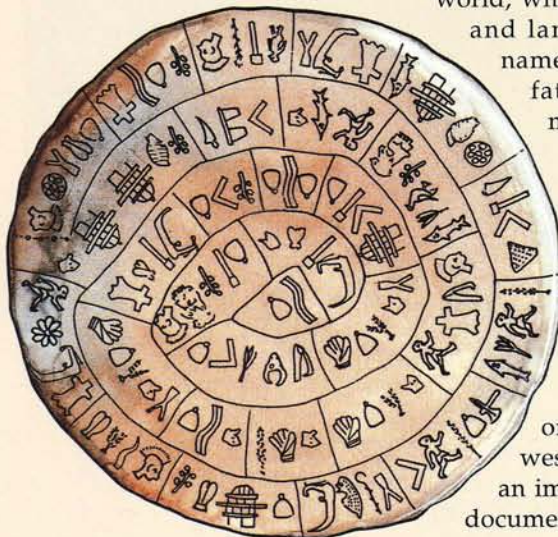
Seven of the known Late Bronze Age civilizations had all of the following attributes: a geographical region or realm, a people, at least one substantial city, a script and a contemporary name. However, in each of these categories we find one isolated entry that is somehow related to western Anatolia, but is considered mysterious or inexplicable within the parameters of traditional scholarship.

There is, first of all, the problem of Troy, one of the most formidable archeological sites in the world, whose inhabitants, realm, script and language, and contemporary name—as well as its history and fate—remain obscure despite more than 120 years of excavation and research. There are also the Sea People, whose city, realm, script and language and name are unknown: They came from nowhere and then vanished. There are the many references to Assuwa, Asiya, Ahiya and Ahhiyawa, states or confederations of states in western Anatolia, which played an important role in contemporary documents from Egypt and Hattusa,

but whose city or cities, people, language and script are unknown. And finally there is the Discos of Phaistos, a unique—some would also say notorious—document, discovered on Crete in 1908, whose spiral inscription, using 45 different symbols, is inscribed on a clay disc 16 centimeters (6¼") across. Although the origin and importance of this artifact are fiercely disputed, its discoverer, Italian archeologist Luigi Pernier, claimed parallels between the characters used in the Discos script and images of the Sea People from the Medinat Habu inscriptions. Indeed, the latest attempt by scholars to decipher the Discos even bears the title "The Language of the Sea People," but the city, people, realm, language and name to be associated with the Discos are all unknown.

Combining all these incomplete entries into one row in our table would produce all the attributes of a complete civilization in western Anatolia. We even possess a contemporary name for such a civilization, as "Assuwa" was the term used to describe the confederated states, of which Ahhiyawa seems to have been the most important constituent. If these deductions prove correct, archeological scholarship has overlooked an entire, and important, Bronze Age civilization.

In a practical sense, the possibility that western Anatolia hosted a civilization equal—or in some respects even superior—to those of Mycenaean Greece and Minoan Crete is quite plausible. The Aegean shore of Anatolia contains countless natural harbors and advantageous places for settlement. The interior offers an abundance of natural resources including ores, timber and water, while the coastal maritime route has been of strategic and economic importance for millennia. Despite ample evidence that it was well-inhabited during the Late Bronze Age, and despite archeological evidence from Troy and Beycesultan that indicates these



Anatolian societies may well have been sophisticated enough for them to rank with Greece and Crete, the thought has simply never been entertained in archeological circles. Why not?

Two characteristics of Old World archeological research methods illuminate how this may have occurred. Building on foundations in art history and philology, today's archeology tends to concentrate on the study of architectural monuments, artifacts and documents. This tendency rests on the implicit assumption that most of the relevant aspects of any ancient culture will indeed be recorded in these remains. But the approach puts any civilization whose people built with perishable mud-brick and wood, instead of with stone, at a serious disadvantage, for the remains of their structures will not survive. Similarly, when a civilization has traded in metal, cloth, timber, grain, leather, cattle or horses, slaves and other perishable goods rather than in pottery, the evidence of that activity will not survive the centuries. And if this civilization, in addition, used papyrus, wax or leather, rather than stone or clay, to write on, then its people may become almost invisible to archeological research.

