

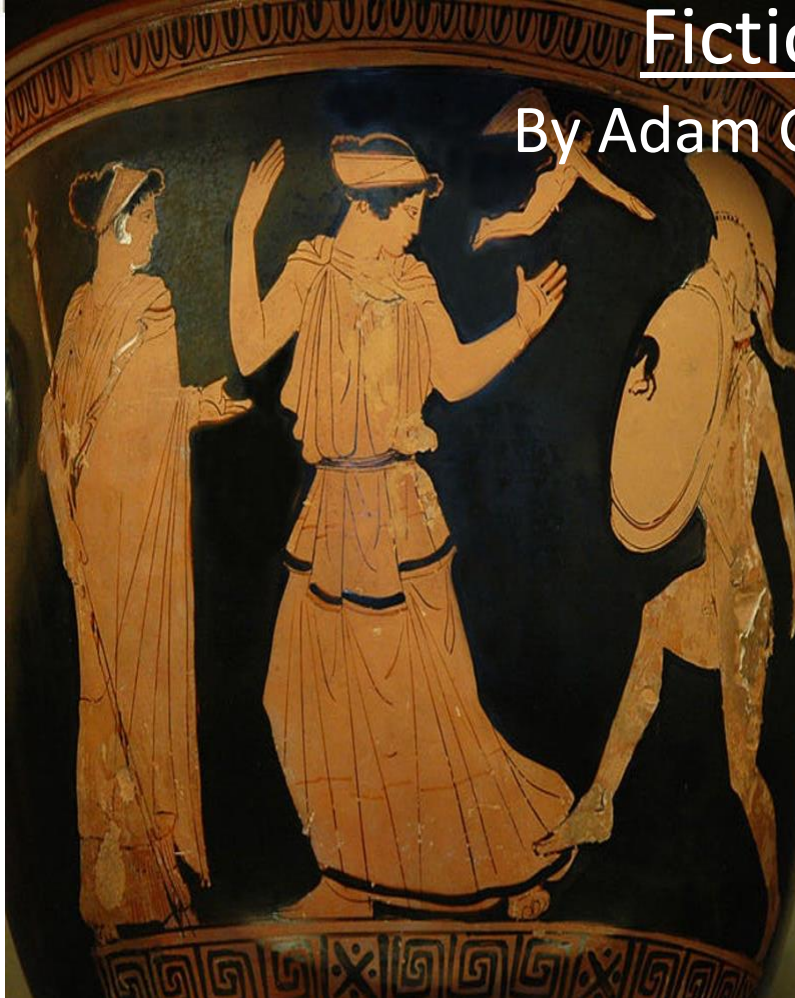


Troy

Historical Event or Work of

Fiction?

By Adam Gaunt 2B



Troy: Historical Event or Work of Fiction?

The Trojan War is one of the most iconic and enduring tales ever told. Its universal themes of love, betrayal and war still fascinate us today. But what is it about the story that is so engaging and how much of it is even remotely true?

During the course of my project, I will be exploring the origins of the story and recent attempts to substantiate the events. But I would like to begin with a brief retelling of the story that we know from Homer's epic poem the *Iliad*.

The Story of the Trojan War

This incredible story of gods and mortals begins with three jealous goddesses and a golden apple inscribed with the message 'for the most beautiful.' This caught the attention of the goddesses Athena, goddess of wisdom; Aphrodite, goddess of love; and Hera, Queen of the Gods.

Each believing they deserved the apple, the deities travelled to Mount Ida and asked handsome Paris, Prince of Troy, to settle the dispute.

All of the goddesses tried to bribe Paris to gain victory. Hera offered him power and to make him a great ruler; Athena offered him great success in battles and for him to become a famous warrior, and Aphrodite offered him the hand of the most beautiful woman in the world – Helen of Sparta. Paris, delighted by Aphrodite's offer, handed her the apple.



The Judgement of Paris – Gustav Pope (1852-1895)

Outraged, Athena and Hera protested to the other gods at Mount Olympus. Meanwhile Paris, with Aphrodite's help, kidnapped Helen, and departed for Troy. There was just one problem: Helen was married to King Menelaus, the King of Sparta, and he was incensed. With his brother, Agamemnon, High King of all Greeks, Menelaus enlisted the help of all the Greek Kings and sailed to Troy to win Helen back. Olympus was just as chaotic, as the Gods were divided over whether to help the Trojans or the Greeks. In the end, the Gods chose sides, except for Zeus, King of the Gods, God of the Sky and Lightning, who took a neutral stance to ensure that the impending battle did not get out of hand. However, even the almighty could not prevent this battle of epic proportions, and The Trojan War becoming the most cited fight in Ancient Greece.

