



The Trojan War: A New History

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The Trojan War is the most famous conflict in history, the subject of Homer's *Iliad*, one of the cornerstones of Western literature. Although many readers know that this literary masterwork is based on actual events, there is disagreement about how much of Homer's tale is true. Drawing on recent archeological research, historian and classicist Barry Strauss explains what really happened in Troy more than 3,000 years ago. For many years it was thought that Troy was an insignificant place that never had a chance against the Greek warriors who laid siege and overwhelmed the city. In the old view, the conflict was decided by duels between champions on the plain of Troy. Today we know that Troy was indeed a large and prosperous city, just as Homer said. The Trojans themselves were not Greeks but vassals of the powerful Hittite Empire to the east in modern-day Turkey, and they probably spoke a Hittite-related language called Luwian. The Trojan War was most likely the culmination of a long feud over power, wealth, and honor in western Turkey and the offshore islands. The war itself was mainly a low-intensity conflict, a series of raids on neighboring towns and lands. It seems unlikely that there was ever a siege of Troy; rather some sort of trick -- perhaps involving a wooden horse -- allowed the Greeks to take the city.

Strauss shows us where Homer nods, and sometimes exaggerates and distorts, as well. He puts the Trojan War into the context of its time, explaining the strategies and tactics that both sides used, and compares the war to contemporary battles elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. With his vivid reconstructions of the conflict and his insights into the famous characters and events of Homer's great epic, Strauss masterfully tells the story of the fall of Troy as history without losing the poetry and grandeur that continue to draw readers to this ancient tale.

The Trojan War: A New History Details

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From Reader Review The Trojan War: A New History for online ebook

Paul Pensom says

This book wasn't what I was expecting at all. I was looking for a detailed examination of the archaeological evidence for Troy and the Trojan War. What I got was a retelling – in often purple prose – of The Iliad. There were frequent references to near contemporary records, to be sure, but the hard nosed archaeology was scarce indeed, and far too often it took a back seat to the author's rhetorical flights of fancy. Maybe there isn't enough evidence to furnish a book, but considering this volume had the word history in its title made me feel justified in expecting something a little more rigorous.

Alex says

Thought this would give me more historical info on the actual Trojan War. Turns out we don't know enough to fill a book, so a lot of this is padded out by a blow-by-blow retelling of the Iliad, which I definitely didn't need. Booooring.

Someone recently asked me for my least favorite nonfiction books of my whole Reading Through History project, and this was one of two books I named. (The other: Hannibal: Enemy Of Rome.)

We had a stoop sale last Sunday and someone tried to buy this book for a dollar and I was like "Actually no, you're just going to have to take that for free; I dislike it too much to accept money for it."

But now it's gone from my house! Yaaaaay!

That same lady took Hannibal too. Sucker.

If you want to read nonfiction about The Iliad, here's what you should do: buy Fagles' translation of it and read the intro by Bernard Knox. That's the best essay I've ever read about Homer, and it covers basically everything we know about the Trojan War.

Linh says

Không h?n là History mà là tác gi? vi?t l?i bình và d?n gi?i v? cu?c chi?n thành Troy d?a trên nh?ng s? li?u v? b?i c?nh th?i k? (cu?i th?i ?? ??ng, kho?ng th? k? 12 TCN ? vùng Anatolia nay thu?c Th? Nh? K?) d?a trên các th? t?ch c?a c? Hy L?p và Hittite (?? qu?c th?ng tr? ? Anatolia và Trung C?n ?ông vào th?i ?ó). Ví d?: th? tín c?a ng??i Hitite có nh?c t?i tên v? vua Alexandu c?a Wilusa t?c Troy (d? làm liên t??ng t?i Alexander là tên khác c?a Paris trong Troy c?a Homer).

Thành Troy trong l?ch s? là m?t thành qu?c quan tr?ng ? Anatolia, ban ??u ??c l?p và v? sau liên minh v?i Hittite. Th?i ?i?m ng??i Hy L?p (thu?c cu?i th?i k? v?n minh Mycenae, mà thành bang quan tr?ng nh?t chính là Mycenae c?a Agamemnon) ?ánh Troy c?ng là th?i h?ng th?nh cu?i cùng c?a Mycenae. Ngay sau ??y, c? ?? qu?c Hittite h?ng m?nh th?ng tr? Trung ?ông trong hàng tr?m n?m c?ng nh? n?n v?n minh Mycenae ??u

b? tan rã vì nh?ng nguyên nhân không th? xác quy?t. Nhân lo?i ??ng th?i c?ng b??c sang th?i ?? S?t (còn ? Hy L?p c? thì là s? xâm chi?m c?a ng??i Dorian và b??c vào th?i k? Dark Ages kéo dài 4-500 n?m).

