

THE IN A HURRY SERIES

Troy

in a Hurry

The war, the poem, and the city under the hill

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The Whole Thing in One Page

Troy is four things that later memory insists on treating as one. It is a mound at Hisarlik in north-western Anatolia, built and rebuilt for roughly four thousand years. It is a Late Bronze Age kingdom that probably appears in Hittite records as Wilusa, caught between Anatolian rulers and powers from across the Aegean. It is the city destroyed in Greek epic after Paris took, or was given, Helen. It is also the argument produced whenever somebody asks whether Homer was telling the truth.

The mound gives no single answer because it contains no single Troy. Archaeologists divide its settlements into numbered phases, from early fortified towns to Greek Ilion and Roman Ilium. Troy VI had the sloping stone walls and monumental scale that suit the epic city, then probably fell to an earthquake around 1300 BCE. Troy VIIa reused those defences, packed more storage into the citadel and ended violently around the wider collapse of eastern Mediterranean palace societies. It offers the destruction people want, but no attacker signs the ruins.

The Hittite documents move the question forward and stop before the finish. They place Wilusa in western Anatolian diplomacy and record disputes involving Ahhiyawa, a power widely connected with the Mycenaean Aegean. They make conflict around Troy plausible. They do not provide Helen, Hector, a ten-year siege or a horse. A historical setting is not a verified plot.

The Iliad was shaped centuries later within a long oral tradition. It does not tell the whole Trojan War. It covers a short period in the tenth year, begins with a quarrel inside the Greek army and ends with Hector's funeral. The horse, the sack and Achilles' death belong elsewhere in the wider tradition. Homeric poetry preserved Troy by changing it into an argument about rage, status, command, mortality and the human cost of being excellent at violence.

Then later ages rebuilt the city again. Alexander honoured heroic graves. Rome claimed descent from the defeated Trojans through Aeneas. Medieval dynasties invented Trojan ancestors. Heinrich Schliemann excavated Hisarlik with enough conviction to make Troy famous and enough haste to destroy part of what he wanted to find. Museums, films and computer security carried the name further.

Each rebuilding changed the evidence available to the next. Roman construction cut into Greek Ilion. Schliemann's trench cut through Roman, Greek and Bronze Age remains. A museum label attached Priam to objects from the wrong millennium, then millions of visitors learned the label before the correction. Troy is therefore not a puzzle with untouched pieces. The history of trying to solve it has become another part of the puzzle.

Troy matters because it teaches a hard discipline: separate the place, the possible events, the poem and the uses made of both. Keep them apart long enough to see where they connect.

The city has layers. So does every claim made about it.

That is the book.

Why You Should Care

Your phone or computer may warn you about a Trojan. The term needs no footnote. Something desirable is admitted, the gate closes, and the danger begins its work from inside. A story attached to a city destroyed more than three thousand years ago has become a category in cybersecurity. The odd part is that the Iliad never mentions the wooden horse.

That small fact contains the reason Troy matters. Most people meet the war as one complete story, then assume Homer told it and archaeology later checked it. Neither step is right. The Iliad covers a few weeks near the end of the war and stops with Hector's funeral. The horse and the sack survived through other poems, later summaries, art, tragedy and Roman epic. Hisarlik contains real cities, but no trench has produced a label saying this room belonged to Priam or this arrowhead was fired by a Greek.

Troy therefore gives you a method for handling any famous past. Separate the claims before deciding whether the whole story is true. A settlement existed. A substantial Late Bronze Age city stood near the Dardanelles. Hittite records probably call it Wilusa and place it inside disputes involving an Aegean power. One settlement was damaged, another destroyed. Oral poetry later attached names, motives, speeches and a ten-year structure to conflict around the city. Each sentence has a different level of support. Popular memory joins them because joined stories are easier to carry.

The same process builds family legends, national origins and corporate histories. A place becomes an event, the event gains heroes, the heroes acquire speeches, and later institutions inherit the result. Romans claimed Trojan ancestry through Aeneas because descent from heroic losers offered antiquity without descent from Greek rivals. Medieval rulers did the same. The claim was poor genealogy and excellent politics.

This is why the fight over Troy never stays inside archaeology. If the war becomes Europe against Asia, later politics receives a Bronze Age ancestor. If Troy becomes a Greek colony, Anatolian history disappears. If every tradition is dismissed as fiction, material evidence is made to answer a question it was never asked. The argument is always partly about who gets to inherit the city.

Troy also matters because the Iliad is harder than the simplified war story built from it. Its Greeks quarrel, bargain over captive women and damage their own cause. Achilles is magnificent, terrifying and socially destructive. Hector defends his city while knowing that the system of honour around him may leave his wife enslaved and his child dead. Priam crosses the battlefield to ask the killer of his son for the body. The poem does not make war meaningless. It refuses to make it clean.

The city also teaches the difference between emotional truth and factual correspondence. Priam's appeal to Achilles can expose grief and recognition without proving that either man spoke those words. A scene may be historically unusable as an event and indispensable as evidence for what the poem understands about war.

Literature is not failed reporting. Archaeology is not silent literature.

There are honest limits. Archaeology cannot disprove every conflict merely because names are absent, and oral tradition can preserve places and political memories while changing them. Hittite documents strengthen the historical background without narrating Homer's campaign. Scepticism becomes lazy when it treats all possibilities as equal nonsense. Belief becomes lazy when one burnt layer is promoted into the whole epic.

Use Troy to resist both habits. Ask which Troy, which source, and what that source can carry.

The Core Ideas

The Mound Contains Cities, Not Answers

Hisarlik is a tell, a mound made from repeated occupation. Houses collapse, walls are repaired, floors rise, rubbish accumulates, and later builders cut into earlier lives. The site is therefore an archive assembled by people who were not trying to leave one. Its first lesson is simple and routinely ignored: Troy was never one city waiting beneath the soil.

The familiar numbering, Troy I through Troy IX, is an archaeological convenience rather than a sequence of kings. Each major phase contains subphases, and the dates remain approximate because pottery sequences, radiocarbon evidence and imported objects do not produce one perfect calendar. Recent work has also identified occupation earlier than the original Troy I. The mound has become more complicated as methods improved, which is what evidence tends to do when it is treated properly.

Early Troy already mattered. From around the beginning of the third millennium BCE, a fortified settlement occupied the hill above the plain. Troy II, flourishing in the later third millennium, produced the metal hoards Schliemann would misname Priam's Treasure. Its wealth shows long-distance exchange and skilled production, but it belongs roughly a thousand years before the usual setting of the Trojan War. The gold is real. The royal owner was supplied by a poem.

Troy VI, beginning around the eighteenth century BCE and lasting into the thirteenth, created the architecture most readers recognise. Its citadel walls used carefully fitted limestone, leaned slightly inwards and were interrupted by towers and gates. Large buildings stood behind them. Excavation beyond the citadel found evidence for settlement across the surrounding area, though the extent, population and commercial role of the lower city have generated serious debate. Troy was important by regional standards. Claims that it was a vast international trading capital go further than the evidence permits.

The geography helps explain why settlement kept returning. Troy stood near the entrance to the Dardanelles, between the Aegean and the Sea of Marmara, with access to agricultural land and routes through western Anatolia. That position did not guarantee control of all shipping, and Bronze Age vessels did not queue beneath the walls for customs inspection. It did place the community inside networks of movement whose political value could rise sharply when larger powers competed nearby.

Troy VI ended around 1300 BCE. Cracked and displaced masonry led excavators to favour earthquake as the main cause, although human violence around the same period cannot be excluded from every part of the sequence. Troy VIIa then occupied and altered the citadel. Houses were more densely arranged, and large storage jars were set into floors. These changes have been read as preparation for siege, as pressure upon space, or as ordinary adaptation. The jars do not know which interpretation a visitor prefers.

Troy VIIa was destroyed by fire around 1200 BCE, within the unstable decades when Mycenaean palaces, Hittite power and several eastern Mediterranean states were failing or changing. Signs of violence exist, but the identity of attackers remains unknown. Aegean raiders are possible. So are regional enemies and conflict connected with the wider breakdown. The destruction gives the epic tradition a credible historical environment. It does not issue a cast list.

Layer discipline prevents two opposite errors. Believers combine the monumental walls of Troy VI with the destruction of VIIa and call the result Priam's city. Sceptics point out the combination and conclude that the whole connection is fantasy. The better answer is less theatrical. The poem may preserve memories drawn from more than one phase, and archaeology may illuminate a tradition without matching it scene by scene.

The mound matters because it forces every claim to remain dated. A wall, a fire, a pot and a poem may concern Troy while belonging to different centuries. Put them together too soon and you have built a city that never existed. Keep them separate and the real sequence becomes stranger, longer and more useful.

Wilusa Makes the Background Historical

For most of modern scholarship, the argument over Troy was conducted between Greek poetry and the soil. Hittite tablets changed the shape of it. They did not solve the Trojan War. They supplied a

political world in which something behind the tradition could have happened.