Furthermore, the art-historical emphasis in archeology tends to highlight research that deals with concrete artifacts rather than the reconstruction of past political, economic and military relations—precisely the matters in which the Late Bronze Age Anatolian states seem to have excelled. Hence, by excavating standing monuments and artifact-rich sites, European archeology itself may have contributed to a slanted picture of antiquity.

The second characteristic goes back to the birth of scientific archeology in 19th-century Europe. The founders of the discipline had absorbed the Enlightenment belief that classical Greece and Rome were superior to the cultures of modern times. Also, both 19th-century Europe and Greece of the fourth century BC were engaged in conflicts with Anatolian powers: The Ottoman Empire's interests conflicted with those of European powers in much the same way that Troy's conflicted with Mycenae and, later, Persia's with classical Greece. As the culture of antiquity was presented as the model for modern culture in Europe, the antipathies born in Greece of the fourth century BC were also readopted and reinforced. All these conflicts—contemporary and historical—caused considerable anti-Anatolian sentiment.

Early archeology, as a strictly European discipline, unavoidably took up these attitudes. Johann Winckelmann, widely considered the founder of art history, regarded the ancient Greeks as "equal to the gods," while their contemporaries abroad were "barbarians." Later, the European university system institutional-

ized such attitudes through the omnipresence of ancient Greek sculpture and architecture in European institutions of higher learning.

As a result, ancient Greece was, and to a considerable extent still is, considered the cradle of Western culture, despite clear indications that several of its achievements—agriculture, metallurgy and elements of sophisticated architecture—actually came to Greece from Anatolia.

**I**f we can clear our minds of these inherited assumptions, we find that the fall of the Late Bronze Age civilizations can indeed be plausibly reconstructed.

Early in the 14th century BC, as the power of the Minoan civilization on Crete dwindled, the many small kingdoms on the Greek and Anatolian sides of the Aegean took advantage of the vacuum. The Greek Mycenaean kings adopted the system of a palace-administered society from the Minoans, and gradually took over Cretan trade routes. Troy achieved sole control of some islands in the eastern Aegean and of the important maritime trade route through the Dardanelles to the Black Sea. It also assumed many of Crete's functions in the metals trade. Thus both the Mycenaean and the Trojan civilizations reached the peak of their political and economic power between 1375 and 1250 BC.

Eventually, the equilibrium must have shifted. Perhaps because Greek vessels attempted to use the straits to the Black Sea for their own trade activities, a serious conflict arose between the two sides of the Aegean. Traditional accounts recall how a small Greek contingent was sent to punish Troy in about 1250 BC. In a surprise attack, Greek units succeeded in destroying the city at its absolute cultural peak.

This first Greek assault was not the legendary Trojan War. It did, however, mark the beginning of the decline of the Late Bronze Age cultures. The Trojans rebuilt their city, but this time, the archeological evidence makes clear, they built not with status in mind, but defense. Soon after the citadel of Troy was finished, both the Mycenaean kings in Greece and the Great King of Hatti reinforced their own citadels in similar fashion. The new fortresses followed a common plan: The protected area was expanded to provide shelter not only for the upper classes but also for members of the lower echelons of society; the walls were reinforced to withstand massive onslaughts; access to freshwater springs was included in the protected areas to assure water supply under conditions of siege; and finally, defense galleries and secret escape routes were incorporated into the structures. The similarities between the citadels at Hattusa and Mycenae are so striking that one might almost infer they had been jointly designed.



