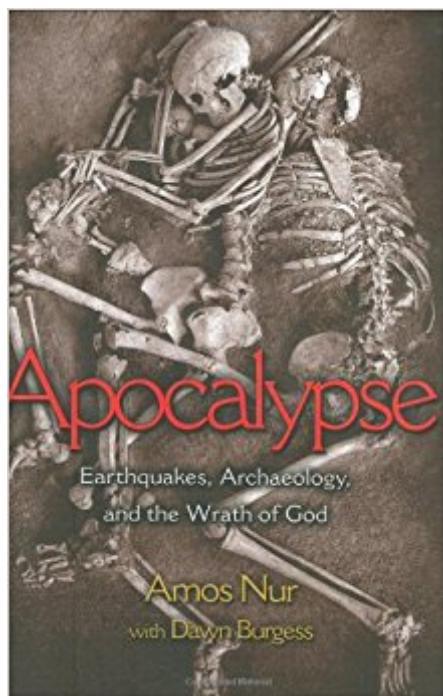


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Apocalypse: Earthquakes, Archaeology, And The Wrath Of God



Synopsis

What if Troy was not destroyed in the epic battle immortalized by Homer? What if many legendary cities of the ancient world did not meet their ends through war and conquest as archaeologists and historians believe, but in fact were laid waste by a force of nature so catastrophic that religions and legends describe it as the wrath of god? *Apocalypse* brings the latest scientific evidence to bear on biblical accounts, mythology, and the archaeological record to explore how ancient and modern earthquakes have shaped history--and, for some civilizations, seemingly heralded the end of the world. Archaeologists are trained to seek human causes behind the ruins they study. Because of this, the subtle clues that indicate earthquake damage are often overlooked or even ignored. Amos Nur bridges the gap that for too long has separated archaeology and seismology. He examines tantalizing evidence of earthquakes at some of the world's most famous archaeological sites in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, including Troy, Jericho, Knossos, Mycenae, Armageddon, Teotihuacán, and Petra. He reveals what the Bible, the *Iliad*, and other writings can tell us about the seismic calamities that may have rocked the ancient world. He even explores how earthquakes may have helped preserve the Dead Sea Scrolls. As Nur shows, recognizing earthquake damage in the shifted foundations and toppled arches of historic ruins is vital today because the scientific record of world earthquake risks is still incomplete. *Apocalypse* explains where and why ancient earthquakes struck--and could strike again.

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Customer Reviews

Considering anew the archeological evidence of catastrophic destruction in Mexico and the eastern Mediterranean, geophysicists Nur and Burgess explore the overlooked role of earthquakes in the downfall of many well-known prehistoric civilizations-Tenochtitlan, the Hittite empire, Troy, Mycenae, Jericho and others-which archeologists tend to blame on invading armies or social factors. Nur and Burgess compare evidence from modern earthquakes with the structures, debris, human remains and (where possible) written records from ancient catastrophes, finding impressive and alarming support for their archeoseismic theory. Among other conclusions, the authors find evidence that severe earthquakes may occur in quick succession (what they call earthquake storms) separated by long periods of seismic quiet. They also look at the cultural legacy of earthquakes, like the tumultuous impact of the 1755 Lisbon earthquake on European politics and the long-term effects of the 1923 Tokyo earthquake. The authors' most important point is that archaeologists, failing to understand these regions' vulnerability, have failed to warn modern inhabitants of the danger they live in. With a dire prognosis sure to touch off controversy, this book will rivet fans of archaeology, geology and history. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"[Amos Nur] posits seismicity--rather than invaders or social forces--as the prime dynamic behind the fall of ancient civilizations. Nur engages in what we might call archaeological detective work--looking at the positions of human remains, for instance, to determine cause of death--his book is focused and intense."--David Ulin, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*"[A] deeply researched and compellingly written book. *Apocalypse* is a winning combination of cautious interdisciplinary investigation and interpretation, writing suitable for a general readership, and excellent illustrations. Although it will deliberately irritate many archaeologists, it should also provoke a serious reconsideration of the archaeological record. [T]he evidence for earthquakes in prehistorical change may be staring archaeologists in the face."--Andrew Robinson, *Nature*"The theory that earthquakes may have caused the destruction of many ancient cities is unpopular and controversial. Amos Nur's book illustrated these ideas with convincing prose and meticulous research. Nur introduces the reader to a relatively new science...called Archaeoseismology. The reader will discover that the earthquakes that have occurred in the more recent times...have parallels to the remnants of destruction left from earthquakes in the distant past. *Apocalypse* is a result of [Nur's] determined effort to expell the fallacies in archaeology with the hard science of geophysics."--Lee Gooden, *ForeWord Magazine*"In *Apocalypse*...Amos Nur compellingly proposes seismic sources for civilizational collapses that the Bible and the Classics attribute to other causes."--Anneli Rufus, *East*