Hittite kings ruled a major Anatolian empire from central Turkey during the Late Bronze Age. Their archives preserve treaties, diplomatic letters, royal annals and disputes with western polities. Several names matter. Wilusa is now widely identified with Troy or Ilios. The linguistic path from Wilusa to the Greek Wilios, later Ilios, is persuasive, and the geographical information places Wilusa in north-western Anatolia. Taruisa, another Hittite name, may be connected with Troia, although that equation is less secure.

A treaty between the Hittite king Muwatalli II and Alaksandu of Wilusa, usually dated to the early thirteenth century BCE, shows Wilusa as a recognised kingdom within Hittite diplomacy. Alaksandu immediately attracts attention because Alexandros is another name for Paris in Greek tradition. The resemblance is worth noticing. It does not make the treaty partner Helen's lover. Names travelled, dynasties repeated them and languages reshaped them. A clue is not a biography.

Ahhiyawa is more consequential. Most specialists connect it with the Mycenaean Greek world, the land of the Achaeans, although debate continues over the exact political organisation meant by the term. Hittite texts treat the king of Ahhiyawa as a significant ruler and record Aegean involvement in western Anatolia. The so-called Tawagalawa Letter discusses a previous dispute over Wilusa that the Hittite king says he and the Ahhiyawan king have settled.

That is the closest the documentary record comes to placing Troy inside conflict involving a Mycenaean power.

Read the sentence carefully. It records a dispute, not Homer's war. We do not know its scale, duration, participants or outcome. It may refer to diplomacy after fighting, pressure through local allies or a confrontation unlike a ten-year siege. Other texts, including the Milawata Letter, help locate Wilusa and show the instability of western Anatolian politics. None mentions Agamemnon, Helen or a wooden horse.

The documents still overturn an older picture in which Troy sat outside recoverable history until Greek singers invented a setting. Wilusa had rulers, treaty obligations and regional enemies. Hittite power reached towards it. Aegean interests operated across western Anatolia. A conflict remembered on the Greek side is therefore credible in a way that would be weaker without the tablets.

The limits are as informative as the advance. Hittite records survive because one imperial archive was burnt and preserved, not because it documented every war. Greek palace records in Linear B are administrative lists, not narrative histories, and none has yielded an account of Troy. The absence of a war from surviving texts may reflect lost archives and selective recording. It may also reflect that no single expedition resembling the epic occurred. Silence does not choose between those possibilities for us.

Wilusa also corrects the habit of describing Troy as a Greek city abroad or as Asia facing Europe. Its political setting was Anatolian, but its material contacts reached across the Aegean. Imported

pottery, diplomatic names and shared elite practices show connection without erasing difference. The Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean was built from overlapping networks, not two civilisations waiting in their corners for the first round of a permanent continental contest.

The Hittite evidence gives Troy historical weight while denying the satisfying verdict. That is its value. It tells us that the background is firmer than pure legend and the plot remains unverified. Any account that calls this proof has spent the evidence twice.

Oral Tradition Preserved Troy by Changing It

A story can survive for centuries without remaining still. Troy is the clearest case because later readers want oral tradition to behave like either a recording device or a game of whispers. It was neither. It was a method of making new performances from inherited language, scenes and plots.

The Iliad and Odyssey emerged from a long culture of oral song. Poets worked with formulaic phrases fitted to the metre, recurring type-scenes and a shared stock of heroic narratives. A singer did not memorise a fixed modern text of more than fifteen thousand lines and recite it like an actor. Traditional language allowed composition in performance, variation and expansion while preserving recognisable characters and events. Repetition was part of the technology.

This explains why Homeric poetry can preserve old material beside later features. Bronze Age objects, place names and political memories may remain within a world whose social institutions also reflect the early Iron Age and the poet's own audience. The poems probably reached monumental forms in the late eighth or early seventh century BCE, several hundred years after the destruction of Troy VIIa. They were then transmitted through performance and writing, with the text becoming more stable across time. There was no single clean moment when memory stopped and literature began.

Attempts to date the entire Homeric world to one century therefore fail. Chariots are used mainly to carry heroes to and from combat rather than as the organised fighting platforms seen in some Bronze Age states. Iron appears in a world still rich in bronze. Political assemblies resemble no palace archive recovered from Mycenae. Cremation and burial practices vary. These are not errors left by a careless historian. They are signs that the poem's world was built from inherited material shaped for later listeners.

The wider Trojan tradition was larger than the Iliad. The Epic Cycle told the causes of the war, earlier expeditions, Achilles' death, the wooden horse, the sack and the returns of Greek heroes. Most of those poems are lost, surviving through fragments, summaries and references. Tragedians, lyric poets, vase painters and local cults used versions that did not always agree. Ancient audiences knew a network of stories. Modern audiences often know one blended plot and put Homer's name on the box.

That compression creates a false test. If the Iliad does not narrate Helen's abduction or the horse, some readers assume the episodes are late inventions. Others assume every familiar scene must once have appeared in a lost part of Homer. The evidence supports neither shortcut. Some traditions are old and independent of the Iliad. Others changed sharply in later literature. The Trojan War never had one authorised edition from which all deviations can be measured.

Oral tradition can preserve. Names such as Troy, Ilios and perhaps echoes of Achaean movement may have crossed the centuries. A city's destruction, a failed expedition or several western Anatolian wars could have supplied durable material. Yet preservation happens through selection. Singers retained events that could be organised around honour, kinship, divine action and memorable heroes. Logistics, ordinary soldiers and political ambiguity were less useful to performance. Memory arrived already edited.

The transformation is visible in scale. A local conflict becomes a coalition of Greek kings. A disputed woman becomes the cause of a war. Separate destructions can be drawn into one fall. The result need not be deceit. Epic makes events intelligible by giving them motive and form, then the form becomes more memorable than whatever first prompted it.

Do not ask whether oral tradition preserved the truth as a single block. Ask which kinds of information it was good at carrying and what performance required it to change. Place names can endure. A striking defeat can endure. Exact dates, troop numbers and dip-

lomatic causes are less secure. Speeches can reveal the values of the tradition without preserving words once spoken outside the walls.

Troy survived because each singer was allowed to rebuild it. Fix the story too early and it might have died with the audience that first knew the argument. Change was not damage around the memory. Change was the vehicle.

The Iliad Is an Anatomy of a Coalition

The Iliad begins by naming rage and then shows what rage does to a coalition. That is why treating the poem as a complete history of the Trojan War misses its design. The walls remain standing. The Greeks are already in their tenth year. The immediate threat comes from inside their own camp.

Agamemnon takes Briseis from Achilles after being forced to return another captive woman, Chryseis. The quarrel is often softened into wounded pride between difficult men. In the poem's social economy, it is more exact. Public honour is measured through visible prizes, and command depends upon distributing them. Agamemnon asserts rank by taking what marks Achilles' status. Achilles withdraws because fighting without recognised honour would confirm that his excellence can be used without being acknowledged.

The dispute exposes a system that needs heroic competition and cannot control it. Greek success depends upon extraordinary

fighters who are encouraged to seek glory above other men. The same values make obedience unstable whenever a leader appears to distribute honour badly. Achilles is not a modern employee refusing an unfair manager. He is the most destructive product of the institution that needs him.

Women make the machinery visible. Chryseis and Briseis are treated as prizes, labour and status. Andromache anticipates enslavement if Troy falls. Hecuba loses sons. Helen is blamed, desired, traded through marriage politics and allowed a painful intelligence about the disaster attached to her name. The poem gives women speech while placing them inside a war organised by male claims over women. Sympathy does not abolish the structure.

Hector carries a different burden. He fights for his city and family, but he also acts inside the same honour culture. In the meeting with Andromache, private knowledge and public obligation collide. He can imagine the fall of Troy and her enslavement, yet shame before Trojan men and women helps send him back towards battle. Courage is real. So is the social pressure that makes courage difficult to distinguish from the inability to stop.

The gods do not reduce human responsibility to puppetry. Divine quarrels enlarge, redirect and expose mortal choices. Athena restrains Achilles from killing Agamemnon but does not remove the rage. Zeus permits suffering while balancing promises. Apollo protects Troy and spreads plague. The divine system makes war part of a cosmos whose justice is never tidy enough to excuse the people acting within it.

The poem's violence is exact and repetitive. Spears enter throats, livers and jaws; armour changes owners; fathers and homes are named at the moment a body falls. Death does not arrive as an anonymous counter. Formulaic technique can make killing feel patterned, then a particular biography breaks through the pattern. The effect is not pacifist instruction. It is refusal to let martial excellence erase the material it works upon.

Achilles' return intensifies the contradiction. His grief for Patroclus produces feats of violence that are magnificent within heroic poetry and horrifying within human measure. He kills Hector, then abuses the corpse. Victory does not settle grief. It gives grief another body to damage.