1227 Greek ships sailed to Troy and set up camp by the ocean. The Greek Kings told the Trojans that they would not attack if Helen was given back to them immediately. King Priam of Troy was tempted by this offer, but the doting father, seeing how happy his son was with Helen, refused. So the Greeks

declared war. Troy was not far away from their camp, but the Greeks knew that they could not penetrate the huge wall surrounding the city, so they stayed where they were and laid siege to Troy.

Across the next ten years, many battles would take place, but the first one of major importance began with yet another squabble over a woman. But it was not between the Greeks and Trojans, but within the Greek camp. The Greeks had successfully raided a temple of Apollo outside of the city, and one of the priestesses, a beautiful woman named Chryseis, was given to the hero Achilles as a gift. However, Agamemnon was so entranced by her beauty that he decided to take her as his own. Achilles was furious, pulled out of the battle and refused to let himself or any of his soldiers, the Myrmidions, engage in battle. With the Greeks' greatest soldier out of the equation, the Trojans managed to turn the tide of the war and, despite the likes of Odysseus, Ajax and Nestor, the Trojans became almost unstoppable under the command of Prince Hector. Agamemnon realised he needed Achilles back, so returned Chryseis to him and begged the hero to rejoin the battle, but still the disrespected Achilles refused.

With no Achilles to even out the battle, the Gods began to interfere. Many of the Gods supporting the Trojans began to fight with them, and the Greek sympathisers quickly followed. Soon it became a war of Gods as well as men, and all the mortals fought for their lives. But still Achilles forbade his soldiers from fighting. But Patroclus, his cousin with whom he had a particularly close bond, thought that they should be fighting. So while Achilles was distracted, he donned the hero's, and rode into battle.

Mistaking the boy for Achilles, Hector challenged Patroclus to a duel. They fought hard, but after a long battle, Hector emerged victorious, before he realised his mistake.

The Myrmidion leader wept as his cousin's corpse was carried to him. He was consumed with rage and almost immediately rode off towards the great Trojan wall and challenged Hector to combat. The Trojan Prince and supreme Trojan warrior, had ultimately give the Greeks what they most needed: Achilles.



Achilles Vs Hector – Mark Churms

They fought from sunrise to sunset, until finally, the demigod Achilles slew his foe. The honourable thing to do would have been to return the body to the Trojans to be mourned as a warrior, son and heir, and receive the proper rituals for his journey to the underworld. Instead, Achilles tied the lifeless body to a rope, attached it to his chariot, and rode around the walls of Troy, dragging Hector behind him, the ultimate dishonour. No amount of begging or offerings of money from King Priam would get him to stop until finally, after over a week, he relented and gave the body back to the Trojans.

The Trojans had lost their military leader, and the Greeks knew it was their time to strike. So Agamemnon called for their smartest and most cunning hero, Odysseus, King of Ithaca, and told him to come up with a plan to defeat the Trojans.

The next day, the Trojan guards looked out over the walls and saw no ships. All that remained was a wooden horse left outside the gates. Believing the Greeks had withdrawn, the Trojans rejoiced and celebrated, dragging the horse inside of the great walls. In reality, they had unknowingly let the Greeks inside the walls of the city for the first time in ten years.

That was Odysseus' plan. The Greeks had not left, they had merely moved their ships around the headland, hiding them from Trojan view. The majority of Greeks had hidden with the ships while a small number concealed themselves in the belly of the wooden horse. And there they waited. As the drunken Trojans slept, the Greeks seized their chance, leaving the horse and opening the gates to the waiting Greeks army outside