A WARRIOR OF THE SEA PEOPLE

CA. 1200 BC

Hatti's biggest concern, however, lay to the east, at the other end of Anatolia. From its heartland in upper Mesopotamia, Assyria launched a successful attack around 1236 BC, which captured copper mines on the eastern border of Hatti. Rather than confront the militarily superior Assyrian state, Hatti determined to acquire a new source of vital copper from an easier target. The Great King managed to conquer Cyprus, one of the richest mining districts in the eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, he barred ships from western Anatolia from entering the ports of his vassals in Syria, thus interrupting trade between his rivals. This blockade was just as much an act of aggression in the 13th century BC as it would be today; war became inevitable.

The first encounters between forces from western Anatolia and those of Hatti probably took place on the mainland, but eventually western Anatolian strategists developed a plan to circumvent the stronger state by sea and attack Cyprus and Syria instead. This naval assault probably occurred around 1195 BC, and it is this that became known as the Sea People invasions.

We may never find out whether the western Anatolian Sea People actually aimed to end Hatti's hegemony over central Anatolia once and for all, or whether they were simply retaliating against Hatti's aggressions in hope of regaining their lost trade routes. In either case, though the first battles may have been indecisive, western Anatolia soon received support from Kashka, which used Hatti's preoccupation with the Sea People to march again toward the Hittite capital. They left it in ashes in about 1190 BC.

With Hatti destroyed, the western Anatolian states—the Sea People—suddenly found themselves commanding an area stretching from the Aegean to Palestine. Pushing farther into the Levant, they became involved in the kind of battles that are depicted on the walls of Medinat Habu. Egypt, weakened by its internal strife, was unable to overwhelm the enemy. Only one state remained powerful enough to fight the western Anatolian allies, which were led by Troy: Mycenaean Greece.

Although Greece itself may not have been attacked, it was clearly facing a difficult future with a neighbor as powerful as western Anatolia, and a neighbor, to boot, whom Greece had already offended sufficiently to earn unwavering enmity. After much preparation, a Greek army entered the battlefield, planning attacks on the centers of cities—the same strategy used by the

western Anatolian states. With the Anatolians busy in the Levant and Egypt, Greek soldiers ravaged the western Anatolian heartland, forcing the Anatolians to pull back to defend their homes. Finally, the opposing armies gathered at the city whose fate would decide the outcome of this unprecedented war. The battles at Troy probably took place around 1186 BC, and they likely lasted a few months before the Greek attackers succeeded—again—in conquering the doomed city.

In an apocalyptic war, there are no winners. Many famous Greek aristocrats lost their lives in the fighting. Those who survived had a hard time reassuming leadership upon their return, because provincial deputies had assumed their thrones and the returning warriors were too weakened and impoverished to regain their titles. Greece and Anatolia entered an era of anarchy. With the disappearance of the palaces and the aristocracy, the fine craftsmanship, the artistry, and the knowledge of writing disappeared as well. *The Odyssey*, numerous legends, and even the Greek historian Thucydides all recount how the survivors of the Trojan War spread all around the central and eastern Mediterranean. The archaeological evidence confirms the migrations, and names still found today—Sicilian, Sardinian, Etruscan, Philistine and Thracian—are first documented after the end of the crisis years.

Although the Sea People vanished from the political records, they left a legacy second to none in world history. In Palestine, where many clans from both Greece and western Anatolia sought refuge, the Philistine and Phoenician civilizations arose, reviving and spreading much of the inventiveness in metallurgy, seafaring, warfare and trade that had characterized fallen Troy and its allies. The civilization of Rome claimed to have originated with Aeneas of Troy. And the memory of Troy and the Trojan War stood firmly at the center of interest for Western scholars up through the Middle Ages. Today it still remains one of the central legends of the West, related by one of the most eloquent poets the world has ever known. 🌐



*Ramses III's scribes used the name "Tekker" for one of the allied groups that comprised the Sea People. In Greece after 1200 BC, the common term for the Trojan population was "Teuker." It is not known whether this similarity has any significance.*

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