The poem finally turns through Priam. The old king enters the enemy camp and asks Achilles to remember his own father. No institution fixes the war. No god reconciles the armies. Two men recognise loss across the division that made one of them kill the other's son. Achilles returns Hector's body, and the poem ends with burial rather than conquest.

That ending matters. Troy will fall, but the Iliad refuses the horse, the sack and the reward of seeing the enemy city burn. Its final act restores a corpse to a family. The poem about heroic war lands on the temporary suspension of it.

Read the Iliad as an argument about coalition, status and mortality, and its historical value becomes clearer rather than smaller. It shows the social imagination through which later Greeks understood command and fame. It may preserve older relationships and

material memories. It does not become a transcript. A speech can be unhistorical in wording and exact about the pressures a culture placed upon its heroes.

The war story asks who won. The Iliad keeps asking what victory requires people to become.

Archaeology Found Troy by Damaging It

Troy became modern archaeology through a productive disaster. Heinrich Schliemann brought money, publicity, energy and an answer chosen in advance. The site gained international attention. Parts of its sequence were cut away before the discipline knew how to record them.

Schliemann did not begin with an unknown mound. Travellers and scholars had debated the location of Troy for generations. Charles Maclaren argued for Hisarlik in the early nineteenth century. Frank Calvert, a member of a Levantine family established in the Troad, owned part of the hill, studied the local topography and excavated there before Schliemann. Calvert persuaded the wealthy German businessman that the mound was the right place.

The later legend reduced this to one man believing Homer against the experts. It suited Schliemann because discovery is easier to own when predecessors vanish. Calvert supplied local knowledge, access and archaeological judgement. Schliemann supplied scale and a press strategy. The difference between contribution and credit became part of Troy's excavation history from the start.

Schliemann cut a large trench through the mound because he expected Priam's city near the bottom. He treated later levels as obstacles above the answer. The method exposed the depth of occupation and removed architecture belonging to the Late Bronze Age levels now considered more relevant to a possible Trojan War. He found Troy by throwing parts of Troy away.

In 1873 he announced a spectacular group of gold, silver and bronze objects as Priam's Treasure. The assemblage belonged to Troy II, more than a millennium too early for the conventional setting of Homer's war. His published account of the discovery, including Sophia Schliemann's role in carrying the objects away, is unreliable. Scholars have disputed whether the group was one deposit or a composite collection. The secure point is the chronology. Priam did not own it.

Schliemann also removed the objects from Ottoman territory in breach of his permit, later settling the dispute with payment. He gave the collection to Berlin. Soviet forces carried it to Moscow after the Second World War, and Russia eventually acknowledged its location. The treasure acquired an Ottoman, German, Soviet and Russian history after leaving the Bronze Age. Provenance did not end when the metal entered a museum.

Later excavators corrected Schliemann and created new problems. Wilhelm Dörpfeld distinguished the impressive Troy VI fortifications and regarded that city as Homer's best candidate. Carl Blegen's team in the 1930s emphasised Troy VIIa because its fiery destruction suited a war. Manfred Korfmann's international project

from 1988 expanded work beyond the citadel and argued for a substantial lower city. Frank Kolb and others challenged claims about its scale, defensive works and commercial importance. The dispute became fierce because the size of Bronze Age Troy had become evidence in a historical argument far larger than the trenches.

This sequence is not a march from amateur error to final truth. Dörpfeld and Blegen worked with stronger stratigraphic methods than Schliemann, but their preferred Troys were influenced by what they expected the epic city to look like. Korfmann used geophysics, environmental study and large teams, yet interpretation still exceeded agreement in places. Archaeology improves by making its methods visible enough to be challenged.

Excavation is irreversible. A trench records by destroying context. That does not make digging wrong. It makes documentation, sampling and restraint part of the evidence rather than administrative chores around it. Schliemann's confidence mattered because it mobilised resources. It also mattered because confidence aimed a pickaxe.

The hero-discoverer story survives because archaeology is often narrated as conquest: lost city, lone believer, breakthrough, treasure. Troy offers the correction. Knowledge came from surveyors, landowners, labourers, conservators, ceramic specialists, translators, geophysicists and generations who disagreed in print. The mound was not discovered once. It was made legible by accumulation, and some of the writing was done with a blade.

Defeat Became an Ancestry

Troy lost the war and won the inheritance. That reversal explains more of its later power than the question of who first breached the walls.

Greek communities of the historical period treated the Troad as heroic ground. Sites were connected with Achilles, Ajax, Patroclus and other figures, while Ilion developed around the sanctuary of Athena. Pilgrims, rulers and armies could move through a geography already organised by epic. The old story made the region politically usable because honouring heroes allowed new actors to place themselves inside a prestigious past.

Alexander crossed into Asia in 334 BCE and visited Troy at the beginning of his campaign against Persia. Ancient accounts present him honouring Achilles and receiving or exchanging armour at Athena's temple. Details vary and later writers knew how neatly the scene suited the conqueror. The political act is secure enough: Alexander framed a Macedonian invasion of Asia through the memory of a Greek expedition against Troy. A war of his own gained an epic predecessor before the first major battle.

The Romans performed the larger reversal. Greek tradition included Aeneas among Trojan survivors. Roman writers developed him into the ancestor through whom Troy reached Italy, and Virgil's Aeneid turned defeated refugees into the prehistory of Roman rule. Rome did not need to deny the sack. It converted catastrophe into departure.

This was excellent ancestry. Claiming descent from the Trojans gave Rome antiquity equal to Greece while keeping Rome outside Greek parentage. The losers could be admired without making the Romans descendants of the people they had conquered. Under Augustus, Aeneas linked imperial power, family descent, divine favour and the cost of founding a state. Troy became the city Rome had to lose before Rome could exist.

The claim changed Ilion materially. Roman patronage, tax privileges, building and imperial attention supported the city because Roman identity had made it ancestral ground. Myth produced masonry. A genealogical fiction became an economic fact for residents living near the mound.

Medieval Europe extended the method. Britons, Franks and other peoples acquired Trojan founders through chronicles that supplied respectable descent from antiquity. Geoffrey of Monmouth's Brutus gave Britain a Trojan origin. French traditions found Francus. These genealogies do not survive historical testing, but testing ancestry was not their only job. They ranked kingdoms, connected rulers with classical prestige and offered national histories older than current rivals.

The pattern reveals why defeated cities can be more useful than victorious ones. A victor's heirs inherit responsibility for conquest. A refugee's heirs inherit suffering, endurance and a claim to new land. The story begins after legitimacy has been stripped away, so later expansion can appear as recovery rather than acquisition. Troy supplied an origin with grief already included.

None of this requires later people to have believed every detail in the same way. Ritual, literature, monuments and political claims can operate through degrees of belief. A Roman official did not need to produce Aeneas's birth record for Ilion's privileges to matter. The question is what the ancestry authorised.

Troy also became a mirror for imperial anxiety. The Aeneid celebrates Roman destiny while dwelling upon people displaced, sacrificed or defeated by that destiny. Medieval Troy stories could praise chivalry and expose treachery. Modern nationalisms have claimed the city as western, eastern, Greek, Anatolian or universally human. A founding story remains powerful because it can hold pride and loss at once.

This afterlife changes how the original war should be read. The most influential consequence of Troy was not any territory gained by Mycenaean attackers. It was the supply of a defeated ancestry that later empires could adopt. The Greeks won the city in the story. The Trojans acquired Rome.

Every Age Adds Another Layer

The last layer of Troy is the one each age believes it has merely uncovered. Museums, films, schoolbooks, national claims and technical metaphors continue the building work. They do not sit outside the history. They are the latest occupation phase.

Begin with the wooden horse. It appears in the Odyssey and the wider ancient tradition, not in the Iliad. Archaeology has produced

no physical horse and no accepted mechanism behind it. Theories have treated it as a siege machine, a ship, an earthquake metaphor associated with Poseidon, a ritual object or an invention of epic narrative. None has closed the case.

The horse survives because it is perfect information design. The city chooses to admit the object that destroys it. Siege, deception, religious uncertainty and self-inflicted failure are compressed into one image. A plausible battering ram would be easier to reconstruct and harder to remember. Modern cybersecurity kept the structure and removed the timber.

Reconstruction performs similar compression. A site plan must choose dates. A museum model must decide roof heights, colours and street lines. A film must give one face to Helen and one shape to the walls. Gaps cannot be displayed as gaps for two hours, so design enters. The responsible version marks where evidence ends. The irresponsible version hides the join because uncertainty photographs badly.

The same choice governs public ownership. Troy lies in modern Turkey and belongs to the archaeology of Anatolia. It also sits within Greek epic, Roman political memory and a global literary inheritance. These statements can coexist until one is used to erase the others. Nineteenth-century European excavators often treated classical prestige as permission to remove objects from Ottoman land. Modern museums inherited both the objects and the arguments.

