Menelaus breaks off when a defeated Paris crawls away from Menelaus and in desperation and exhaustion grasps the legs of his mightier brother, Hector. In Homer's version, in Book 3 of the *Iliad*, Aphrodite miraculously picks up the defeated Paris and deposits him with Helen in Troy while Menelaus is amazed to find his opponent missing. Again Petersen specifically removes the gods from his narrative and emphasizes the human element, in this instance the close relationship between Hector and his younger brother.

In addition, Petersen uses his version of Book 1 of the *Iliad* to establish the fondness that Achilles is beginning to feel for Briseis. At first, Achilles merely assured Briseis that she had nothing to fear from him, but now the arrogant and hated Agamemnon has taken her from him. This loss of face forces Achilles to defend her and value his possession more. It also establishes Briseis' hatred for Agamemnon, whom she will kill near the end of the film.

Petersen is innocent of the charge that he trivializes the *Iliad* by establishing romantic relationships. One of the film's closing credit screens claims that *Troy* was only "inspired by Homer's 'The Iliad'." More importantly, romance has been part of the Trojan tale for several thousand years. Among the Cyclic Epics, the *Cypria* incorporated the romantic relationship between Paris and Helen; the late ancient versions by Dares and Dictys include a romance between Achilles and Polyxena; the late medieval adaptations by Benoît de Sainte-More and Boccaccio feature the romances between Achilles and Bressida, then Cressida. Earlier films equally featured the romantic elements of the tale. Popularity has always demanded, and still demands, the romance that the *Iliad* lacks.

The significance and quality of Petersen's version of the Trojan War is open to discussion. My purpose with the preceding pages is not to limit debate but quite the opposite, to open up such a discussion by directing our attention away from the accusation of inauthenticity, an easy default mode of criticism, to a more appropriate and sophisticated kind of judgment.

CHAPTER SIX

Troy and the Role of the Historical Advisor

J. Lesley Fitton

Troy had no official historical advisor. No such person appears in the credits, and the process by which historical or archaeological research supported the design and the action of the film was diverse, depending largely on its director, writer, producers, and designers – in fact, on the whole team responsible for the film. Their sources were manifold, and the result is visually very rich. The various elements of the environment in which the action takes place, from the largest buildings to the smallest details of costumes and props, show influences from many different ancient cultures from a wide chronological and geographical span.

The reaction of professional archaeologists and historians seems to have been equally varied. Some seem to have enjoyed what one might describe as a game of "spot the source": identifying the original context of various visual elements. Others pointed with indignation to anomalies in the material culture shown in the film. Similarly, general audiences will have included people who, for example, had visited Knossos and who realized that the Troy of the film bore obvious resemblances to the capital of Minoan Crete.

The question becomes, then, whether the film should have had a historical advisor, what such a person would have been able to achieve, and whether the overall effect would have been an improvement. In fact, the creative art of filmmaking took precedence over the creative art of archaeological reconstruction. And rightly so. After all, the filmmakers'

aim was not to create an academic or didactic document but a dramatically satisfying film for large audiences worldwide. The two things are quite different.

Nevertheless, the question of the film's historical accuracy was widely raised. It seems that audiences do care about accuracy or are at least interested to know where facts end and imaginative reconstruction begins. For many epic films, particularly those set in the Roman Empire, an answer to such a question can be offered.[1] Hence perhaps the expectation that the same could be done for *Troy*. But the story of *Troy* occupies the most difficult territory between fact and fiction. If we briefly review the situation, its complexity emerges.

1. A Complex Question

Although they had no historical record of the events described, the ancient Greeks believed in their historical validity. The story of the Trojan War came to them through the tradition of oral recitation. Such oral traditions can preserve memories of historical events but can also distort them, not least in the interests of a good story being told. So even in antiquity the art of storytelling took precedence over the craft of the historian. A shadowy but much-revered poet named Homer was preeminent among the many bards who used elements of this story that had been handed down from an indefinable time in the past. His epic poems, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, represent the earliest Greek literature. They were probably written down in the second half of the eighth century B.C.

The works of Homer became a staple of Greek education and a cornerstone of Greek thought. Themes taken from the story of Troy proliferated not only in literature but also in the visual arts. Sculptors, vase painters, and other artists usually showed the events and protagonists in contemporary trappings.[2] They were doing exactly what the makers of *Troy* were doing in their attempts to portray various elements of the Troy story. On the whole, however, their approach was radically

1 Cf., e.g., the comments by P. M. Pasinetti, "*Julius Caesar*: The Role of the Technical Adviser," *Film Quarterly*, 8 (1953), 131–138, in connection with Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar* (1953), and by Kathleen M. Coleman, "The Pedant Goes to Hollywood: The Role of the Academic Consultant," in *Gladiator: Film and History*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 45–52, in connection with Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000).

