

## Myths and facts about Troy

### The Trojan horse

*There is an old saying - Beware of Greeks bearing gifts. This saying comes from the legend of the Trojan horse.*

*As the story goes...*

A long time ago, there was an ancient city-state on the coast of Turkey, across the sea from Sparta. This city-state was named Troy. At one time, Troy and the other Greek city-states were pretty good friends. But times had changed.

When Paris, a Prince of Troy, was visiting the King of Sparta, Menelaus, he had fallen in love with Menelaus' young bride, Helen.

When Menelaus left Sparta to go to a funeral, Paris abducted Helen and also carried off much of Menelaus' wealth. In Troy, Helen and Paris were married.

Menelaus, however, was outraged to find that Paris had taken Helen. Menelaus then called upon all of Helen's old suitors, as all of the suitors had made an oath long ago that they would all back Helen's husband to defend her honour. Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, was one of those who joined Menelaus.

Firstly, the general Odysseus, known for his eloquence, and Menelaus went as ambassadors to Troy. They demanded Helen and the stolen treasure be returned. King Priam of Troy refused, and Odysseus and Menelaus returned to the Greek ships with the announcement that war was inevitable.

The city of Troy was protected by a high wall built around the city. Some parts of the wall were 20 feet high! There were gates in the wall to let people in and out but it provided great defence for the people of Troy. It gave the Trojan warriors a relatively safe place to stand, while they rained arrows down on the people below, who were trying to break into the city.

The war lasted for nine years. The Greeks realized that Troy was being supplied by its neighbouring kingdoms, so Greeks were sent to defeat these areas. The Greeks won many important battles and the Trojan hero Hector fell. However, the Greeks could not break down the walls of Troy. The great Spartan hero, Achilles, was felled by Paris with an arrow in Achilles' only weak spot, his heel.

Odysseus eventually had an idea. His plan was to build a horse, a beautiful and huge wooden horse, and leave it outside the gate. Then, the entire Greek army would pretend to leave, as if they had finally admitted defeat. But the horse would not be hollow. Thirty men would be hiding inside.

As the Greek warriors sailed away, the people of Troy rushed outside, cheering. They found the horse. Fortunately, they did not try to burn the horse. They dragged the horse inside the city gates to keep it on display, which is just what the Greek general thought they would do.

That night, while the Trojan people were sleeping, the men hiding inside the wooden horse climbed out and opened the gates. The waiting Greek army entered Troy and set it alight. That was the end of Troy.

## The archaeology of Troy

Before the work of Heinrich Schliemann, a German archaeologist, the world believed that Troy was just a city of myths, part of the Iliad, an epic supposedly written by Homer around 1000 BCE, but he himself may also have been mythical.

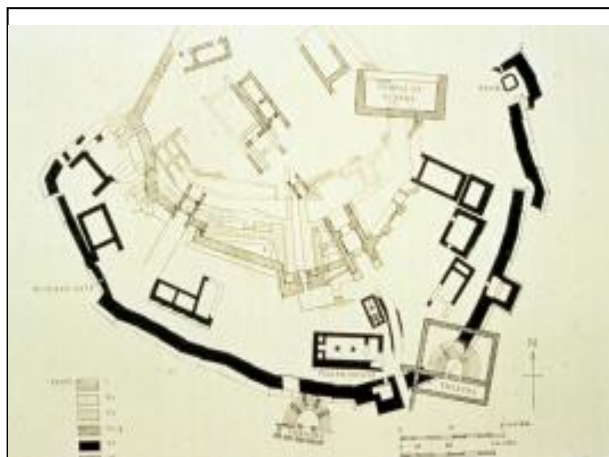
Schliemann, from his knowledge of the myth and his guesswork about where an important prehistoric city might be, decided to look at Tels (mounds that were once the site of a town) in Turkey, specifically at the Hellespont, where Greece and Turkey meet.

The second Tel he excavated was near a village called Hissarlik. It had clearly been an important city and had massive walls, just like Troy in the story.



*Illustration 1: The broken down walls of the city near Hissarlik - possibly Troy?*

These walls did not completely encircle the city, though, and there wasn't any evidence of a nine year siege, or of the city being burned to the ground at any point.



*Illustration 2: Schliemann's plan of the buildings and walls of the city near Hissarlik - possibly Troy?*

The city was at its height several hundred years before Homer said the Trojan Wars took place, so maybe this wasn't Troy.

Schliemann turned his attention to Greece to try to find the truth behind Homer's epic. He went to a city he thought was Mycenae, where Agamemnon had been king, and started digging.

He found another great city with impressive architecture. It had been in use from about 1600 to 1100 BCE.



*Illustration 3: One of the gates at Mycenae decorated with lions*

Schliemann also found tombs of kings who had ruled from the city. Each dead king had a golden mask. When Schliemann found a particularly impressive mask he decided it must have belonged to Agamemnon.



*Illustration 4: The golden mask of Agamemnon, perhaps*

Not everybody believed Schliemann, but it does seem as if there's some truth behind Homer's Iliad.