Priam's Treasure shows how many Troys can occupy one collection. The objects are Early Bronze Age Anatolian finds, named through Greek epic, removed under Ottoman rule, donated to Germany, seized by the Soviet Union and displayed in Russia. Turkey, Germany and Russia can each describe part of the chain without possessing the whole moral answer. Asking where the treasure belongs requires law, history and power, not archaeology alone.

Modern politics also selects its preferred Troy. Some writers make the war Europe's first defence against Asia. Others reclaim the Trojans as ancestors of Anatolian resistance. Popular films make the conflict secular, romantic or nationalist according to the audience. Each version edits the ancient material and then calls the edit recovery.

This does not mean every interpretation is equal. Evidence still ranks claims. Hisarlik is ancient Troy. Wilusa is a strong identification. The horse remains unverified. Priam's Treasure is too early. A reconstruction that states these differences is better than one that confuses them. Cultural layers require stratigraphy as much as soil does.

The loop now closes. The first Core Idea treated the mound as cities built over cities. The final one treats reception the same way. Roman ancestry stands above Greek cult, medieval genealogy above Roman epic, Schliemann above all of them, and the modern museum above Schliemann. Later layers disturb earlier ones while preserving enough material to claim continuity.

Troy is therefore more than a problem about whether one war happened. It is a model of how the past works once people need it. Evidence survives unevenly. Stories join the gaps. Institutions stabilise one version. New discoveries expose the joins. Then another age builds again.

Do not strip the later layers away in search of a pure Troy. There is no historical reason to privilege the first story that happened to become famous. Date each layer, ask what it reused and refuse to let the newest building pretend it is bedrock.

How It Actually Works

The first known settlement at Hisarlik appeared near the beginning of the third millennium BCE, on a hill above a fertile plain close to routes connecting the Aegean with inland Anatolia and the waters beyond the Dardanelles. It was small, fortified and well placed. That combination would recur. People kept building there because the site joined defensibility, agriculture and movement, though the coastline and river channels changed across time.

The Bronze Age shore lay closer to the mound than the modern coast, but Troy was not a port perched directly above a permanent harbour. Rivers deposited sediment, bays narrowed and routes shifted. The community's position should therefore be understood as access to a changing corridor rather than ownership of one timeless chokepoint. Geography created opportunity. It did not collect tolls by itself.

Troy I and II belonged to an Early Bronze Age world of expanding exchange. The citadel grew, monumental gateway approaches appeared, and metal, pottery and other objects connected the community with regions far beyond the Troad. Troy II ended in destruction and left the hoards later marketed as Priam's Treasure. The settlement was wealthy enough to surprise nineteenth-century excavators. It was also too early to be the city of Hector by around a thousand years.

Its metalwork belongs to a network reaching through the Aegean, Anatolia and beyond. Similar forms and materials do not reveal

one merchant route or one ethnic population, but they show that Early Bronze Age Troy was connected long before Hittite kings wrote the name Wilusa. The city did not become international when Homer noticed it. Homer arrived late to a place accustomed to movement.

Troy III, IV and V followed through the later third and early second millennia. Their remains were less useful to a public searching for Homer and suffered accordingly. Archaeology once treated them as the corridor between important cities rather than as communities with their own histories. They show continuity, rebuilding and changing household life. Pottery styles, house plans and food remains record ordinary adaptation that no epic needed. The relative poverty of spectacular finds may reflect smaller differences in wealth, poorer preservation or nineteenth-century excavation priorities. Troy did not spend a millennium waiting for a poetically relevant king.

Around the eighteenth century BCE, Troy VI began a long phase of expansion. Its citadel walls, towers and gates became the most imposing architecture on the mound. Large freestanding buildings occupied terraces within the defences. Settlement extended outside the citadel, although arguments over the size and character of the lower city remain unresolved. Imported Mycenaean pottery and Anatolian material place Troy inside exchange across the Aegean without making it culturally Greek. Local grey wares and Anatolian architectural traditions matter more for everyday identity than a few imported vessels, yet imports reveal the routes along which objects, names and stories could travel.

No royal archive has been found at Troy. That absence limits what can be said about government, language and foreign policy from the site alone. A citadel and lower settlement imply hierarchy, but the ruler's title, the structure of labour and the relationship between town and countryside remain partly reconstructed from comparison. Monumental walls do not write a constitution.

During the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BCE, Hittite records bring western Anatolia into written history. A kingdom called Wilusa appears within the Hittite sphere. The Alaksandu Treaty formalised relations between its ruler and Muwatalli II. Other documents show repeated instability across the west, local rulers changing allegiance and Ahhiyawan interests operating in the region. The Tawagalawa Letter refers to a previous dispute over Wilusa between the Hittite and Ahhiyawan kings. The Milawata Letter and related documents help place Wilusa geographically and show how western rulers moved between Hittite control, rebellion and outside support. The surviving record resembles a zone of unstable alliances more than two fixed blocs.

This is the strongest documentary bridge to the later Greek tradition. The names, geography and political setting fit. The bridge still stops before the other bank. The texts do not describe the destruction excavated at Troy VIIa or a coalition commanded by Agamemnon. They show that Wilusa was real, disputed and connected to powers from both sides of the Aegean.

Troy VI ended around 1300 BCE. The pattern of damage led Dörpfeld and later Blegen to favour earthquake. The next population re-

tained the citadel as its centre. Troy VIIa repaired and reused it, subdividing space and increasing storage within houses. Whether these arrangements indicate siege preparation, population pressure or altered economic life remains debated.

Around 1200 BCE, Troy VIIa burned. Skeletons, weapons and destruction suggest that human violence formed part of the end, but the evidence is scattered and the excavation history has removed context. Identifying the attackers is another matter. The event occurred during a broad regional crisis. Mycenaean palaces were destroyed, the Hittite state disappeared, trade routes broke and populations moved. Egypt recorded attacks by groups it called Sea Peoples. No single cause explains the whole collapse, and Troy cannot be removed from that disorder merely because epic later gave its fall a self-contained plot. Earthquake, drought, internal rebellion, raiding, migration and system failure interacted differently by region. The attraction of a single Greek siege is that it gives Troy a cleaner ending than the century around it received.

Troy VIIb followed, showing continuity alongside new pottery styles and connections. Occupation weakened, revived and changed. New handmade pottery once encouraged theories of a complete foreign replacement, but migration and continuity cannot be read from one ceramic style alone. By the early first millennium BCE, Greek-speaking communities inhabited the area, and Troy VIII developed around a sanctuary of Athena. The mound had become Ilion, a historical city whose residents lived beside heroic geography.

The epic tradition was taking monumental form during roughly the same broad period. Songs about Troy had circulated before the *Iliad* reached the shape we know, and other epics covered parts of the war that Homer omitted. The poem's language, metre and repeated scenes preserve the methods of oral performance. Its political and material world combines elements from different periods. This is what a long tradition should look like after centuries of use.

Writing did not end oral performance at once. Rhapsodes continued to perform Homeric poetry, editors and scholars compared versions, and public festivals helped stabilise texts. The *Iliad* became more fixed while remaining open to interpretation, which is why ancient readers could treat it as inherited authority and still argue over every line.

Archaic and classical Greeks treated the Troad as a place where heroic time remained accessible. Tombs were identified with warriors, sacrifices were made and competing powers sought influence over Ilion. The Persian king Xerxes and later Greek commanders were connected by ancient writers with acts of homage in the region, although the accounts were shaped by the needs of later narratives.

Alexander's visit in 334 BCE gave the site its most famous political performance. He entered Asia, honoured Achilles and associated his campaign against Persia with the expedition of the Achaeans. His companion Hephaestion honoured Patroclus, making their own friendship legible through epic. Whether every ritual detail repor-

ted by later authors is exact matters less than the decision to make Troy the opening stage of conquest. Alexander was not proving the expedition of Agamemnon. He was using it. The distinction is the difference between historical evidence and historical effect.

After Alexander, his successors competed for the Troad and Ilion organised a regional federation centred upon Athena's sanctuary. Festivals, decrees and benefactions made the city useful to rulers who wanted Greek cultural legitimacy. The Bronze Age ruins mattered because the Hellenistic city maintained the address.

Hellenistic rulers invested in Ilion, and the city formed the centre of a regional association. Roman involvement changed its scale and meaning. Through Aeneas, Romans claimed descent from Trojan survivors. Julius Caesar's family connected itself with Aeneas's son Iulus, and Augustus made Trojan ancestry part of imperial culture. Ilion received patronage, privileges and building because Roman power had turned epic defeat into family history. Roman officials and emperors could honour an ancestral city without treating its inhabitants as literal close relatives. Public genealogy works through institutions, not genetic testing.

The Roman city, Troy IX, covered more ground than the Bronze Age citadel and catered to visitors who came for heroic associations. Ancient tourism did not merely preserve the past. It rebuilt sanctuaries, identified graves and organised memory for an audience. By late antiquity the city declined, while the story moved into new languages and institutions.