The Procession of the Trojan Horse into Troy

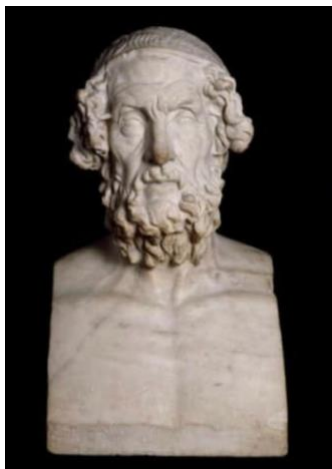


The Wounded Achilles
(1825) – Filippo Albacini

The city of Troy was burned to the ground, King Priam was killed, and only a few Trojans escaped with their lives. Only Paris had stayed awake, unable to sleep. Seeing the Greeks, he grabbed a bow and a quiver and ran out to shoot whoever he could. He spotted Achilles leading the charge and took aim and fired. Paris was a terrible shot but was aided by the Gods. Apollo, the god of archery along with his twin Artemis, was furious with Achilles for taking one of his priestesses, so he guided the arrow and made sure it hit its mark. Achilles' ankle. Achilles had been bathed in the river Styx as an infant by his mother the goddess Thetis and this had made him invincible except for one spot, his heel from which he was held when he was submerged in the river. The arrow pierced its target and Achilles fell to the floor, dead.

But it was too late to save Troy, and the Greeks still won the battle nonetheless. This may have been the end of the Iliad, but according to Virgil's *Aeneid*, written many years later, the escaped Trojans settled in Italy and founded Rome.

How do we know about the Trojan War?



It is widely believed that the earliest written account of the battle is the epic poem the *Iliad*. It is generally accepted that it was written around seven or eight hundred B.C., 500 years after when the poem says the Trojan War actually took place, by the poet Homer. However, little is truly known about him and some even believe that Homer was not one man at all but rather that the poem was written by multiple sources who worked together, possibly over many generations, to create the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Other experts believe that the blind bard that often appears in the poems is Homer himself is recounting his experiences. But this would imply that Homer lived a lot earlier than many academics think the *Iliad* was written. Or could it be that this blind bard represents Homer recounting the story he has heard as he was not present actually to see it?

A later source that details the events of the Trojan War comes the Roman poet Virgil. Unlike Homer, Virgil's existence seems to be more substantiated. His famous epic the *Aeneid* was written in 1st century B.C. in Latin. Not much new information about the war itself can be found in the *Aeneid* as much of Virgil's descriptions of the fall of Troy mirror Homer's account, and it is likely Virgil was directly influenced by both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. However, Virgil takes the story further to cover the aftermath of the war, as much of the *Aeneid* is centred around Aeneas (brother of Hector and Paris) who survives Troy, and the story follows his subsequent adventures. Some notable pieces of new information include Aeneas and his stay with Queen Dido in the city state of Carthage, based in what would be modern day North Africa, and how the Romans believed that the Trojan refugees eventually settled in Italy and founded Rome itself.



Different conclusions can be drawn from this second point as some historians take this literally to mean that the Trojans were the founders of Rome or that the Romans at least believed this; but others say it was just motivational propaganda by the Roman Virgil who wanted his countrymen to believe that their founders had royal or even divine blood rather than common heritage.



An Etruscan Tomb-Painting depicting 'The Judgement of Paris'

Over the last couple of centuries, many artefacts have been unearthed with with references and imagery from the story of the Trojan War. There are a huge array of pieces, from drinking vessels to tomb painting and Roman sarcophagi, but none of these predate when the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are thought to have been written. They do show, however, how widely spread and well known the story was, even in the Ancient Greek world and throughout the centuries.

So was it real, or just a story?

The City of Troy

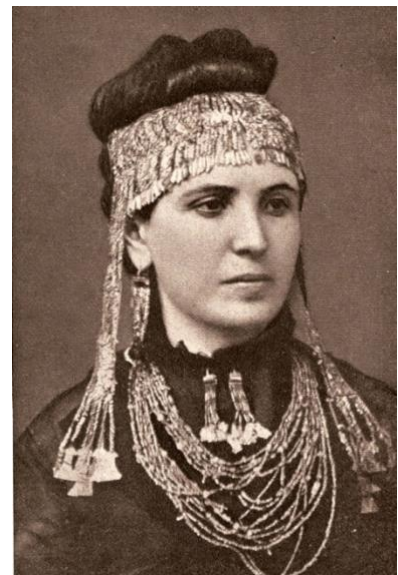
In an attempt to find some concrete evidence for the story, it makes sense to try and discover if the city of Troy actually existed. Many archaeologists have tried to find the remains of Homer's Troy and determine whether or not a battle of that scale ever really occurred. In Homer's *Iliad*, it was made clear that Troy resides in northern Turkey by the Black Sea, however, the exact location was never specified. Despite this, numerous expeditions have taken place over the years in search of the fabled walled city of Troy.