Bay Express" [Amos Nur] delivers a fascinating mini-course full of detail, speculation and a challenge to previous archaeological interpretations. Nur examines the record of earthquakes in the seismically active 'Holy Land.' [R]eaders, regardless of religious persuasion, will appreciate the connections between geological and archaeological evidence and sections of the Bible. Both believers and atheists will enjoy pondering Nur's discussions of material from the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls."--Fred Bortz, Seattle Times "Apocalypse . . . is Nur's attempt to present the fresh-faced discipline of earthquake archaeology to a wider public audience."--Iain Stewart, Times Higher Education "In *Apocalypse*, Nur argues that historical earthquake events explain most of the destruction of several well-known Near East settlements. . . . This volume makes a fine--albeit controversial--contribution to traditional perspectives."--M. Evans, Choice "Nur's book provides a clear, fast-reading, yet cautious and measured account of what archaeologists truly need to know about the geology and physics of earthquakes. . . . The text is liberally sprinkled with prime examples from both the Old and New Worlds. If you work in a seismic area, you owe it to yourself to curl up with this gem."--E.W. Barber, American Journal of Archaeology "[T]he writing is very approachable, and the book is accessible to a broader audience, including geophysicists and the general public. I found it an enjoyable read and was interested to learn about this intersection of geophysics and archeology and also to be reminded of details from long-forgotten ancient history classes."--Seth S. Haines, Leading Edge "Recognizing earthquake damage in the shifted foundations and toppled arches of historic ruins is vital today because the scientific record of world earthquake risks is still incomplete. *Apocalypse* explains where and why ancient earthquakes struck and could strike again."--MCEER Information Service "No doubt, seldom could any book be so provoking in discussions on geophysical contributions to societal collapse in ancient times as *Apocalypse* is."--Marek Lewandowski, Pure and Applied Geophysics "Having read this book with interest it is clear that there is far more evidence for earthquake activity in the archaeological record than we currently acknowledge and that archaeologists need to treat the phenomenon with greater regard. The book is well written and highly accessible and the partnership of Nur and Burgess has clearly worked to the benefit of the reader."--John Grattan, Journal of Archaeological Science "Does this study, which chronicles the history and archaeology of ancient and modern earthquakes in both the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean region, warrant the attention of scholars and interested laymen? Absolutely!"--William S. Arnett, Historian

"*Apocalypse*" is a well-written and fascinating discussion of the role that earthquakes may have played in the Bronze Age history of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Nur is a geophysicist

who argues that archaeologists are too ready to reject earthquakes as a cause of the widespread devastation that is sometimes found at ancient sites. According to Nur, the archaeologist's preferred interpretation is usually that invading armies caused the destruction. Nur admits that this interpretation may be right in many cases, but persuasively argues that archaeologists too often ignore evidence that the real cause of the devastation might have been an earthquake. Nur brings a geophysicist's perspective to the archaeologist's world, observing that many ancient sites (such as Mycenae) are affected by significant fault lines that pass directly through ancient ruins, sometimes visibly offsetting walls and staircases. Others ruins contain the remains of people killed thousands of years ago by collapsing walls or ceilings--the skeletons bear the telltale signs of the crushing injuries typical of earthquake victims. Nur suggests that some ancient abandonments and migrations might have been triggered by earthquakes. For example, some of the devastation usually attributed to the mysterious Sea Peoples may have been caused by earthquakes, either because the earthquakes caused the destruction outright, or because they severely damaged fortifications and killed large numbers of people, leaving cities vulnerable to opportunistic invaders. Archaeologists have tended to dismiss the earthquake explanation for sometimes widespread devastation in the ancient world because much of it (such as the events around 1200BC that precipitated the Greek Dark Ages) appears to have happened suddenly over an implausibly wide area for an earthquake. But Nur argues that very widespread damage could have been caused by either a single very large earthquake, or by an "earthquake storm" (a cascade of earthquakes caused when one quake increases pressure on another fault, leading to a series of events). Both of these possibilities are fair game from the perspective of a geophysicist, and Nur urges that archaeologists should consider the possibility carefully when interpreting ancient sites. Nur's book is an enjoyable mix of geology, geophysics, ancient history, geology, and forensics, but it also contains a warning. What happened in the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the ancient world can happen again, as it did during the Jericho Earthquake of 1927. If archaeologists and geophysicists can learn from each other, they are more likely to spot major earthquake hazards that might otherwise be overlooked.