Có 1 s? ?i?m thú v? mà cu?n sách này nêu: ví d? nh? Hector là 1 viên t??ng t?i khi không s? d?ng chi?n tranh du kích ?? ?ánh ng??i Hy L?p. Hay các di tích cho th?y Troy c?a Homer là m?t thành bang mang tính C?n ?ông ch? không ph?i Hy L?p (dù r?ng ng??i ta tìm th?y nhi?u d?ng c? c?a ng??i Hy L?p - cho th?y s? giao th??ng r?ng r?i gi?a Troy v?i Hy L?p).

S? ph?n c?a Troy có g? ?ó h?i gi?ng nh? thành Carthage c?a ng??i Phoenician sau ?ó m?y tr?m n?m (b? La Mã h?y di?t), làm giàu nh? th??ng m?i do v? trí c?c k? ??c ??a (v?i Troy là c?a ngõ ?? ti?n vào Bi?n ?en còn Carthage là ch?t ch?n trong con ???ng giao th??ng gi?a ch?âu Phi v?i ch?âu Âu) và hùng m?nh nh? ngo?i giao và c?a c?i (s? d?ng quân ?ánh thu?e là các "??ng minh") nh?ng b? m?t th? l?c s?t ?á, ki?n nh?n và cunning h?n ?ánh b?i và h?y di?t.

T?t nhiên là sau chi?n tranh Troy, Troy c?ng không b? h?y di?t hoàn toàn (có 9 thành Troy ???c phát hi?n, ?è l?n nhau, trong ?ó thành Troy c?a Homer ???c ph?ng ?oán là Troy th? 7). Các di ch? kh?o c? cho th?y thành Troy ???c d?ng l?i, có th? d??i th?i v? vua Aeneid huy?n tho?i nh?ng nh?ng thành Troy v? sau này m?i m?i không bao gi? ??t ???c s? huy hoàng c?a Troy VII (t?c Troy c?a Homer)

Rick Davis says

It's a bold move to write a sober history of a mostly legendary war like the Trojan War, but Barry Strauss succeeds in doing just that. The Trojan War is made up of two strands of narrative interwoven throughout the book. One strand is a history of the practices of warfare in the Late Bronze Age in both Anatolia and Mycenaean Greece. Strauss pulls from recent archaeological discoveries, ancient records and letters, and ancient poetry and literature in order to reconstruct the politics and paraphernalia of war. I especially appreciated this aspect of the book. The other strand of narrative that runs through the book is a retelling of the Trojan War story, primarily that presented by Homer in the Iliad and Odyssey, in light of the real methods of war at the time period. This was also interesting in a "What could it have really been like?" sort of way.

The book is well written, fun, and easily accessible for any reader. It has timelines, maps, a glossary and some great resources in the back. I only have two quibbles with the book as a whole. First of all, he's interpreting the Iliad primarily from a military history perspective rather than from a literary perspective. Because of this I think he misinterprets many character points in the Iliad; I especially thing he doesn't "get" the character of Achilles as Homer presents him. The other problem is that because he is intertwining the two threads (the historical information and the imaginative "historical" reconstruction of the Iliad), it would be easy for readers to make the mistake of considering Agamemnon, Menelaus, Helen, Priam, et al as actual historical persons. There was a war at Troy and the city was burnt sometime between 1250 and 1180ish BC, but Strauss is not intending to say that the story of the Iliad is absolutely historically true. The way he writes can give this impression at times, though.

Overall, I would highly recommend this book to any person interested in classical literature or history. From teachers, to students, to the merely curious, The Trojan War is an engaging and lively read.

Adam Balshan says

1.5 stars [History]

This is a decent book if you're not a historian. Historians will justifiably scoff at Strauss for presuming to put the word "history" in his subtitle. Basically, the author weaves several hundred generalizations (enriched by unending conjecture) into a somewhat systematic, somewhat chronological narrative. He tells what could have happened in the campaign for Troy, based upon Homer and broad historical data from the Hellenic and Hittite cultures.

It was difficult for me to read more than one chapter at a time. Strauss punctuates almost every page with some quasi-related generalization from the more reliable historical record in order to support his conjecture. However, it is forgivable if you are interested in the period, and if you don't set your expectations too high. I picked up the book because I am interested in ancient Greece and in Bronze Age warfare. If you have a similar interest, it is at least worth reading once.

