Most people grow up having read parts of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* either for pleasure or a high school English assignment. Recently, the story of the Trojan War has recaptured audiences with the blockbuster hit *Troy*—although this may have been because of the star of the movie. Today most people consider the Trojan War to be an actual historical event, but this has not always been the case. In 1871, Heinrich Schliemann set out to discover Troy, and in doing so, redefined history and archaeology as we know it.

The *Iliad* is one of the most recognizable poems of all time. The story of Helen, Paris, Hector, Priam, Achilles, and Agamemnon is one that is at least somewhat familiar to anyone who has ever taken a history class.

We search for Troy because of Homer. Homer’s *Iliad*, the story of the siege of Troy by an army of Greeks (or Achaeans, as Homer called them) under the great king Agamemnon, is the wellspring of Western literature. The characters resonate still, instantly recognizable in our imaginations—Agamemnon, Achilles, Hector, Helen, Paris, Priam and Hecuba. It is the very first poem that is distinctly European. Outside of religion, it is one of our oldest stories.

Today most people consider the accounts of Homer to be factual accounts, but could he have been writing one of the world’s most well-known myths? Throughout history, civilizations have accepted the Trojan War as fact, even harkening back to Trojan roots and ideals.

Twenty-five hundred years ago commentators on the *Iliad* believed that the Trojan War had occurred and, further, that they understood fairly well its geographic setting. By Strabo’s time, specific descriptions and commentaries were written on Trojan topography. But by the nineteenth century A.D. the opinion of some scholars had swung against the very existence of Troy.

As we learned in class, many scholars began to believe that Troy had never existed because of the writings of George Grote. In 1856, Grote wrote that the Homeric Corpus was just a collection of legends which had never really existed and there was no ancient Greek civilization. Much before Grote, Pascal even went as far as to say “Homer wrote a romance; for nobody can believe that Troy
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and Agamemnon had any more existence than the golden apples of the Hesperides. He had no intention to write history, but only to amuse us”. Referring to the eleventh task of Hercules, Pascal is saying that it is just as far-fetched an idea to believe that Greek army sailed all the way to Troy to recapture Helen, and whose success was only due to the super-human Achilles, as it is to believe that Hercules could trick Atlas into stealing apples belonging to Zeus from a garden guarded by nymphs and a dragon with 100 heads. This belief that the Iliad was only a myth was accepted until the 1870s when Heinrich Schliemann successfully uncovered the remains of the ancient city of Troy.

Manfred Korfmann, the Director of excavations at Troy and a professor of archaeology at the University of Tübingen provides an interesting explanation as to why there may have been doubt as to the authenticity of Troy and the Trojan War. In “Was There a Trojan War?”, Korfmann points out that although Heinrich Schliemann’s work at Hisarlik caused many scholars to “consider the battle between Greeks and Trojans to be more than Homeric fantasy”, there are those who disagree. He argues that “some scholars...still cast doubt on the notion of a Historical Trojan War, stressing that our belief in its existence is based ultimately on the creation of Homer, who was a poet, not a historian”. However, he believes these beliefs are unfounded. Korfmann says, “Troy appears to have been destroyed around 1180 B.C. ...probably by a war the city lost” and there is much evidence to confirm these assumptions including human remains and weapons; however, Korfmann admits “this does not mean the conflict was the war”. The main reason that many scholars do not believe there was a Trojan War is because they believe that Troy was not worth fighting over, but according to Korfmann, it may very well have been. Based on the excavations that have been done, it appears that Troy was very large with a citadel unparalleled by any in the surrounding area as well as southeast Europe, it controlled access to trade and waterways by holding a key position in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, and had faced conflict and war several times before. According to Anatolian specialists, Troy, called Wilusa during the Late Bronze Age, was “powerful enough to conclude treaties with the Hittite Empire; even the Egyptians seem to have been familiar with the city. Furthermore, according to Hittite records, there were political and military tensions around Troy precisely during the thirteenth and early twelfth centuries B.C.—the supposed time of Homer’s Trojan War.

Perhaps the main reason there is doubt about the Trojan War is that the Iliad is somewhat vague, mostly because “Homer took for granted that his audience knew a war had been fought for what was alternately called Ilios or Troy” and that while Troy had already been destroyed by Homer’s time, people would have still been able to see its impressive remains.
The name Heinrich Schliemann has become synonymous with the names Hisarlik and Troy. Fascinated with the Homeric Corpus, he dedicated his life to finding the lost city. “When he was eight years old he was captivated by the stories of the Trojan War and resolved that one day he would excavate Troy. He devoted the early part of his life to commerce in order to earn enough money to be able to realize his childhood dream”\(^{14}\). Schliemann was the entrepreneur’s entrepreneur. He first made his fortune during the 1850s in California during the Gold Rush; however he was forced to leave due to accusations of unbalanced scales. He then continued to build his fortune as an arms dealer in the Crimean War\(^ {15}\). With this, Schliemann was on his way to being able to excavate Troy. Finally, “in his mid-forties he went to Paris to study archaeology”\(^ {16}\). In order to familiarize himself with the ancient city of Troy, Schliemann’s life revolved around Homer’s *Iliad*.

