CHAPTER ONE

Was There a Trojan War? Troy Between Fiction and Archaeological Evidence

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To an unusual degree, Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* has directed public attention to the archaeology of Troy – Hisarlık in modern Turkey – and to the work of its excavators. Although the team of the *Troia-Projekt* ("Project Troy"), which I direct, had nothing to do with the film, news of its production brought us numerous requests for information: Who was Homer? Was there a Trojan War? These and other fundamental questions concerning historical facts and the credibility of the film's story continued well beyond the film's release.

Colleagues and I found *Troy* quite enjoyable, but at the same time we looked at it from a perspective different from that of most viewers. For instance, to us the credibility of a film shot in Mexico and Malta rather than on authentic locations is unavoidably problematic. In *Troy* the sun rises above the horizon from the very direction where we are used to seeing it set. This is rather disconcerting to those familiar with the lay of the land. Specialists are almost always disappointed with modern attempts to revive ancient stories. But *Troy* was not made for specialists. If the filmmakers had wished to involve them, the ensuing debates concerning each and every detail would most likely have postponed its production until this day. And the scholarly obsession with details would have made it a boring film as well. Epic films are made for the largest possible audiences worldwide. Their expectations, not those of scholars, have to be satisfied. This is why experts like ourselves were not consulted.

And we do not mind, for the basic theme of *Troy* turned out to be handled right, or at least not wrong. As did Homer's *Iliad*, *Troy* concerns not so much the Trojan War itself as the conflict of Agamemnon and Achilles, two leaders in the same camp. Homer already realized that this fundamental pattern of individual heroism was popular with audiences, especially if it has an aura of historicity. Homer told about this conflict about 480 years after it was supposed to have occurred; Petersen did so about 3180 years afterwards. Both used their imagination and their storytelling skills. Petersen, who had received a classical education in Germany, knows his source, Homer, but scholars today ask what Homer's source or sources may have been. Only few today believe that the *Iliad* and its background are nothing more than products of his imagination.[1] Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Homer was criticized for putting a number of contemporary aspects into his work, as he did. On the contrary; his audience must have expected no less. Like today's audiences, Homer's listeners wanted a bridge between the distant past and their own present. Art has its own rules and its own truth, and this applies to Petersen, too. The question of what he was allowed or forbidden to do to the *Iliad* is rather quaint. It is certainly unhelpful.

As a part of our culture, the cinema reflects our present concerns and desires. In a world linked by technology, these are now global ones. American films of the 1950s and 1960s that were set in antiquity carried topical messages about freedom and tyranny. Recent ones like Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000), *Troy*, and Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004) clearly point to the American wish to learn more about the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean world, an area that is currently of special significance through its wars and conflicts. These films appear to raise their voices against despotism and praise the ideals of a united world. As a result, antiquity and its archaeology have become widely popular. So the questions about ancient history, society, and archaeology that *Troy* has raised could in turn lead to positive results by means of such popular attention. Increased media interest in our own excavations and noticeably larger numbers of national and international tourists visiting the site of Troy have already indicated as much. Such travelers return to the origins of Western culture and civilization, and so, in its own way, does *Troy*. This is a positive situation for classical scholars and archaeologists. The latter are usually not primarily concerned with imagining in every detail what the site on which they are working looked

1 On this see now Joachim Latacz, *Troy and Homer: Towards a Solution of an Old Mystery*, tr. Kevin Windle and Rosh Ireland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

like in the distant past. But films must show everything in detail. So a film like *Troy* in a way forces even archaeologists to wonder: What was Troy really like? This situation is all for the better.

To professional archaeologists, ancient remains and artifacts are of chief interest as means to reconstruct the life and environment of earlier societies that emerge from an analysis and interpretation of these remains. Three general and important questions arise from this: Where do we come from, where are we today, and where are we likely to go? In this context the metaphor of the balancing scales is instructive about past, present, and future. The more knowledge we can put into the scale that represents the past, the more we are justified to deal with the other scale that represents the future. Of course we must also pay attention to the beam in the middle: the pivot representing our own present. But how can we reconstruct sites of ancient settlements and their geographic environs? How can we describe ancient peoples and their appearances, their daily occupations, tools, households, workshops, palaces? To answer such questions, or at least to strive for an answer, is the archaeologists' duty, all too often neglected. A film can remind them of this duty, even if it puts partially wrong images into the one scale.

A book recently published in German and Turkish addresses this topic. Its title translates as follows: "Troy – How It Really Looked."[2] We would dearly love to know how Troy really looked. The book's authors are experts in their field, and in their introduction they acknowledge that the title more accurately should have been something like "Troy – How It Most Likely Looked According to the Best Knowledge of the Scientists Working There." That is as close as we can get. So Petersen's *Troy* can increase interest in and study of the Bronze Age and can even stimulate an archaeologist to deal with the film, as this essay shows. Both sides can fruitfully interact with each other, especially now that classical education is no longer the basis of our school curriculum. In the future, just as in the past and in the present, Troy and the Homeric landscape will be subjects of fiction and objects of research.