Western medieval readers often knew Troy through Latin works rather than the Greek Iliad itself. Dares the Phrygian and Dictys the Cretan presented themselves as eyewitnesses, and their compact Latin narratives often seemed more historical than pagan epic. Chronicles and romances expanded the war, moralised it and recruited Trojan founders for European peoples. The name remained culturally central even while the location of the mound became uncertain to many travellers. A city could be lost geographically and remain crowded in literature.

Early modern scholars proposed several sites in the Troad, often matching rivers and hills against Homer line by line. Lechevalier's candidate at Bunarbashi dominated much discussion, while Charles Maclaren argued for Hisarlik. By the nineteenth century, the mound had strong advocates before Schliemann arrived. Frank Calvert excavated and argued for it. Schliemann began major work in 1870 and 1871, drove his trench through the mound and announced Homeric discoveries with extraordinary publicity. He proved the depth and importance of the site while misdating Troy II and damaging later levels. His reports mixed close observation with self-dramatisation, and his removal of the treasure from Ottoman territory turned excavation into an international legal dispute. The modern history of Troy began with the methods, publicity and ownership problems of imperial archaeology all arriving together.

Dörpfeld improved the stratigraphy and identified Troy VI as the monumental Late Bronze Age city. Blegen's University of Cincinnati expedition in the 1930s separated phases further and preferred

VIIa as the likelier war city because of its destruction. The choice exposed a recurring problem: the architecture and the ending that resemble Homer belong most neatly to different phases. Blegen's team also produced a far stronger ceramic and architectural sequence, proving that the value of excavation is not measured by gold.

Korfmann's project, beginning in 1988, used geophysical survey, environmental work and excavation across the lower settlement. It strengthened the view that Late Bronze Age Troy was more than a small citadel, but claims about its urban scale, defensive ditch and trading role drew forceful criticism. The disagreement mattered because archaeological description had become tied to a public verdict on whether Homer's Troy was important enough to deserve the poem. A ditch became evidence for city status, city status became evidence for a war, and criticism of one interpretation could be presented as hostility to Troy itself. The argument demonstrated how easily scale changes from an archaeological question into a referendum on a text.

Excavation continues under Turkish leadership, with conservation and interpretation now carrying as much weight as dramatic discovery. The modern site contains Bronze Age walls, Greek and Roman buildings, Schliemann's trench and the infrastructure of heritage tourism. Visitors walk across several histories at once, which is the correct condition for Troy even when the signs try to make the route simpler.

Conservation creates its own choices. Exposed mud brick and stone deteriorate, so archaeologists stabilise walls, add protective material and decide which phases can remain visible. A visitor may therefore see ancient masonry, modern support and a reconstructed line within one wall. Preservation is another controlled alteration of the site, necessary because leaving a ruin untouched can destroy it.

Public display then decides which Troy receives the strongest image. Fortifications, treasure and the horse attract attention more easily than cooking pots, drainage or uncertain lower-city trenches. The result is understandable and distorting. The city known through war was sustained through water, food, craft and repair. Troy lasted for millennia because most days were not the day it fell. That ordinary duration is the strongest correction to the epic frame. Households, workshops, ritual and repair sustained the place across repeated rebuilding, while one night of destruction supplied the part later ages chose to remember most.

How we know

Troy is known through four bodies of evidence, and each fails differently. Their overlaps are useful only after their limits have been kept separate.

Archaeology provides sequence, architecture, objects, diet, destruction and contact. Its strengths are material and local. Its defects begin with preservation and excavation. Mud brick disappears, timber burns, metal is removed, and early digging destroyed

context. A burnt room can show destruction but rarely name the attacker. Imported pottery shows connection, not the language or political identity of every resident. Survey and environmental evidence can reconstruct routes and settlement, but coastlines, population estimates and defensive interpretations remain models rather than photographs.

Hittite texts provide contemporary Late Bronze Age diplomacy. They make Wilusa and Ahhiyawa historical actors rather than poetic inventions. The archive is still partial, imperial and written from Hattusa. Names require linguistic argument, geography requires reconstruction and the documents were not composed to answer whether Homer was accurate. They also preserve the Hittite state's view, which means rebellion, loyalty and legitimacy arrive in imperial vocabulary.

Greek epic provides the richest account and the weakest direct chronology. The Iliad and Odyssey emerged from oral tradition and were shaped centuries after the proposed war. They preserve old material, later institutions and poetic invention together. Their speeches are evidence for the poem's moral and social world, not transcripts. Repeated formulae can preserve old diction and create new scenes at once. Literary power is therefore part of the source's operation, not decoration that can be peeled away.

Later Greek, Roman and medieval sources show reception. They tell us how people used Troy, visited Ilion and claimed descent. They often report earlier events through traditions already serving political ends. Alexander's heroic performance, Roman ancestry

and Schliemann's autobiography must be read as acts as well as accounts.

No source should be promoted to do another source's job. The mound cannot explain Achilles' rage. The Iliad cannot date a wall. The Hittite archive cannot certify a horse it never mentions. Put them beside one another and a historically credible background appears, surrounded by uncertainty that is structured rather than empty.

That is how Troy works: not one proof, but several incomplete records whose overlaps matter and whose gaps must remain visible.

What People Get Wrong

“Heinrich Schliemann discovered Troy”

Schliemann made Hisarlik famous, financed excavation on a scale Frank Calvert could not and exposed a deep sequence of ancient settlements. He did not identify the mound alone or recover a place nobody knew.

Calvert had studied the Troad, owned part of Hisarlik and excavated there before Schliemann. Earlier travellers and scholars had argued for the site, while other candidates remained in circulation. Calvert's topographical judgement helped persuade Schliemann where to dig. Schliemann later reduced that debt because the story of one believer defeating scholarly doubt was worth more than collaboration.

His excavation was both achievement and damage. The great trench demonstrated that the mound contained many cities, then cut through levels now considered relevant to the Late Bronze Age. He expected Priam's Troy near the bottom and treated later structures as material above the answer.

The accurate claim is sharper. Schliemann transformed the study and publicity of Troy. He did so using Calvert's groundwork, large resources, destructive methods and an unmatched instinct for headlines. Later campaigns by Dörpfeld, Blegen and Korfmann made the site intelligible in ways Schliemann could not, which is

why discovery should be treated as a sequence of corrections rather than one heroic afternoon. Archaeology supplied the sequence. Calvert supplied the place. Schliemann supplied the legend of Schliemann.

“Priam’s Treasure belonged to Priam”

The gold, silver and bronze objects Schliemann announced in 1873 came from Troy II, an Early Bronze Age city roughly a thousand years earlier than the conventional period proposed for a Trojan War. The name was chronologically impossible from the beginning once the sequence was understood.

The discovery account is also disputed. Schliemann described his wife Sophia helping to remove the objects, but she was not at the site on the claimed day. David Traill argued that the group was assembled from separate finds. Donald Easton defended a genuine deposit while accepting serious problems in Schliemann's reporting. The composite question remains contested. The Early Bronze Age date does not.

Schliemann removed the collection from Ottoman territory, later gave it to Berlin, and Soviet forces carried it to Moscow in 1945. It now bears several modern histories of ownership and war.

Calling it Priam's Treasure turns metal into narrative before the visitor has read a date. The collection is important evidence for Troy II, exchange and elite wealth. It proves nothing about Priam, assuming a ruler behind that poetic name existed. The title also

affects ownership because a royal Homeric name makes the collection feel like the centre of Troy rather than one Early Bronze Age assemblage among several. The objects survived three thousand years. The label still managed to age them by the wrong millennium.

“Archaeology proved the Trojan War happened”

Archaeology proved that substantial settlements stood at Hisarlik, that Late Bronze Age Troy had impressive defences and wider occupation, and that Troy VIIa ended in destructive fire around the regional crisis of about 1200 BCE. It did not recover Homer's war as a complete event.

A destruction layer rarely identifies its attacker. Arrowheads and violent damage can strengthen the case for conflict, but they cannot name Agamemnon or establish ten years of siege. Troy VIIa may have fallen to Aegean attackers, local rivals, raiders connected with the wider collapse or a combination of pressures. The evidence does not choose a hero.

Hittite texts make the background stronger. Wilusa was a real western Anatolian kingdom, and Ahhiyawan power intervened in the region. A dispute over Wilusa is mentioned. That gives a possible historical seed to the Greek tradition without verifying Helen, Hector or the horse.

The serious position lies between triumph and dismissal. One conflict, or several conflicts, may have fed oral memory. Archaeology

has recovered the kind of city and political setting from which the tradition could grow. The distinction matters because a credible background can support serious historical inquiry without rewarding every detail inherited from later art and literature. It has not excavated the poem.

“Troy VIIa is definitely Homer’s Troy”

Troy VIIa is attractive because it reused the great defences of Troy VI and was destroyed by fire near the end of the Bronze Age. Dense housing and storage jars sunk into floors have been interpreted as signs of siege conditions. The combination looks persuasive because the desired ending is already known.

