

Did the Trojan War Happen?

This essay explores the topic of whether the Trojan War happened. I argue that the Trojan War did not occur, as the supposed layer of 'Homer's Troy' in Hissarlik does not show sufficient evidence of warfare on a 10-year scale. Also, as a result of his enthusiasm to find a Troy that matched Homer's, some of Heinrich Schliemann's findings have been found to be inaccurate. However, it must be acknowledged that Hittite tablets do indicate tension (and possible warfare) between the Greeks and the Turks.

Before beginning the discussion, the definition of the term 'The Trojan War' must be stated: 'A war fought by the Greeks against the Trojans to avenge the abduction of Helen from her Greek husband Menelaus by Paris, son of the Trojan king. It lasted ten years and ended in the sack of Troy' (Collins English Dictionary, 2024)

To begin the argument, an obvious, yet key reason to why the War did not occur is the involvement of Gods in Homer's 'The Iliad'. As written in the Iliad, Paris was promised the most beautiful woman by Aphrodite, God of Love, after Paris took part in a dispute of the Gods. Helen, wife of Menelaus subsequently fell in love with Paris and went with him to Troy. This event sparked warfare between the two regions, with the Greeks seeking to avenge their loss of Helen. (Homer, 7th century BC). This order of events is impossible, due to the Gods in the story simply being myths. Therefore, the war could not have begun in this way. An alternative explanation is that Paris merely kidnapped Helen, starting the war. However, a more likely cause for the war was the wealth, strategic geographic location and prosperity of Troy, which may have been looked upon with envy by the Greeks. However, there is a lack of evidence to support these claims.

As stated in Homer's 'The Iliad', the Trojan War is said to have happened over a 10-year period. However, when excavating the site of Troy, there is very little evidence suggesting that a war of such immensity took place. Whilst there have been discoveries of sling bullets, skeletons and conflagration, these findings indicate multiple minor attempts at penetrating Troy, not the single effort that was the Trojan War. It is possible that these smaller attempts were collected under the

name of 'The Trojan War', although this does not suit the description stated in the definition above, and especially how the Trojan War was described in 'The Iliad'.

Furthermore, Heinrich Schliemann's discoveries were questionable. From a young age, Schliemann, the business man- turned archaeologist accredited to excavating Troy, held much interest in the topic of the Trojan War, and especially in the task of finding the site of Troy. His fervent belief in Homer's stories led to him pouring his money into the hill Hissarlik. However, this enthusiasm and desire to prove the Iliad's descriptions led to him making many mistakes and bad decisions. Schliemann was involved in the fabrication of certain aspects of his life and work, as well as inaccurately dating some of his findings, like the supposed 'mask of Agamemnon'. Also, Schliemann was prone to falsifying his excavation journals and is believed to have forged some of his metal-work finds. Finally, Heinrich Schliemann was an amateur archaeologist, and this was shown in his lack of discipline when he first began excavation, resulting in unnecessary damage to Troy VI, Homer's Troy. These behaviours all suggest Schliemann's bias towards the Trojan War, and an unwillingness to believe that it did not occur, making his findings very controversial.

To address the opposing side of the argument, evidence from a civilisation called the 'Hittites' do indicate that there was a dispute between the Achaeans (Greeks) and the people of Troy. Troy has appeared in records from the Hittite empire of Anatolia, given the name of 'Wilusa'. These records (in the form of tablets) document the Hittites fighting those from 'Ahhiyawa' – a possible name for Homer's Achaeans. Furthermore, the name 'Alaksandu' appeared in the records, and was translated to 'Paris', possibly the Prince of Troy in 'The Iliad'. Finally, a letter from the Hittite King to his correspondent, the King of 'Ahhiyawa', mentions that Wilusa was a 'bone of contention' between the two regions. It is possible that this passionate disagreement led to the Trojan War. Also, when linking the factors listed above together, the evidence shows that there was a region called Troy, with a Prince called Paris, who had a conflict with the King of the Achaeans. This story holds great similarity to that of Homer's. However, this argument is weak as it lacks proof of an actual fight between the Greeks and Troy.

Troy has many similarities to the Troy of Homer's 'The Iliad'. In Homer's writing, he describes Troy as being 'well-founded', 'strong-built' and 'well-walled' (Homer, 7th century BC). When observing Troy VI, the city matches Homer's description very well, with sloping walls five meters thick and eight

meters high, all constructed from limestone. The city also features a fortified citadel. Furthermore, the lead excavator of Troy in 2004, Manfred Korfmann, stated that 'There is nothing in the archaeological record to contradict the assertion that Troy and the surrounding countryside formed the setting for Homer's *Iliad*'. (Korfmann, 2004). The fact that a 'Troy' even exists, let alone the resemblance between the city Homer described and Troy VI, can help us imply that other key features of the book were based on fact. However, to make this assumption is to rely on guesswork rather than fact. To link 'The Iliad' to the real world requires more historical findings that aren't based *solely* on a story.

A final argument is that, whilst the war may not have started or happened as Homer described, the war may have still taken place. Contrary to immediate opinions on Troy's size, the site was found to be far larger than once thought. The excavation (in 1993) unveiled fifteen new fortifications, a set of defences suited to enduring the ten-year siege. It is believed that the war began due to envy of Troy's wealth, strategic importance and agricultural prosperity from the West, instead of the kidnapping of Helen. As well as this, experts think that the city was attacked multiple times, instead of once. Furthermore, Manfred Korfmann supports the idea of multiple wars when stating: 'We shouldn't talk about The Trojan War, but about a whole series of Trojan Wars.' (Maugh, 1993). Whilst the war is likely not to have happened exactly as Homer wrote, it is very possible that wars occurred in Troy during the late Bronze Age. To believe these 'series of Trojan Wars' can be recognised as Homer's Trojan War is up to personal interpretation, as this view contains similarities and differences to the definition stated at the start of the document.

In conclusion, despite information from Hittite civilisations and guesswork based on 'The Iliad', there remains a significant lack of evidence to show that the war happened over a ten year period. It is likely that wars of some kind did occur in Troy, although it is open to interpretation to whether a number of smaller wars can be labelled as 'The Trojan War'. I do not believe it can be labelled this way when consulting the definition at the start of the essay. Further research is required to prove whether warfare on a far larger scale did occur. If evidence of warfare on a higher scale was found, when paired with the credible information from the Hittites, the possibility of a Trojan War would be far more likely. However, with the current ideas based on the Iliad, which was written to entertain, not educate, as well as the uncertainty regarding Heinrich Schliemann's findings, I believe that at the moment, the Trojan War did not happen.

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