2 On this see Susan Woodford, *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; rpt. 2003), ch. 12 ("Life and Myth in Art").

different. The Greeks did not aim for conscious archaism, still less for historical reconstruction, although they had their own artistic means to separate the heroic world of the poems from their contemporary reality. An example is the ancient convention of heroic nudity: heroes are shown naked in circumstances such as battlefields in which any real warriors would have been clothed. In general, artworks that depict clothes, armor, physical settings, and other accoutrements are usually based on contemporary classical reality and do not strive toward the re-creation of times past.

The classical Greeks did not have information about their past from archaeology as, by contrast, the modern world does. Excavations at Troy, Mycenae, and elsewhere have provided us with detailed information about the material world of the earliest periods of Aegean history. If the equation of the Late-Bronze-Age world with the world of Homer's heroes is accepted, then visualizations of the Trojan War can at least attempt accurate reconstructions, if within the limitations of archaeological evidence.[3]

These limitations themselves pose a great problem, for much remains unknown. Creators of archaeological reconstructions for didactic purposes have a choice. They need only attempt to reconstruct on the basis of actual evidence; where gaps remain, they can simply leave a blank. A filmmaker has no such latitude. Sets must be built, actors clothed, action must be continuous. A cogent whole must be created and presented to the audience. This is problematic for any historical setting, even one from a well-documented era. It is particularly difficult for Greek prehistory, where by definition no written sources can help and where excavations reveal remains more than three thousand years old. The world of Mycenaean Greece or Late-Bronze-Age Troy does not spring from the ground as if new-minted. Archaeologists are fully aware that details remain obscure and that there are many gaps even in the broader picture. Moreover, is this really the world in which any events that lie behind the tradition of the Trojan War should be set? It is a plausible but not a provable setting. Archaeology shows that Mycenae and Troy were rich and important places in the Late Bronze Age and that they were in contact. We know, too, that the fortification walls of Late-Bronze-Age Troy are battered and may have been attacked many times. The current excavators date a particularly devastating destruction around 1180 B.C. and interpret the archaeological record as showing that Troy lost a major

3 For a general discussion of the archaeological pursuit of the world of Homer's heroes see my *The Discovery of the Greek Bronze Age* (London: British Museum Press, 1995; rpt. 2001).

battle.[4] This certainly could be archaeological evidence for the event handed down in the literary and artistic tradition as the Trojan War, although archaeology does not make clear who the attackers were. And no Agamemnon or Achilles, Priam or Hector, Helen or Menelaus could possibly appear in archaeological findings.

The *Iliad* is of little help for pinning down the material culture and the date of the events described. Much scholarly effort has been spent addressing this question, with interesting results. Certainly some well-known specifics demonstrably describe Bronze-Age reality – Odysseus' boar's-tusk helmet is often quoted in this connection – and we can see many general correspondences between the Bronze-Age world and the world of Homer.[5] But the main difficulty resides in the fact, fully recognized from classical antiquity onwards, that Homer is a poet, not a historian. The world he creates may be half-remembered, but it is equally certainly half-imagined. It is an age of heroes and has to be bigger and better than anything in the audience's experience or the poet's own time. The description of Priam's palace in Troy, for example, demonstrates this. Its endless rooms and courtyards and its living quarters for the king's fifty sons and their families make it bigger and more complex than any real building ever was or could have been.

So imagination and exaggeration must be taken into account. The same is true for the possibility of accretions, losses, and changes that occurred during the centuries of the story's oral transmission from the end of the Bronze Age around 1200 B.C. to the time when the poems were written, perhaps around 700 B.C. This leaves the possibility of a very broad approach to material culture in a film such as *Troy*. If we keep all this in mind, it becomes evident that the inclusion of elements from the whole period of the story's creation and transmission in a film is entirely defensible. Indeed it is defensible to include almost anything if modern imagination is allowed to mirror that of the poet himself.

2. The Filmmakers' Approach

It must be said, though, that the makers of *Troy* did not adopt this rationale. Rather, they thought that they were aiming for a Late-Bronze-Age

4 Cf. the contribution by Manfred O. Korfmann in this volume and the references cited there.
5 *Iliad* 10.261–265. On this helmet see, e.g., Hilda Lockhart Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments* (London: Macmillan, 1950), 212–214, and Frank H. Stubbings, "Arms and Armour," in *A Companion to Homer*, ed. Alan J. B. Wace and Frank H. Stubbings (1962; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1974), 504–522, at 513–517.

setting somewhere around 1200 B.C. At the same time, they consciously included some elements that fitted in with the modern world's expectations of ancient Greek behavior, particularly as transmitted by Hollywood and popular culture. So the placement of coins on the eyes of the deceased for burial purposes was anachronistic even within the loose rationale outlined above. Coinage was not introduced until later than any of the possible "ages of Homer," probably not much earlier than about 600 B.C. Nonetheless the gesture appeared in the film both as a poignant farewell to the dead and as part of the repertoire of things that people "know" the Greeks used to do. We might question whether the inclusion of coins was a wise decision. It invites accusations of anachronism without adding substantially to the plot. But in other instances the very nature of the story and its sources force the filmmaker's hand. This is the case when it comes to the statues of the gods.