Each element permits other readings. Increased storage may reflect insecurity, population pressure or ordinary household practice. Fire and signs of violence do not identify the attackers. The date remains approximate. The city was less monumental than Troy VI, whose walls fit the epic description more comfortably but whose destruction was probably an earthquake.

This produced a revealing scholarly division. Dörpfeld preferred VI for grandeur. Blegen preferred VIIa for destruction. Popular reconstructions often combine both without warning, giving Priam the walls of one settlement and the death of another.

VIIa may be the strongest archaeological candidate for a conflict that entered the tradition. That is a reasonable hypothesis. It is not a street address for Hector. Homeric Troy is a poetic city built

from inherited descriptions and later performance. Even a future discovery of an Aegean attack would identify an event, not prove that one archaeological layer supplied every feature of the epic city. No single phase can be identical with it.

“The Iliad tells the story of the Trojan War”

The Iliad begins in the tenth year and covers a short period centred on Achilles' withdrawal and return. It ends with Hector's funeral. It does not narrate the judgement of Paris, Helen's departure, the first landing, Achilles' death, the wooden horse or the sack.

Those episodes belonged to the wider Trojan tradition. The Epic Cycle, most of it now lost, covered the causes and conclusion of the war. The Odyssey refers to the horse. Greek tragedy, vase painting, later mythography and Roman poetry developed other scenes. Modern retellings blend them into one continuous plot and leave Homer's name on the result.

The error changes how the poem is read. The Iliad is not failing to provide a complete campaign. It deliberately confines itself to a crisis within the Greek coalition and stops before victory. Its centre is rage, honour, command and mortality. Troy's fall remains certain but offstage.

The surviving masterpiece absorbed the lost library around it. Homer became responsible for events his poem assumes, avoids or never mentions. The misunderstanding also encourages adapt-

ations to rush past Hector's funeral towards the visual reward of a burning city, replacing the poem's chosen ending with the one it withheld. The Iliad grew larger in public memory by being remembered less accurately.

“The wooden horse was a real siege engine”

The horse is ancient. The Odyssey mentions it, the lost epics included it, and early art depicts it. Its historical mechanism is unknown.

Proposals have treated it as a covered siege device, a ship described through equine language, a symbol of cavalry, an earthquake memory linked to Poseidon or a ritual object later misunderstood. Each connects some evidence. None commands enough evidence to become the explanation.

The siege-engine theory feels sensible because ancient armies used machines and deception. It still starts with a poetic object and designs backwards. The ship theory uses genuine metaphorical links between horses and vessels but cannot show that a ship was the original event. The earthquake theory makes use of Poseidon's associations with horses and earthquakes, then risks treating mythology as a codebook.

The horse does not need a recovered blueprint to have historical force. It became the permanent image of Troy because the city participates in its own defeat by misreading a gift. The object compresses strategy, religious uncertainty and self-destruction

into one shape. A practical ram might have worked better at the wall. The strongest historical claim is therefore modest: the horse belonged to ancient storytelling about the fall and may preserve a transformed memory of deception. Its material form is unavailable. A practical ram might have worked better at the wall. It would have worked worse in memory.

“The Trojan War was Europe against Asia”

The map tempts later readers. Aegean forces attack a city on the Anatolian shore, so the war becomes the first round of West against East. Bronze Age identities do not fit the fixture.

Troy belonged to western Anatolian politics and had strong Aegean contacts. Hittite texts place Wilusa within networks of treaty and intervention. Ahhiyawan rulers acted across the same connected region. Pottery, marriage, migration, raiding and diplomacy crossed the line that later continents would harden.

The Iliad itself does not make Trojans a lesser civilisation. They worship comparable gods, share elite values and receive full emotional seriousness. Hector is not written as an alien barbarian. Later conflicts with Persia, Roman claims of Trojan descent and modern European politics sharpened the opposition because an ancient frontier was useful.

A Bronze Age attack from the Aegean may have occurred. That would still be conflict inside an interconnected eastern Mediterranean world, not a declaration by Europe against Asia. Using Troy

as the first battle of a permanent East-West war removes the alliances, trade and shared elite culture that made conflict possible in the first place. Continents arrived later and drafted the dead.

Use It

Troy is useful because it trains you to refuse a verdict that has been badly framed. The forced question is whether the Trojan War was true. The better questions carefully separate the mound, the Late Bronze Age political setting, the oral tradition, the surviving poems and the later uses of all of them. Once those are divided, certainty becomes possible in some places and impossible in others.

Begin with the layer test. Whenever archaeology is attached to a famous story, date each object before allowing the story to name it. Troy VI has monumental walls. Troy VIIa has the fiery destruction. Priam's Treasure comes from Troy II. Combining them creates a better exhibition and a worse historical city. The same rule applies to any site where a later narrative arrives before the stratigraphy.

Then use the claim ladder. Put statements in order from secure to speculative. Hisarlik is ancient Troy. Wilusa is probably the Hittite name for the same kingdom. Ahhiyawan involvement in western Anatolia is secure. A conflict over Wilusa occurred. A Mycenaean attack on Troy is plausible. Homer's coalition fought a ten-year war for Helen is a different claim. Do not make the top rung carry the weight of the bottom ones.

Use genre before extraction. The Iliad is epic poetry built around rage, honour and mortality. It selects speeches, duels, gods and named deaths because those forms make the argument work in

performance. It is poor practice to strip away whatever sounds poetic and call the residue history. Genre shapes what survives. A legal record, diplomatic letter, heroic poem and excavation report answer different questions.

Apply the version test to every complete myth. Which ancient source contains this episode? The horse is not in the Iliad. Aeneas's Roman destiny is not Homer's programme. Medieval accounts add characters and motives absent from early Greek tradition. A familiar plot may be a later composite whose parts were never presented together in antiquity.

Use the historical-background test without demanding plot confirmation. Hittite records can make conflict around Wilusa credible while leaving Hector untouched. A tradition may preserve the geography and scale of a problem while transforming cause, sequence and identity. This is common in collective memory. The responsible conclusion may be that something in this family of events happened, not that the most famous version won.

Then reverse the discovery story. Ask who knew the place, who owned the land, who supplied labour, who documented the trenches and who received the fame. Frank Calvert becomes visible as soon as the question changes. Schliemann remains important, but importance no longer requires solitary genius.

Excavation needs an irreversibility test. Digging creates knowledge by removing context. Confidence, money and speed can increase discovery and destruction together. Whenever evidence will be consumed by the method used to study it, documentation and re-

straint are part of the result. A dramatic find does not repay a poorly recorded layer.

Use the naming test on objects. Priam's Treasure acquired authority from a royal name before its date was understood. Once attached, the label outlived the correction. Names guide attention, funding and ownership. Ask what the object proves without the name. If the answer changes sharply, the label is doing argumentative work.

Apply the coalition test to commemoration. The Trojan War became a shared Greek expedition in later memory, although the political unity projected backwards was fragile or absent in the proposed period. Collective achievements are often assigned to the group that later needs an origin. Ask which later identity is being made older.

Then use the loser test. Rome adopted Trojan ancestry because defeat could be turned into moral capital and migration. A failed city provided suffering, antiquity and a reason to begin elsewhere. Modern institutions do the same when they frame loss as proof that later success was destined or deserved. The useful question is not whether the genealogy is factual. Ask what legitimacy it manufactures.

Reconstruction requires a seam test. Every model, map and film fills gaps. Where does excavation stop and design begin? A responsible reconstruction marks uncertainty through alternatives, shading or explicit language. An irresponsible one presents one possible roofline as recovered fact. Visual confidence often ex-

ceeds textual confidence because a half-built model looks like failure.

Use the effect test for myths. The wooden horse may be unverifiable as an object and fully verifiable as an influence. It shaped art, literature, political language and computer security. Historical reality includes what people did because of a story. Factual correspondence and causal effect are separate measures.

Apply the emotional-truth test with equal care. Priam and Achilles can reveal something exact about grief even if the meeting cannot be verified. That does not let emotional force certify historical occurrence. A moving scene may be excellent literature, strong evidence for values and no evidence that the conversation happened. Name the category before praising the truth.

Use the archive-absence test. Troy has produced no royal tablets comparable with Hattusa's archive. That silence may result from writing materials, destruction, excavation limits or different administrative practice. It restricts claims about Trojan government and language. It does not prove that the city lacked diplomacy because its neighbours wrote the letters.

Then use the scale test. A settlement can be regionally important without being a giant commercial capital. Public arguments often make Troy large because Homer sounds large, then use the reconstructed size to prove Homer. Ask what the measurement itself supports before allowing significance to become historicity.

Apply the fame test to evidence. Schliemann's gold is famous and chronologically unhelpful for the Trojan War. Grey pottery is visually modest and central to understanding daily life. The spectacular object often receives more interpretive work than it can perform, while ordinary material carries the sequence.