Very interesting book. A nice combination of archeology, geophysics and the sparks that show up when both sciences "collide". The author collects a number of examples around the Mediterranean Sea to demonstrate that the destruction found at some levels in some of the classic ruins (Jericho, Troy, Mycenae and others) can be explained by earthquakes instead of war and human destruction. I'm a geologist living in a seismic country (Chile) and I found the evidence very convincing, having myself experienced earthquakes as big as 8.8 recently. The author takes some space to explain the

controversy raised by this alternative, not very welcome interpretation of ruins in the archeological world. If you like to combine history and science, it is a good choice. The book is written in a technically correct, but not too complex language, making it appropriate for normal readers without much scientific background.

One of the subjects that fascinated me in school, and indeed, for most of my life, has been the topic of archaeology. Forget Indiana Jones, the real excitement is untangling the clues left by the past, and what with the new technology that keeps appearing all of the time, the reinterpretation of what we thought were the facts. Author Amos Nur with Dawn Burgess looks at how geology has affected history -- and it's the immense changes that an earthquake can unleash on civilization. Nur, a professor at Stanford University in California, takes a closer look at the end of the Bronze Age, about 300-500 BCE, and comes up with some surprising new theories for why so many civilizations failed in such a short span of time. The traditional theory is that the eastern Mediterranean was overrun by what was known as the Sea Peoples, who looted and burned cities in their wake, leaving not much else behind but scorched ruins. What skeletal remains have been found have been explained away by war injuries, and left at that. If the idea of earthquakes causing destruction came up, many archaeologists dismissed the notion out of hand, saying that it was very unlikely and not very possible. Amos Nur takes a very different track, however. By using geology, archaeology, and even biblical legend, he gives a provocative new theory that much of the Bronze Age civilizations came to an end by a series of earthquakes, and triggered tsunamis. To back up his theories, he looks at the geological and archaeological record, using not just ancient narratives, but also more modern seismic events, such as the tragic 2004 Sumatra earthquake and tsunami, the 1923 Kanto earthquake in Japan that ravaged Tokyo, and the earthquakes in 1750 Lisbon that destroyed most of the city and created both religious fervour and also may have helped to spur on the Enlightenment. Along the way, we get to learn about how such widespread disasters have created political upheaval in their wake, and how our ancestors may have tried to understand such seemingly random events by viewing them as signs of divine displeasure. As well as the narrative, Nur uses charts, maps and photographs of various earthquake sites. It were the photographs that undid me -- one was of a young family huddled together, found beneath massive ceiling stones that broke my heart, and a mute testimony of what happened in a matter of minutes. Sidebars are scattered throughout giving some basic information about how earthquake faults work, what kind there are; and other topics such as radiocarbon dating, and how it works; and finally, what is societal collapse? While the narrative is very dry, the subject matter is fascinating. I found myself

understanding more of how earthquakes not only affect the immediate area of destruction, but also how they can have a ripple effect across a far wider area. While this isn't for the casual reader -- an interest in or some knowledge of geology or archaeology is really needed to grasp most of what Nur is talking about -- it's still a fascinating read. Four and a half stars, rounded up to five. Heartily recommended.

This book is an enjoyable and interesting read. Nur offers a unique, and perhaps somewhat controversial, hypothesis by arguing that earthquakes may have played a greater role in some ancient disasters than previously thought by archaeologists. His book is strongest where he talks about the artifacts of earthquakes and explains in detail the evidence ancient earthquakes would have left behind. However, his history is questionable at times, which certainly detracts from the overall argument. Nur uses no citations whatsoever and, at times, makes off-handed claims about ancient populations that are most certainly questionable. Nevertheless, he writes in a clear and engaging style that makes the book a good read, though the reader should employ a healthy dose of skepticism in regards to some of the claims made.

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