Heinrich Schliemann

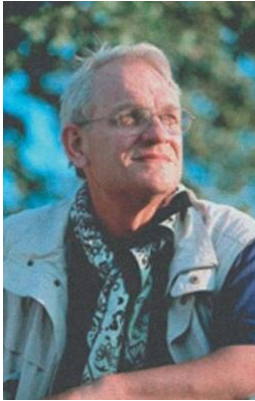
After many unsuccessful searches, the most famous expedition came in 1871 when rich, self-proclaimed archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann claimed that he had found Troy in northwestern Turkey, where a large mound of earth called Hisarlik stood. Schliemann dug a huge trench down the centre of the mound, not caring about his recklessness and the damage he could be doing to the site. When he reached the very bottom, he found riches; beautiful golden jewellery and plates, and Schliemann proclaimed these to be the treasures of King Priam, the ruler of Troy during the Trojan War, according to Homer. He gave them to the Berlin museum and proclaimed that he had found Troy.

However, despite it being large, Hisarlik was not anywhere near big enough to fit Homer's descriptions of Troy. Realising this, Schliemann heavily exaggerated his claims, and for a short while people believed him. But soon doubters appeared. They realised that the so called treasures of Priam were made a millennia too early to have been made around the time of the Trojan War, and it soon got out that Hisarlik was much smaller than Schliemann had made out. It was also rumoured that Schliemann did not find Hisarlik himself at all, but rather that it was found by British amateur archaeologist Frank Calvert. Calvert said that he had found Hisarlik and realised its name translated to 'Place of Fortresses' in Turkish. It seemed that it could contain riches, so he approached Schliemann for funding. Schliemann promptly stole credit for the find and took over the project, using his wealth as leverage, and started to proclaim Hisarlik as Troy. By his death, Schliemann had been forced to withdraw his claims that Hisarlik was Troy, and Hisarlik was dismissed as a wealthy town. Nevertheless, the discovered treasures had sparked interest.



Schliemann's wife wearing the so-called treasures of King Priam

Archaeologists continued to search the site, and it was soon discovered that Hisarlik was not one, but nine settlements one on top of the other. Subsequent archaeologists realised that Schliemann's treasure was from the second level, and that there were settlements at the site from much later. These were named Troy I to IX, and it is believed that Homer's Troy would have been Troy VI. Archaeologists had the right time frame, but this settlement was much too small to be Homer's Troy.



Manfred Korfmann

Then, in the 1990s, Manfred Korfmann headed up a new expedition which lasted for fifteen years. He believed that Schliemann was right, and that Hisarlik was indeed Troy. Using modern day technology, he found much new evidence indicating that Troy VI contained many more similarities to Homer's descriptions than first thought. Firstly, Hisarlik had been dismissed because it was too small to be Troy. However, magnetic prospecting revealed that there was a large trench surrounding the area around the mound. At the time of Troy VI, there would have been a huge wall protecting the settlement, and this trench would be its base. It appeared that the trench surrounded a much larger area than just Hisarlik and the materials in the trench indicated that there would have been buildings right up to the edge. This means that Troy VI was much larger than originally believed and that it now fitted the size description in Homer's poem.

In addition, Troy was described as a very advanced city for its time, and this is true about Troy VI. The fact the city was so large was in itself a heavy indicator that they were an advanced culture for their time, but the main pointer was the way the houses were built. The bricks were laid in such a way that if an earthquake or earth tremor shook the house, it would not collapse outward but inward, therefore staying upright and if anything making buildings stronger.



Some of the ruins at Hisarlik

The positioning of Hisarlik also cast doubt over it being the right location. Homer described Troy as a port, whereas Hisarlik is over four miles from the sea. But studying the soils of the ground between Hisarlik and the sea showed that at the time the Trojan War, much of that land would have been underwater, thus, the sea came a lot closer to Troy VI in the time of Homer's Troy than it does today. And finally, in the level of Troy VI, many damaged skulls

and weapons were found, a major suggestion of conflict. There was also evidence of a possible fire, which would corroborate the story of Troy's destruction.

Not everyone is convinced Hisarlik and Troy are one and the same though. Much like his predecessor Schliemann, Korfmann has his doubters. Some experts feel that, again much like Schliemann, Korfmann has exaggerated the amount of information that can be taken from the findings at Hisarlik. Two main questions are often posed by sceptics: 'If Hisarlik is Troy, then where are the royal tombs?' and 'If this is Homer's Troy, where are the remains of the Greek camp? They were there for ten years, surely they would have left some kind of mark?'