Philipp says

This feels like it started out as an annotated edition of the Iliad, and then ballooned into its own book, but it's still an entertaining read. The Trojan War goes through the Iliad (and later, a few other sources), treats the sack of Troy as if it was a historic event (including characters - they probably did not have these names, but similar people probably did exist - "Whether Helen's face launched a thousand ships or none, queens of the Bronze Age wielded great power and kings made war over marriage alliances."), and then goes from event to event - could this have happened this way? Do we have evidence for similar events around that time? Do we have archaeological evidence for similar wars happening at Troy?

An example:

When the Greeks sacked the city, they put Troy to the torch. Archaeology discloses that a savage fire destroyed the settlement level known as Troy VI (formerly called Troy VIIa). [...] The inferno can be dated, according to the best estimate, sometime between 1230 and 1180 B.C., more likely between 1210 and 1180.

or

Bronze Age documents show that however brutal the sack of Troy may have been, it would have conformed to the laws of war. Cities that did not surrender would, if they were captured, be destroyed. This rule goes as far back as the first well-documented interstate conflict, the border wars between the two Sumerian city-states of Lagash and Umma between 2500 and 2350 B.C.

All the while Strauss is a great narrator - often starting out with "Now imagine the scene", going into living detail how it could have been, then switching over to the primary text with comparison of secondary sources.

The Trojan War is a good introduction to the Iliad and its events, it doesn't purport itself to be an academic work, in fact, the introduction explains most basic archaeology. If you've never had a university course in Greek history or literature go for it.

Nancy says

Based on discoveries made in the last decade in archaeology and epigraphy, Strauss recounts, in his very distinctive voice and style, the story of the Trojan War and analyzes its historicity, connecting it to what we know about Bronze Age warfare, the cult of the warrior, and interstate conflicts and alliances. Strauss has a really compelling sense of narrative. One jarring note for me: when he quotes from *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, he uses poet Alexander Pope's translations, an interesting choice but not particularly to my taste.

Kenneth says

The author's understanding of what "really" happened insofar as we can reconstruct the story from Homer and the archaeological discoveries of the last 200 years.

Reid says

Strauss crafts a great short book, replete with quick prose, great language and interesting scholarship, tying together Egyptian and Hittite records to show that many of the outlandish tales from the Iliad and the Odyssey are not nearly as surprising as we might think. Anyone who has seriously enjoyed the epics would love this book, a contemporary version of the classic *The World of Odysseus* by M.I. Finley. I highly recommend this book for novices and serious scholars. The approachable length makes it more appealing, as do the short chapters and the nuggets of narrative voice that Strauss includes to spruce up the countless inscriptions. A great addition to any library.

max says

I grow weary of books on the Trojan War. Who was Homer? When did he live? Where did he come from? Did he compose in the Greek alphabet that was apparently adopted sometime around 750 B.C. or was he an oral poet who dictated his poems to a scribe? Were the Iliad and Odyssey composed by the same individual or by different authors? Was the author a man or a woman? If they were in fact oral compositions, how were poems of such extraordinary length recited -- piecemeal or in their entirety?

Is the city Schliemann discovered the Troy which we read of in Homer's poems? Was the Trojan War actually fought? If so, when was it fought? Why was it fought? Were Achilles, Agamemnon, Nestor,

Odysseus and other characters legendary figures with some basis in men who actually lived, or are they purely the creation of a poetic, mythic imagination?

And on and on and on... There are no answers, only intense speculation. And this very absence of firm answers about the composer of these poems we call the Iliad and Odyssey is one of the things that makes Homer and his Trojan War so interesting. Apart from the spellbinding artistry and transcendent power of his poetry, there is a mystery, a vast chasm of the unknown that separates the creation of these wonderful poems from our world. It is a gulf that is unlikely ever to be bridged.

Contemporary scholars who write about Homer are like ants crawling over the chariot tracks of antiquity. And yet these modern day Myrmidons remain undeterred in their quest, carrying back a grain here, a grain there, and occasionally taking up academic arms against one another. And so they publish books discussing Bronze Age archaeological findings, the meanings of Hittite inscriptions, theories of oral composition, military tactics, social and political organization, etc., etc. etc.

The inquiry into the Trojan War is not at all unimportant, of course. And, in fairness to the scholars, we must admit that their researches have been remarkably fruitful, albeit inconclusive. Still, reading their works is like poring over a book of baseball statistics when you could be watching an actual game. In the end, there is Homer, and only Homer. My advice is to read him (in Greek, of course) or re-read him before opening this book. Smell the salt air wafting over the wine dark sea; hear the rattling of Apollo's arrows as he speeds angrily from Mt. Olympus in response to the prayer of his priest, Chryses; watch the smoke rising from the pyres cremating the Greeks who have been killed by Apollo's plague; behold the manifold wonders of Homer's epic world rather than lie entombed in the frigid, gloomy mausoleum of what are called "Homeric studies."