As is well known, the gods in Homer appear as a big supernatural family, gossiping, banqueting, quarreling, and not only taking sides in the Trojan War but personally interceding on behalf of their favorites. The decision to omit them from the action of the film was perhaps necessary; certainly it strains the modern imagination to contemplate how they could have been incorporated successfully. But while the gods took no part in the film's action, they had to be present, as it were, as the deities whom the protagonists worshipped. They were therefore represented in the form of statues.

The walls of Troy built for the film were based on reconstruction drawings of what archaeologists call Troy VI (about 1700–1200 B.C.). These walls could not possibly have protected the statues of the gods seen in Priam's throne room or council chamber, which were loosely modeled after the *kouros* ("young man") and *kore* ("young woman") types of the Archaic period, which emerged fairly late in the seventh century B.C. The adaptations used in the film were elaborate enough to include the attributes associated with the Olympian deities. For example, Apollo carried a bow and Poseidon a trident. But such sculptures do not fit the rationale of "anything from the period of origin or the period of transmission" of the story. They are too late.

Their inclusion, far from being simply a blunder, is a response by the filmmakers to an impossible situation. The problem is that Homer describes the Olympian deities with characteristics and spheres of influence that could be recognized in classical Greece. Clearly this way of looking at the gods had evolved by the late eighth century B.C. But it is much less clear whether these deities were viewed in a similar way in 1200 B.C. We know from the Linear B tablets of the Mycenaean world that some

of the deities who would later be numbered among the Olympian gods and goddesses were already being worshipped. The names of Zeus, Hera, Athena, and Poseidon occur along with some others. But too little is known of Mycenaean religion for it to be clear whether these deities were already being worshipped in the same way as they were in classical times.

Even more problematic is the visual representation of deities in the Mycenaean world. One of the striking things about Late-Bronze-Age Greek art is that most of it is relatively small-scale.[6] There are no big sculptures of either gods or rulers of the sort that are found in contemporary Egypt and Mesopotamia. And it is often difficult to recognize deities with any certainty. A number of terracotta figurines and some figures on frescoes or seal rings are generally thought to represent deities. Yet cult statues remain elusive and the gods remain small. The filmmakers therefore faced a serious difficulty concerning representations of the gods, a difficulty that arises from the very nature of the Homeric account, which cannot easily be linked with the material record of the Bronze Age. Even in the poet's own time large-scale statuary was not yet common. A purist's attempt at Late-Bronze-Age authenticity would have the film's protagonists worshipping very small terracotta figures, no doubt puzzling audiences and running the risk of looking rather odd. The argument that larger-scale statues of wood may have existed in the Bronze Age and later is of limited help in this dilemma since we have little idea what such statues would have looked like. Again, any attempt at reconstruction would have been confusing.

The film's designers were keen not to use classical prototypes. From the beginning of the design process they avowedly wanted to avoid classical styles in both architecture and sculpture, especially the fluted columns and draped figures that have already become visual clichés of ancient Greece in popular culture. They wanted at the very least to retain a sense of earliness and of the pre-classical throughout the film. This goal was not always achieved – Helen's dress and wreath look very Hellenistic, to name only one example. Nonetheless, the compromise of adopting and adapting archaic statue types to represent the gods in *Troy* was perhaps the best option.

6 For small-scale representations of Mycenaean deities see the chapter entitled "Religion and Cult Centres" in Lord William Taylour, *The Mycenaeans*, 2nd edn (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1983; rpt. 1990), 43–64.

3. *Troy* and the British Museum

The above reflections arose during the time that I spent on the sets of *Troy*, at Shepperton Studios for the interiors and in Malta for exteriors, and when I lectured to audiences at a small exhibition that we mounted at the British Museum to coincide with the film's release. This display took as its theme *Troy Retold* and incorporated some of the costumes from the film.

I have said that the film had no historical advisor, and this is strictly true. My own contact with *Troy* began after sets and costumes had been designed. Much was already fixed, and my discussions with director and producers were concerned mainly with various details, such things as movements, ritual gestures, and others. My impact on the final product was minimal, but it is a pleasure to record my association with it here.