Troy VI's wall at Hisarlik

There is no definitive evidence that Hisarlik is or is not Troy. But its geographical position would, like Troy, have made for a good strategic location, controlling the entrance to the now called Dardanelles, that would have been a busy commercial route at the time, thus making it a desirable city to control. What we do know is that, at the time of Homer's Troy, Troy VI was in northwestern Turkey, advanced in their understanding of the world, and a wealthy trading port which suffered some of form of conflict, just as Homer described.

Interest in Hisarlik has increased because of Korfmann's findings, and in 2013 a huge expedition was planned to begin to find out more about Troy VI and see if there is any unquestionable proof that this was indeed the site of the fabled Trojan War. The expedition, led by Classics Professor William Aylward from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the USA, was set to be the biggest archaeological project in history. Unfortunately, the Turkish government refused to give permission for the expedition to take place, preferring to excavate the site themselves. The *Troya Muzesi* (Troy Museum) containing artefacts found at Hisarlik, is due to open later this year (2020) as a celebration of Hisarlik becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1998.

The Characters

There are some elements of the story that are clearly fictitious. The inclusion of the Gods and their part in the cause of the battle were obviously not based on facts. However, they were nonetheless a very important part of the epic. The Ancient Greeks with their polytheistic faith, believing that events were predetermined by the will of the gods, and the idea that they were all powerful and needed to be pleased, was central to their moral and social structure.

But could any of the mortal characters, like Helen, Hector, Paris, and Odysseus, have existed? Despite their names lasting the test of time, no evidence has been uncovered to confirm that they were indeed at Troy, or even existed elsewhere. One ancient Anatolian people, the Hittites from Asia Minor, did write about Wilusa (Troy), and even talked of a

ruler named Aleksandu. Paris was known as Alexandros in the Iliad, but perhaps the link is too tenuous.

The Horse

It is impossible to imagine the Trojan War without the Trojan horse. This was ingenious plan of Odysseus, which led to the fall of Troy, but could it have been real? Although there is little to no evidence of a horse at Hisarlik, there have been many theories of what Homer meant by this wooden structure. Some people take it literally, as a colossal horse made of timber containing many Greek soldiers, but other interpret it differently. Some say it just a poetic representation of the Greek ships arriving at Troy, which evolved over time into the belief there was actual wooden horse. Another theory is that a horse was drawn onto a gate by a disloyal Trojan to indicate where the Greeks should enter the city. Some believe that it is a representation of an earthquake. The horse was the animal of Poseidon, god of the sea. But he was also the 'Earth-shaker' and god of earthquakes, so some take this to mean that an earth tremor destroyed the city.



A replica of a siege engine that may have been used at the time

However, a more pragmatic explanation offered is that the siege engines which were used in battle as early as the eighteenth century BC would have had elements similar to the wooden horse. They were huge, portable wooden shelters with an over five meter long pointed stake. Attacking soldiers would be protected by the shelter and would repeatedly slam the stake against the wall of the city to weaken and possibly penetrate it. But, in the end, there is no proof of a horse or equivalent wooden structure at Hisarlik so far.

Conclusion

The story of the siege of Troy has been told for thousands of years in literature, paintings, poems, and even films. It is a tale where the fictions and possible facts have been emphasised, adapted and changed over time. Throughout my essay, I have covered the areas of pure fiction, like the Gods, and the unsubstantiated, such as the mortals, the horse and even the poet himself.

As for Troy, it seems likely that it did exist in some form where Hisarlik is today, and it is generally accepted by experts that Hisarlik is where the immortalised city of Troy once stood. Whether or not it was really called Troy is still a mystery. Also, the evidence suggests there was a battle at the time of Homer's descriptions, but whether it was against the Greeks and whether it was of the same scale as Homer's description is still undetermined. As for the Greek encampment and the wooden horse, no evidence at all has been found thus far to indicate either ever existed.

So why is the story as popular as ever today? It is probable that part of the appeal of this story is how little we can prove or disprove it. If it was proven to have not happened, or to have been a battle of little significance, that had been glorified for propaganda, much of the intrigue would be lost. Also, the themes that are explored are relevant throughout the ages, today and beyond. Love, passion, jealousy, deceit, heroism, war, grief, revenge, loss and triumph are emotions and behaviours that still resonate today. We will probably never know what truly occurred 3,500 years ago. But does that really matter? Myth, legend and truth often intertwine and it is this that makes stories so fascinating. The Trojan War is arguably the most influential tale ever told and we may never know if it was real or not, but in reality, that just adds to the magic.

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