



Catastrophe: An Investigation into the Origins of Modern Civilization

By David Keys

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It was a catastrophe without precedent in recorded history: for months on end, starting in A.D. 535, a strange, dusky haze robbed much of the earth of normal sunlight. Crops failed in Asia and the Middle East as global weather patterns radically altered. Bubonic plague, exploding out of Africa, wiped out entire populations in Europe. Flood and drought brought ancient cultures to the brink of collapse. In a matter of decades, the old order died and a new world—essentially the modern world as we know it today—began to emerge.

In this fascinating, groundbreaking, totally accessible book, archaeological journalist David Keys dramatically reconstructs the global chain of revolutions that began in the catastrophe of A.D. 535, then offers a definitive explanation of how and why this cataclysm occurred on that momentous day centuries ago.

The Roman Empire, the greatest power in Europe and the Middle East for centuries, lost half its territory in the century following the catastrophe. During the exact same period, the ancient southern Chinese state, weakened by economic turmoil, succumbed to invaders from the north, and a single unified China was born. Meanwhile, as restless tribes swept down from the central Asian steppes, a new religion known as Islam spread through the Middle East. As Keys demonstrates with compelling originality and authoritative research, these were not isolated upheavals but linked events arising from the same cause and rippling around the world like an enormous tidal wave.

Keys's narrative circles the globe as he identifies the eerie fallout from the months of darkness: unprecedented drought in Central America, a strange yellow dust drifting like snow over eastern Asia, prolonged famine, and the hideous pandemic of the bubonic plague. With a superb command of ancient literatures and historical records, Keys makes hitherto unrecognized connections between the "wasteland" that overspread the British countryside and the fall of the great pyramid-building Teotihuacan civilization in Mexico, between a little-known "Jewish empire" in Eastern Europe and the rise of the Japanese nation-state, between storms in France and pestilence in Ireland.

In the book's final chapters, Keys delves into the mystery at the heart of this global catastrophe: Why did it happen? The answer, at once surprising and definitive, holds chilling implications for our own precarious geopolitical future. Wide-ranging in its scholarship, written with flair and passion, filled with original insights, Catastrophe is a superb synthesis of history, science, and cultural interpretation.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Everybody knows the Dark Ages weren't really dark, right? Not so fast, counters archaeological journalist David Keys, maybe it's more than just a slightly judgmental metaphor. His book *Catastrophe: An Investigation into the Origins of the Modern World*, based on years of careful research spanning five continents, argues that sometime in A.D. 535, a worldwide disaster struck and uprooted nearly every culture then extant. Given contemporary reports of the sun being blotted out or weakened for nearly a year and a half, followed by famine, drought, and plague, it's hard not to think that so many reports from all over the world must be related.

Keys shows a keen grasp of both the written historical record from Asia, Africa, and Europe and the archaeological evidence from the Americas, and tells many tales of great havoc destroying old empires and laying the ground for new ones. Rome may have fallen, but Spain, England, and France rose in its place, while farther east, Japan and China each unified and gained strength after the chaos. Could an enormous volcanic eruption have had such influence on the world as a whole, and could the same thing happen tomorrow? *Catastrophe* makes no predictions, but leaves the reader with a new sense of history, nature, and destiny. --Rob Lightner

From Publishers Weekly

In Keys's startling thesis, a global climatic catastrophe in A.D. 535-536--a massive volcanic eruption sundering Java from Sumatra--was the decisive factor that transformed the ancient world into the medieval, or as Keys prefers to call it, the "proto-modern" era. Ancient chroniclers record a disaster in that year that blotted out the sun for months, causing famine, droughts, floods, storms and bubonic plague. Keys, archeology correspondent for the London Independent, uses tree-ring samples, analysis of lake deposits and ice cores, as well as contemporaneous documents to bolster his highly speculative thesis. In his scenario, the ensuing disasters precipitated the disintegration of the Roman Empire, beset by Slav, Mongol and Persian invaders propelled from their disrupted homelands. The sixth-century collapse of Arabian civilization under pressure from floods and crop failure created an apocalyptic atmosphere that set the stage for Islam's emergence. In Mexico, Keys claims, the cataclysm triggered the collapse of a Mesoamerican empire; in Anatolia, it helped the Turks establish what eventually became the Ottoman Empire; while in China, the ensuing half-century of political and social chaos led to a reunified nation. Huge claims call for big proof, yet Keys reassembles history to fit his thesis, relentlessly overworking its explanatory power in a manner reminiscent of Velikovsky's theory that a comet collided with the earth in 1500 B.C. Readers anxious about future cataclysms will take note of Keys's roundup of trouble spots that could conceivably wreak planetary havoc. Maps. BOMC and QPBC selections. (Feb.)

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From Library Journal

In the years 535 and 536 C.E., according to archaeological journalist Keys, a dusky haze blotted out the light and heat of the sun and brought about both massive droughts and floods. The famines and plagues that resulted from these climate changes then drove tribal groups out of the heartlands of Asia and into the Mediterranean world of the old Roman Empire. Then, the wars and displacement of long-settled peoples that resulted destroyed the old order and, in Keys's opinion, marked the emergence of the modern world. Keys supports his thesis with an impressive array of scientific and historical evidence. Although it seems unlikely that any single factor could have such catastrophic consequences, the book, written in an engaging manner,

should stimulate interest in the role of climate in human events. Suitable for academic libraries.

-Harry Frummerman, formerly with Hunter Coll., CUNY

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Mildred Patton:

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Laura Crabtree:

The knowledge that you get from Catastrophe: An Investigation into the Origins of Modern Civilization is a more deep you looking the information that hide in the words the more you get enthusiastic about reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to comprehend but Catastrophe: An Investigation into the Origins of Modern Civilization giving you enjoyment feeling of reading. The article author conveys their point in certain way that can be understood by anyone who read it because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. That book also makes your current vocabulary increase well. So it is easy to understand then can go together with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We advise you for having this particular Catastrophe: An Investigation into the Origins of Modern Civilization instantly.

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