I believed that the film was worthy of support by historians and archaeologists because it aimed to bring the story of Troy to new audiences around the world. Moreover, it rapidly became clear that Wolfgang Petersen and his team were taking an extremely thoughtful view of the subject matter. Particularly striking was the way in which the equality of the Greeks and the Trojans emerged. Both had their virtues and their flaws in a way that exactly echoed the *Iliad*. And the inclusion of such a great Homeric set-piece as Priam ransoming the body of Hector seemed to show that the spirit of the original would indeed be at the heart of this new version for the twenty-first century.

Certainly reservations can be expressed about the liberties taken with the story toward the end of the film, when the fates of certain characters were radically different from what the ancient tradition tells us. Of course one could argue that the ancient world knew variants of traditional stories, but these were not motivated by what seemed in the film to be a very Hollywood need for the evil to be punished and the good to prosper. The ambivalent position of Helen in particular has been the subject of much fascination and poetic and scholarly debate down the ages, replete with speculations about what her life could possibly have been like when she returned to Sparta with Menelaus, with Troy a smoldering ruin. The ending of *Troy* undercuts such speculation, and the story becomes far less interesting.

Audiences who saw some of the costumes displayed at the British Museum almost invariably asked whether they were accurate. The truth was that the costumes, though magnificent creations in their own right, bore no close relationship to any ancient period or culture. Instead, like

the film as a whole, they reflected mixed influences. The question of accuracy was easy to ask but hard to answer, and any reply had to try to summarize the complexity of the issues outlined above. Our intention was not to use the costumes as any sort of archaeological resource. Instead, we attempted to put them and the film itself into the context of a long series of retellings of the Troy story from antiquity to the present day. We wanted to explore not the archaeology of Greece or Troy, which can be pursued in our permanent galleries, but the phenomenon of the story itself, its reception throughout later ages, and its continuing power.

4. Conclusion

We return, then, to the original question whether *Troy* should have had a historical advisor and whether the film would have been improved by full incorporation of historical and archaeological advice from the outset. In spite of the difficulties outlined above, it would no doubt have been possible to create a more consistent Late-Bronze-Age environment of considerable grandeur, given the extensive resources available. Many of the elements were already there, particularly in the large sets. And the film's Wooden Horse could scarcely have been improved.

Yet my personal view is that the story is not history, that Homer was not a historian, and that something of Homer would certainly have been lost in a purist archaeological approach. Ultimately, dramatic success matters more than the archaeological accuracy of Helen's hairpins. It matters more for modern audiences to feel for Achilles in his progress from war machine to man, to sympathize with Hector in his efforts to defend all that was dear to him, and in the end to mourn for Priam and for Troy. In this regard the film takes an honorable place as the latest, if not the last, instance in the long series of retellings of the tale of Troy.[7] Perhaps what matters most of all is that audiences still gather to see and hear this story as they have done for three thousand years. We share a common humanity with the heroes and with the early audiences – in spite of the differences between a Mycenaean megaron and a cinema multiplex.

7 The meticulously researched *Age of Bronze* comics by Eric Shanower deserve honorable mention here. They show that it is possible, at least in graphic form, to retell the story of Troy in an exclusively Mycenaean setting. At the same time they illustrate the difficulties inherent in showing worship of small-scale gods. The first nineteen issues of this ongoing series have been collected in two books: *A Thousand Ships* (2001) and *Sacrifice* (2004). For details about the production of these comics see *Age of Bronze: Behind the Scenes* (2002). All books mentioned are published by Image Comics of Orange, California.

CHAPTER SEVEN

From Greek Myth to Hollywood Story: Explanatory Narrative in *Troy*

Kim Shahabudin

Before the release of *Troy* scriptwriter David Benioff was asked how he felt about adapting the *Iliad*, the foundation of Western literature. He replied that this was not his intention and that his script had borrowed ideas from several different sources. He called it "an adaptation of the Trojan War myth in its entirety, not The Iliad alone."[1] Despite Benioff's declaration and subsequent similar statements from others involved in the film, the close association with Homer's epic refused to go away. When *Troy* was released critics were quick to seize on the rather vague statement in the credits that the film had been inspired by Homer's *Iliad*. Consequently, much of its critical reception has been concerned with how well or badly the film adapts the poem.

In view of Benioff's statement, this seems rather unfair. But if *Troy* is not a literary adaptation, it is also not simply a film version of the Trojan War myth. Any scriptwriter working from existing sources must select and discard from the material he or she collects. Although many of the major names and places connected with the myth are present in *Troy*, a whole layer is missing. The decision to exclude the gods as a motivating force makes man (and woman) the measure of all things and transforms the mythological story of the Trojan War from a web of interactions

1 "David Benioff . . . Web Access" at www.bbc.co.uk/print/films/webaccess/david_benioff_1.shtml.

Troy
From Homer's *Iliad* to Hollywood Epic

Edited by

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