
BOOK NOTE

David Keys: *Catastrophe: An Investigation into the Origins of the Modern World*. New York, Ballentine Books, 1999

The author, an archaeology writer, states, “The aim of this book is to help change people’s view of the past — and the future. Although human inventions, achievements, and actions are obviously key factors in determining the course of human history, the forces of nature and other mechanisms beyond the control of individual human beings, or even states, play an even greater role, both directly and indirectly, by conditioning the circumstances that induce, produce, or permit individual or collective human actions.”

Keys accomplishes his goal. Seldom is a history book so full of suspense. But this volume has enough to make it a page turner. Essentially, it is a history of the world in the mid-6th century. The case is strongly made for the author’s theory, that the history of this era, and later, was the direct result of an unusually large volcanic eruption in 535 A.D.

This explosion was so loud it could be heard thousands of miles away. Moreover, it submerged the land mass joining Java to Samatra. What’s more, this catastrophe put sufficient materials into the atmosphere so that the sun wasn’t able to shine through for years. Hence, the earth suffered years of drought, floods, starvation, wars of survival and conquest, migrations, plague, death, destruction, and more. Even today, those effects can still be seen in such things as the world’s current geopolitical setup. Engrossing, this book is recommended. —
James C. Sullivan