Hanna (lapetiteboleyn) says

A clear and concise primer to the Trojan War as a historical event rather than an epic poem. I enjoyed Strauss's sense of humour and his defense of Homer as a source, but there was also an awful lot of romantic imagining that got in the way of his evidence.

[redacted by S.H.I.E.L.D.] says

There's about 30 pages of actual history in here, but I guess at least it's written well. Pity, I usually love Strauss.

Marica says

Il romanzo dell'età del bronzo

Come quasi tutti, ho letto Iliade ed Odissea a scuola. Allora era una pietra miliare della formazione classica e come tale si studiava. Achille, Patroclo, Ulisse, Ettore erano personaggi letterari sui quali, ai tempi, non ho riflettuto più di tanto, poiché il dubbio sull'esistenza di Omero aggiungeva leggenda a leggenda. Ripensandoci dopo, ho realizzato che erano guerrieri dell'età del bronzo e che l'Iliade, a poterla interpretare correttamente, ci offriva un importante documento sulla vita e i valori in Grecia e in Anatolia in un periodo

preclassico, del quale non ci sono testimonianze greche scritte. La storia dell'Uomo nel periodo pre-storico mi ha sempre affascinato, proprio per la mancanza di documenti che la definiscano.

Il primo motivo d'interesse di questo saggio sta nell'aiutare il lettore a inquadrare il racconto di Omero in una dimensione storica. Per esempio, per quanto la figura di Omero sfumi nel mito, la città, le usanze, le navi, la guerra che descrive sono considerate attendibili, nonostante i 500 anni fra gli avvenimenti e la scrittura dell'opera: questo perchè il racconto orale, in un'epoca in cui la conoscenza non poteva essere trasmessa in altro modo, era tenuto in grande considerazione e veniva riportato con grande attenzione.

Mi ha anche sorpresa che la verosimiglianza delle cose narrate sia supportata dal confronto coi documenti Egizi e Ittiti contemporanei alla guerra di Troia.

L'autore chiarisce che la durata della guerra fu molto più breve di 10 anni, dato che non sarebbe stato possibile sostenere gli eserciti, né spostare i capi di stato greci dalle polis per un tempo così lungo senza perdere il potere. La guerra serviva probabilmente (come molte altre) a distrarre l'attenzione del popolo dalle turbolenze interne e inoltre a saccheggiare una città di grande ricchezza, posta strategicamente sulla via del commercio fra il mar Nero e il Mediterraneo. Non ci fu un cavallo di Troia, ma è molto probabile che i Greci siano entrati a Troia con l'inganno.

I nostri eroi omerici erano predoni che si spartivano bottino e donne, non i primi e neanche gli ultimi, basti pensare alle Crociate, che ebbero vari diversivi, fra i quali i sacco di Praga e quello di Costantinopoli.

E' strano pensare che una delle opere più importanti della classicità che si studiano a scuola sia questa storia di stragi, bambini buttati giù dalle mura, cadaveri trascinati per chilometri.

Nonostante questo, vorrei rileggere Iliade ed Odissea per rinfrescare l'impressione che ne ho avuto da ragazzina.

Nikki says

I remember finding Barry Strauss' book on Spartacus entertaining and readable, which is probably why I asked for this for Christmas. I've always been interested in the Trojan War, and when it came to getting round to actually reading this I was a little hesitant -- I like my stories of cunning Odysseus and beautiful Helen, not the sordid truth. But so, apparently, does Barry Strauss -- and in fact he suggests that the work of Homer is a lot closer to the historical truth than modern scholars have tended to believe. I can't remember where I read it before, but probably in Bettany Hughes' book on Helen, but Strauss champions the idea that Homer's epics reflected years of oral history: not myth, mind, but actual history. The names of cities, the geography, the customs of both sides, all seem to fit, more or less.

Strauss sticks very close to the narrative of the Trojan War, using the names and roles described in Homer's epics. That seems to be going a little far to me -- it seems like Strauss verges on fiction -- but it does make his book readable and interesting, and when he does comment on the likelihood of certain aspects, that fascinates me. He is quite optimistic, for example, on the actual existence of the Trojan Horse, though not quite as described.

Joaco says

This was such a nice book to read. Even though it is short, the author shows his depth of knowledge and succeeds at grounding the Trojan War on archaeological evidence- not only from Greece but also comparing the Greek and Trojan armies to other Bronze Age civilizations from the Near East such as Egyptians, Assyrians, Hittites, and Babylonians-.

Anyone interested on what a real Trojan War might have looked like will have a solid starting point with this book.