The one question that *Troy* has raised again and again and that is most often addressed to me as the director of excavations at Hisarlık is

2 Birgit Brandau, Hartmut Schickert, and Peter Jablonka, *Troia – Wie es wirklich aussah* (Munich: Piper, 2004). Cf. in general the internet sites of the *Troia Projekt* at http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/troia and specifically *Troia Virtual Reality (Troia VR)* at http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/troia/vr/index_html (in English).

this: "Do you think that there ever was a Trojan War, and, if so, why did it take place?" I will answer this question in some detail.[3]

Myths and legends practically demand to be connected to the specific places in which they are set. In our case this is, and has been since antiquity, an area of ancient ruins that in Greco-Roman times had been built on and expanded under the name of Ilion or Ilium. (Coins showing this name were struck there.) Today this place is called Hisarlık. Its connection with myth, the world of imagination and illusion, is the very origin of archaeology as a scientific discipline. But in the course of the past decade major archaeological discoveries have significantly changed our knowledge of Troy. Archaeological research includes the entire history of Troy from its two millennia in the Bronze Age to its Hellenistic-Roman era. This means that archaeology at Troy has never aimed at contributing answers to questions about the *Iliad* or the Trojan War, although many people hold that assumption. As a matter of principle it is best to keep these two areas separate. On the other hand, Homer studies, too, have greatly advanced in recent years, and archaeologists are justified to consider or use those pieces or "splinters" of information contained in the *Iliad* which modern scholarship is debating as deriving from the past: the late Bronze Age. Such information primarily concerns the place in which the story of the *Iliad* is set; that is to say, it concerns the ruins of Troy VI–VIIa, which at the time of Homer and for centuries after must have been highly impressive in their appearance. This is true for the fortified citadel and for the area of the settlement below it.

That the Trojan War did take place is something Homer assumed his audience to have known. His main topic was the anger of Achilles and its consequences. Homer used Troy and the war only as poetic background for a tale about the conflict between and among humans and gods. But for archaeologists the *Iliad* provides a different kind of background. Homer and those from whom he may have derived some of his information are witnesses of what the topographical setting and life in the late eighth century B.C. were like. On the whole, his descriptions of the place and its surroundings must have been accurate for the time around 700 B.C., when the *Iliad* was by and large composed. This means that what Homer said about Troy and its environs could not openly

3 A brief answer from the perspectives of different disciplines (archaeology, Homeric studies, Hittitology) appeared in Manfred Korfmann, Joachim Latacz, and David Hawkins, "Was There a Trojan War?" *Archaeology*, 57 no. 3 (May–June, 2004), 36–41.

contradict the reality of that time. Contemporary and later listeners to recitals of the *Iliad*, who came from or were familiar with the area of Troy, were supposed to recognize at least the general features of the place in which the poem's action occurred. That place had to be described in a credible manner. As mentioned, in Homer's time Troy was largely in ruins and probably had already become an object of legends and myths. So when local people of that time climbed up a particular hill, they could imagine the Trojans of the *Iliad* ascending to their sanctuary. Such a sanctuary – a wooden structure dating from at least the early seventh century B.C., i.e., Homer's time – had most likely been built on the very spot that served as a cult place down to the era of the late Roman Empire.

One of the most spectacular discoveries of our recent excavations was an exterior settlement south of the citadel of Troy, a settlement from the seventeenth century B.C. down to the early twelfth, i.e., Troy VI–VIIa. In its late phase it consisted of large stone structures. Considerable remains of the houses of this lower city were found, although they had been covered and so were partially destroyed by the foundations of later Hellenistic and Roman buildings during eight to nine centuries of continuous settlement from the third century B.C. until 500 A.D. Magnetometrical measurings and the annual excavation campaigns since 1993 have revealed that from about 1300 until about 1180 B.C. – that is, toward the very end of Troy VI and during Troy VIIa – this lower city had been encircled by a U-shaped defensive ditch that was about 3.5 meters wide and about two meters deep. The existence of this ditch, cut into the limestone, can be clearly demonstrated over an extent of 700 meters. It formed the lower settlement's boundary in accordance with local topography. The extent to which the lower city had been settled by the late second millennium B.C. is further documented by a cemetery south of and outside this ditch. Systematic excavations, surveys, and other research – yielding, for instance, shards of pottery – corroborate our conclusion that the lower city was fully built up throughout this area, an area terminated in the west as well by a clear boundary line. The conclusion is unavoidable that during the second half of the second millennium B.C. Troy was about fifteen times larger than had been previously assumed, covering more than 300,000 square meters. This Troy had a large residential area below a strongly fortified citadel. As far as we know today, the citadel was unparalleled in its region and in all of southeastern Europe. Nevertheless, several phases in which new fortifications were built during this time tell us that this Troy had to defend itself against outside attacks time and again.