Use the incentive test on every source. A Hittite king writes to manage loyalty, an epic singer performs to hold an audience, a Roman poet gives empire an ancestry, and an excavator writes to secure authority and funding. Incentive does not make a source false. It tells you why some facts were selected, some silences preserved and some victories made neat.

Apply the translation test to ancient names and modern certainty. Wilusa to Ilios is a strong linguistic argument built from sound change, geography and documentary context. Alaksandu to Alexandros is an attractive resemblance with less historical force. Ask how many independent steps support the equation before a similar sound becomes the same person.

Then use the negative-space test. Epic names kings and champions because performance rewards them. Archaeology often preserves buildings and durable objects better than voices. Diplomatic archives record rulers who mattered to the state. The missing farmer, captive and labourer did not fail to exist. The sources were built to notice somebody else.

Use the counterfactual test before accepting a neat identification. Would the same wall, name or destruction look equally persuasive if the Iliad had not survived? If the answer is no, the poem is guid-

ing the interpretation. That may be useful, but it must be admitted. Evidence found by a question is not automatically evidence for the answer that inspired it. State the influence before weighing the result.

Finally, apply cultural stratigraphy. Roman Troy sits above Greek heroic cult, medieval Troy above Roman ancestry, and Schliemann's Troy above all three. Later versions reuse and damage earlier ones. Instead of searching for a pure original beneath contamination, date the interpretations and ask what each selected. Reception is evidence for the people doing the receiving.

Limits

Troy cannot become a general excuse for saying truth is layered and therefore unknowable. Some claims are strong. Hisarlik is the site. Priam's Treasure is too early. The Iliad does not contain the horse. Uncertainty should narrow claims, not flatten evidence into opinion.

Nor should caution erase the possible history behind epic. Wilusa, Ahhiyawa and Late Bronze Age destruction changed the debate for good reason. Oral traditions can carry names, places and political memories across generations. Transformation is not proof of invention from nothing.

The final limit is ownership. Troy is in Turkey and belongs materially to Anatolian heritage. It also belongs to Greek and Roman literary traditions and to later global culture. These relationships are dif-

ferent. None authorises removal, and none becomes stronger by pretending the others do not exist.

The one thing to keep

Whenever somebody says Troy has been proved or disproved, ask which Troy and which claim.

The mound is real. The verdict is built.

Terms

Achaeans

One of Homer's main names for the Greek forces at Troy. The term may preserve a connection with Ahhiyawa, but the linguistic and political equation is not a simple label match, and Homer does not describe a unified Greek nation in the modern sense.

Aeneas

A Trojan hero who survives the fall in Greek tradition. Roman writers made him the ancestor of Rome, converting Trojan defeat into imperial prehistory and giving Rome an antiquity that did not depend upon Greek victory.

Ahhiyawa

A Late Bronze Age power named in Hittite texts and widely connected with the Mycenaean Aegean. Its exact territorial and political form remains debated, including whether the term named one kingdom, a shifting coalition or a wider political sphere.

Alaksandu

A ruler of Wilusa who made a treaty with the Hittite king Muwatalli II. His name resembles Alexandros, another name for Paris, but the resemblance does not prove identity.

Anatolia

The large peninsula forming most of modern Turkey. Troy stood in its north-west, politically connected with Anatolian states and materially connected across the Aegean.

Bronze Age Collapse

The linked destructions and political breakdowns around 1200 BCE across the eastern Mediterranean. No single cause explains the whole crisis, which included the end of Troy VIIa.

Dardanelles

The strait connecting the Aegean with the Sea of Marmara. Troy stood near its entrance, giving the region strategic value without proving that the city controlled all passing trade.

Epic Cycle

A group of early Greek epics covering the wider Trojan War and its aftermath. Most are lost, but summaries, fragments and later retellings preserve episodes absent from the Iliad, including much of the war before and after Achilles' rage.

Formula

A repeated phrase shaped to fit epic metre, such as a standard name and epithet. Formulae supported oral composition and were creative tools, not signs of mechanical copying. A singer could combine inherited language differently according to scene, audience and performance.

Frank Calvert

The archaeologist and landowner who investigated Hisarlik before Schliemann and helped persuade him that it was Troy. Later discovery stories pushed Calvert to the margin.

Heinrich Schliemann

The wealthy excavator who made Hisarlik famous from the 1870s.

His work exposed major remains, misdated Troy II as Priam's city and destroyed important context.

Hisarlik

The mound in north-western Turkey identified as ancient Troy and Ilion. It contains successive settlements from the Early Bronze Age through Greek, Roman and later periods.

Iliad

The epic centred on Achilles' rage during a short period in the tenth year of the war. It ends with Hector's funeral, before the horse and sack.

Ilion

The Greek historical city built at Troy, also called Ilios. Roman writers used the Latin form Ilium. The name is closely connected with Hittite Wilusa.

Linear B

The script used for Mycenaean Greek palace administration. Its tablets record goods, personnel and offerings, not narrative history, and no surviving text describes a Trojan expedition. The archive reveals the palace economy while remaining silent about the famous war.

Lower city

The settlement outside Troy's Late Bronze Age citadel. Its size, density and defensive works have been central to debate over Troy's regional importance.

Mycenaeans

The palace societies of Late Bronze Age Greece. Hittite Ahhiyawa is widely associated with their world, though no archive identifies a united Greek expedition to Troy.

Oral-formulaic composition

The creation of epic in performance using inherited phrases, scenes and story patterns. It allowed continuity and variation across generations before the poems became stable texts. Preservation therefore occurred through repeated recomposition, not exact memorisation of one original script.

Priam's Treasure

Schliemann's name for Early Bronze Age metal finds from Troy II. The objects predate any plausible Homeric Priam by about a millennium, and their find circumstances remain disputed.

Stratigraphy

The study of archaeological layers and their sequence. At Troy it prevents walls, treasures and destructions from different centuries being combined into one convenient city. The method establishes what came before what, even when absolute dates remain approximate.

Troad

The region surrounding Troy in north-western Anatolia. Ancient heroic sites, settlements and routes made it a zone of archaeology, cult, politics and later pilgrimage.

Trojan Horse

The deceptive wooden object used to enter Troy in the wider epic tradition. It appears in the *Odyssey*, not the *Iliad*, and has no verified archaeological mechanism.

Troy VI

The monumental Late Bronze Age settlement with the famous sloping stone walls. It probably ended through earthquake around 1300 BCE, though details remain debated.

Troy VIIa

The settlement that reused Troy VI's defences and was destroyed by fire around 1200 BCE. It is a plausible setting for conflict, but its attackers are unknown.

Wilusa

A kingdom named in Hittite documents and widely identified with Troy or Ilios. Its treaties and disputes place Troy inside Late Bronze Age international politics, but the documents describe Hittite diplomacy rather than the characters or sequence of Greek epic.

Wilhelm Dörpfeld

The architect and archaeologist who refined Troy's stratigraphy after Schliemann. He recognised Troy VI as the imposing Late Bronze Age city and preferred it as Homer's candidate.

Carl Blegen

The archaeologist who led the University of Cincinnati excavations in the 1930s. His team refined the sequence and favoured Troy VIIa because of its violent destruction.

Hittites

The rulers of a major Late Bronze Age Anatolian empire centred at Hattusa. Their archives preserve the treaties and letters that place Wilusa inside contemporary politics.

Troy IX

The Roman city of Ilium, developed through imperial patronage and Trojan ancestry claims. Its buildings belong to the site's history but are far later than any Bronze Age war.

Tawagalawa Letter

A Hittite diplomatic letter that refers to an earlier dispute over Wilusa involving Ahhiyawa. It supports a historical conflict background but gives no account resembling Homer's war.

Go Deeper

The narrative: Eric H. Cline, *The Trojan War: A Very Short Introduction*. Start here for a compact, sceptical and readable account of the whole problem. Cline moves among Homer, Hittite documents, the Bronze Age collapse and the excavation campaigns without pretending that one discipline has solved the others. The book is strongest when it separates a plausible conflict from the ten-year narrative and explains why Troy VIIa is evidence for destruction rather than a certificate naming the attackers. Read it to establish the range of defensible positions before entering the larger arguments. Its brevity is useful because it makes disagreements visible rather than burying them beneath one preferred reconstruction. Then compare its cautions with a more confident account and notice where interpretation enters.

The primary source: Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Emily Wilson. Read the poem that popular culture keeps replacing with the complete war. Wilson's 2023 translation is direct, metrically controlled and alert to status, slavery and bodily violence. Watch the opening quarrel over captive women, Hector's meeting with Andromache, the treatment of the dead and the final encounter between Priam and Achilles. The horse is absent because the poem is not a campaign summary. Its subject is what heroic excellence does to the people and coalition that depend upon it. Read Book 24 slowly: the poem chooses a returned body, not a captured city, as its landing. The ending is the most efficient test of what the poem thinks it has been about.