Geographically, Troy VIII (Hellenistic Ilion), Troy IX (Roman Ilium), and Troy X (Byzantine Ilion) all belong to Anatolia, an area of western Asia Minor that had been settled by Greeks. American excavator Carl Blegen, among others, considered Troy VI and VIIa to have been Greek settlements, thereby reinforcing a view of Troy established by Heinrich Schliemann, the first excavator at Hisarlık, that Troy closely belonged to Europe historically and culturally. Until the 1930s, when archaeologists began to concern themselves with Bronze-Age Anatolia, there had been little evidence to direct their attention east to Anatolia rather than west to the Greeks, although it is unlikely that Troy in the centuries before Homer had not belonged to Anatolia. Independent evaluation of available evidence now tells us that Troy was integrated far more closely into the culture of Anatolia than into that of the Aegean. Archaeological finds including local ceramics and small works of art, the settlement's layout as a whole, architectural details such as individual palaces or building patterns with brick walls topping stone foundations, and customs like cremation – all these point Troy toward Anatolia during the thirteenth century B.C. The results of recent research on the languages spoken and written at that time corroborate these archaeological findings. Linguistically, Troas, the region surrounding Troy, is Luvian and Old-Anatolian; that is to say, it is Indo-European. Troy or Ilios (or Wilios) is most probably identical with Wilusa or Truwisa, an area or town mentioned in Hittite sources. That even the Egyptians seem to have known of it under the name of Dardanya tells us that Troy was by no means an unimportant settlement. So modern scholarship in Hittite and Homeric studies and other, related, areas of classical studies has complemented our archaeological work.

According to most recent archaeological evidence, Troy VIIa came to its end around 1180 B.C., most likely through a defeat in war. After a hiatus of a few decades new settlers, probably from the eastern Balkans or northwestern Black-Sea area, began to inhabit the ruins. This does not mean that the war in question must have been the Trojan War of legend, although tradition places it at this time. But when modern Homeric scholars present us with a scenario in which details contained in the *Iliad* point to the late Bronze Age for the poem's plot, when scholars of Hittitology tell us that during the thirteenth and early twelfth centuries political and military tensions existed around the area of Wilusa or Ilios-Wilios, and when, in addition, recent years have brought to light evidence of an explosive political situation in western Asia Minor and the Troas around 1200 B.C., then archaeologists have no reason to deny the importance of such non-archaeological findings. Indeed, the

archaeologists now working at Troy do not agree with a few traditional scholars who insist that nothing in the archaeological evidence about Troy is connected with Homer at all. These scholars maintain, for instance, that Troy was an insignificant settlement of a size that would not fit a city as large and powerful as Homer describes it. But they fail to take into account recent archaeological discoveries and the new conclusions to which these discoveries lead us.

So where does all this take us regarding the question about the Trojan War? The answer is best expressed in two counter-questions: "Why should or could there not have been a Trojan War?" And: "Why do those who see a measure of historicity in the *Iliad* have to justify their views against any doubters?" Given today's level of knowledge, the burden of proof that there was no such war must rest on the doubters' shoulders. How, for instance, do they propose to reconcile their view of Troy as a third-rate settlement with the modern archaeological evidence concerning the thirteenth and especially the early twelfth centuries? Whether the wars or war-like conflicts of that time, in whole or in part, gave rise to the later legend of the Trojan War, or whether there had been among those wars or campaigns an especially remarkable one that was thought to be worthy of preservation first in memory and legend and then in heroic poetry – all this is yet unknown. But at the moment everything indicates that we ought to take Homer seriously about the background information of a war between Trojans and Greeks that his epic provides. Future research and the evaluation of current and yet-to-be-discovered evidence must take such information into consideration. According to the current state of our knowledge, the story told in the *Iliad* most likely contains a kernel of historical truth or, to put it differently, a historical substrate. Any future discussions about the historicity of the Trojan War only make sense if they ask what exactly we understand this kernel or substrate to be.

Translated by Martin M. Winkler

CHAPTER TWO

From Homer's Troy to Petersen's *Troy*

Joachim Latacz

Not all critics and reviewers of Wolfgang Petersen's film have paid sufficient attention to its title. *Troy* does not mean the same thing as *The Iliad*. Petersen was well aware that his film differs from Homer, as the end credits tell us: it was "inspired" by Homer's *Iliad*, but it is not a retelling of it. Only those who understand what this difference means can appreciate the film. So I will here address two questions to make the difference clear: What does Homer tell about Troy in the *Iliad*, and how does he tell it? And how does Petersen's *Troy* relate to Homer? My answers are intended to provide a fair appraisal of the film in regard to its subject matter.

1. *Homer's Troy*

Troy is not the subject of the *Iliad* but the site of its action. The first line of the poem states the theme: "The wrath do sing, goddess, of Peleus' son Achilles!" This announces not the history of Troy or of the Trojan War but the story of an individual. What the name signified and to what larger context it belonged was known exactly to Homer's first audiences in the late eighth century B.C. as soon as they heard it. Achilles was the greatest hero of the Greeks who once had fought at Troy. To

Troy
From Homer's *Iliad* to Hollywood Epic

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