The argument: Trevor Bryce, *The Trojans and Their Neighbours*.

Use Bryce to move Troy out of an isolated Greek frame and into western Anatolia. The book explains Wilusa, Hittite authority, Ahhiyawan intervention and the local states surrounding the Troad. It is especially useful for understanding how little the familiar Europe-Asia opposition tells us about Late Bronze Age politics. Bryce is cautious about the war while taking the historical setting seriously, which makes the book a strong corrective to accounts that treat Hittite names as either final proof or irrelevant coincidence. Pair it with the translated Ahhiyawa texts when you want to see how much interpretation sits behind each confident proper name. This is the book for the political world the Greek tradition largely leaves offstage.

How we know: Charles Brian Rose, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Troy*.

Rose gives the most useful single history of the site across its full duration. Bronze Age settlement, Greek sanctuary, Hellenistic federation, Roman ancestry, excavation and later reception appear in one archaeological sequence without being collapsed into one Troy. The book is detailed enough to expose how much public retellings omit and measured enough to flag disputed claims about the lower city and historical war. Read it when a reconstruction, museum label or confident documentary makes uncertainty disappear too neatly. It also restores Greek and Roman Ilion, which popular accounts often sacrifice to the Bronze Age question. Its later chapters show that Troy remained historically active long after any possible war.

Notes and Sources

Dating convention

Bronze Age dates: Dates for Troy's prehistoric phases remain approximate and vary slightly among excavation teams and syntheses. This book uses rounded dates close to Rose, Bryce and Cline, generally placing Troy VI around 1750–1300 BCE and the destruction of Troy VIIa around 1200 BCE.

Homeric dating: The Iliad is treated as a monumental product of a long oral tradition, reaching a form close to the surviving poem in the late eighth or early seventh century BCE. The process of textual stabilisation continued after composition, so one publication date would misrepresent the evidence.

Section 1

Four Troys: The distinction among archaeological site, Late Bronze Age polity, epic city and later reception follows the method used across Cline, Bryce, Rose and Burgess. The categories overlap but should not be treated as interchangeable.

Troy VI and VIIa: Dörpfeld favoured Troy VI because of its architecture; Blegen favoured VIIa because of its destruction. Modern accounts treat VIIa as a plausible conflict horizon while rejecting certainty about attackers or direct identity with Homeric Troy.

Wilusa and Ahhiyawa: The identification of Wilusa with Troy is the dominant view, supported by linguistics and geography. Ahhiyawa is widely linked with the Mycenaean Aegean, although its precise political extent remains disputed. See Beckman, Bryce and Cline, *The Ahhiyawa Texts*.

The Iliad's scope: The poem covers a short period in the tenth year and ends with Hector's funeral. Events such as Achilles' death, the horse and the sack belonged to the wider Epic Cycle and later tradition. See Burgess and West.

Section 2

Trojan in computing: The modern technical term derives from the logic of the wooden horse: malicious code is admitted under a deceptive appearance. The point is reception rather than evidence for an ancient object.

Roman ancestry: Virgil systematised a much older association between Aeneas and Italy. Roman political use of Trojan descent affected Ilion materially through patronage and privilege. See Rose and Virgil.

Limits of scepticism: The book rejects both direct historicisation and automatic dismissal. Cline, Bryce and Latacz differ in confidence, but all treat the Hittite material and archaeology as changing the historical question rather than closing it.

Section 3

Hisarlik as a tell: Troy's numbered levels are scholarly divisions within a complicated sequence. Recent excavation has added an earlier Troy O, another reminder that the standard nine-city scheme is a tool rather than the mound's natural form.

The lower city debate: Korfmann's team argued for a large lower settlement and defensive ditch. Frank Kolb and others challenged the urban and commercial interpretation. Rose provides a measured synthesis and avoids turning disputed scale into proof of Homer.

Alaksandu: The Alaksandu Treaty is usually dated to the reign of Muwatalli II. The resemblance between Alaksandu and Alexandros is suggestive, not identification. Beckman, Bryce and Cline provide translation and commentary.

The Tawagalawa Letter: The letter refers retrospectively to a dispute over Wilusa between Hatti and Ahhiyawa. It is evidence for international contention involving Wilusa, not a record of the Trojan War.

Oral composition: The formulaic and performance-based character of Homeric epic is standard scholarship following Parry and Lord, refined by later work. The Cambridge Guide to Homer and Burgess summarise how traditional language permits preservation through change.

Mixed historical horizons: The Homeric world contains features from different periods. This does not allow every anomaly to be assigned confidently to the Bronze Age or Iron Age. The point is stratification, not a complete archaeological decoding of the poem.

Captive women: The Iliad's opening dispute concerns women seized in war and allocated as status-bearing prizes. Modern romantic language can obscure the coercive system. Wilson's translation and the Greek text keep the material facts visible.

Priam and Achilles: The meeting in Iliad 24 is treated as the poem's moral turn without claiming modern humanitarianism. It suspends violence through shared recognition of mortality and paternal grief.

Calvert and Schliemann: Susan Heuck Allen reconstructs Calvert's contribution and the later distribution of credit. Schliemann's importance remains large, but the lone-discoverer story is false.

Priam's Treasure dispute: Traill argued that the treasure was a composite and Schliemann's account fraudulent. Easton defended a single archaeological deposit while acknowledging problems. The assemblage's Troy II date is not disputed.

Alexander at Troy: Arrian and Plutarch describe Alexander honouring Achilles and using armour from Athena's temple. The reports are later and shaped by heroic comparison, but the visit and political use of Troy are well established.

Trojan genealogy: Rose traces the development of Trojan ancestry from Rome through medieval European claims. These stories are evidence for political identity and reception, not biological descent.

Section 4

Early Troy: Rose provides the principal synthesis for Troy I–V and the longer settlement history. The book resists treating these phases as a prelude to Homer because their exchange networks and social changes matter independently.

Earthquake at Troy VI: The earthquake interpretation rests on structural damage and remains the leading account. Warfare or human disturbance around the end of the phase cannot be excluded in every context.

Destruction of VIIa: Fire and evidence of violence make conflict plausible. Exact dating and attacker identity remain open, especially within the wider crisis around 1200 BCE. Cline places Troy within the regional collapse rather than isolating one war.

Greek and Roman Ilium: Rose is the main source for the city's sanctuary, civic growth, Hellenistic association, Roman patronage and development as a centre of heroic tourism.

Medieval transmission: Burgess and studies of Homeric reception show that western medieval Troy often travelled through Latin

summaries, Dares, Dictys and romance rather than direct access to the Greek Iliad.

Modern excavation sequence: Schliemann, Dörpfeld, Blegen and Korfmann each changed the preferred archaeological Troy. Their methods and expectations demonstrate why improved evidence does not remove interpretation.

How we know: The four-source scheme distinguishes archaeology, Hittite texts, epic and later reception. It is methodological rather than a claim that the bodies of evidence are equally extensive or reliable for every question.

Section 5

Schliemann and discovery: Allen documents Calvert's prior identification and work. Schliemann transformed excavation and public knowledge but did not discover an unknown mound alone.

Treasure chronology: The Troy II date makes the name Priam's Treasure untenable regardless of the debate between Traill and Easton about the assemblage's find circumstances.

Archaeology and proof: Cline and Bryce support a historically credible background and reject the claim that the epic campaign has been archaeologically verified.

VIIa as candidate: VIIa is best described as a plausible phase connected with conflict that may have fed tradition. Identifying it directly with Priam's city exceeds the evidence.

The horse: The Odyssey and Epic Cycle establish the horse within ancient tradition. Modern historical explanations remain hypotheses with no archaeological confirmation.

Europe and Asia: Bryce places Troy within Anatolian politics and Aegean interaction. The civilisational opposition belongs largely to later receptions of the war.

Section 6

The claim ladder: The hierarchy of statements reflects the different evidential confidence assigned in Bryce, Cline, Rose and Beckman, Bryce and Cline. It is designed to stop secure context being used as proof for weaker narrative detail.

Cultural stratigraphy: Rose's account of Greek, Roman and later Troy supports treating reception as successive, datable reuse. The metaphor does not imply that literature can be excavated by the same methods as soil.

Ownership: The modern location, Ottoman excavation history and post-war movement of Priam's Treasure create distinct legal and cultural claims. No single ancient literary tradition settles modern possession.

Section 7

Terms and spellings: Greek, Hittite and modern names have variant spellings. This glossary uses forms common in current English

scholarship and distinguishes script, language, polity and archaeological phase where popular accounts often combine them.

Section 8

Selection: The four books have separate jobs. Cline is the concise narrative, Wilson the primary literary encounter, Bryce the Anatolian and Hittite context, and Rose the archaeological and reception history. Latacz offers a more affirmative historical argument and is listed in the bibliography for comparison.

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