During the last thirty-four years of his life, Schliemann read the *Iliad* avidly. It was his bible, the book he consulted at all hours of the day, the fountainhead of nearly all the thoughts that ever occurred to him, and no single part of it was to be preferred to any other\(^ {17}\). Schliemann believed, without a shadow of a doubt, that Troy was real. Furthermore, Schliemann described his wife Sophia as “an Athenian lady, who is an enthusiastic admirer of Homer, and knows almost the whole of the ‘Iliad’ by heart”\(^ {18}\). The two combined were well qualified to search for the remains of Homer’s fabled city, at least in the literary sense.

Schliemann came to believe that the lost city of Troy could be found in Asia Minor on a hill named Hisarlik belonging to the Turks. The “Turkish name of *Hissarlik* [means] ‘fortress’ or ‘acropolis’”\(^ {19}\), implying a city which was a formerly a great and powerful polis. While he has taken credit for finding Hisarlik, the idea was probably not his own. Although the claimed that it was his mission to prove “that the site of Troy must necessarily be identical with the site of that town which, throughout all antiquity and down to its complete destruction at the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century A.D., was called *Ilium*”\(^ {20}\), the idea that this city, located at Hisarlik, was the ancient city of Troy extends far beyond Schliemann.

As much as a century before Schliemann’s discoveries, in 1768, Baron Johann Hermann—a friend and student of J.J. Winckelmann, the German scholar and founder of the study of Classical art—while traveling in the Troad, proposed that Troy should be sought at Hisarlik\(^ {21}\). Then, closer to the time of Schliemann, in 1863, Frank Calvert began his first dig at Hisarlik\(^ {22}\). Although Calvert began digging at Hisarlik, he did not have the funds to continue. On August 15, 1868, due to the delay of his ship, Heinrich
Schliemann visited Frank Calvert. Calvert thus finally met the man about whom he could only have dreamed. Standing before him was not simply a wealthy man, with available capital and an interest in antiquities, but rather an ambitious and energetic millionaire traveling with Homer in hand in search of Troy—whose walls, according to Calvert’s own firm conviction, were hidden in the depths of the hill he owned. In the course of talking with his guest, however, it soon became quite clear to Calvert that this wealthy man, who could quote from memory whole songs from the Iliad in ancient Greek and express himself fluently in many languages, did not know of the location of Hisarlik and had only visited Pınarbaği... It is remarkable that the first mention of Hisarlik in Schliemann’s travel journal was dated 14 August, and the name of the place was given in a somewhat distorted form—Hessarlyk or Haserlyk. This is easily explained by the fact that Schliemann, on first arriving, did not attach any particular significance to this geographical spot, previously unknown to him, but instead had concentrated all his attention on Bali Daği near Pınarbaği. The traveler only learned of the existence of this significant hill for the first time from his hospitable new acquaintance, Frank Calvert.

Calvert was very aware of the fact that he had given the location of Troy to Schliemann, although he probably did not expect to receive no credit for discovering the location of Troy. In his journal, Calvert wrote,

In 1868 Dr. Schliemann first visited the Troad. He asked me my opinion as to the true site of Troy, admitting that he had not as yet given any attention to the problem. I, on my part, frankly communicated to him the results of my researches and the grounds on which I had arrived at the conviction, regarding the location of Homer’s Troy, that if Troy ever existed, it must have been at Hisarlik.

If the idea that Troy could be found at Hisarlik had existed for over a century at least, why is it that no one had considered it before and attempted to dig there? One major reason is the modern location of Hisarlik. As we have learned, most ancient cities were within a short distance from the coast. Troy would have been no different, relying on the sea for food, transportation, and protection. In the modern world, Hisarlik is much farther from the coast than it would have been around the time of the Trojan War. Note the location of the ancient coast as compared to the modern coast. With this new information, Schliemann was ready to start digging for Troy. Schliemann, using his knowledge of history and the Homeric Corpus, was able to prove “that the distance, at which Homer considers his

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Troy to be from the Hellespont, is more than four times less than the distance of Bounarbashi from the sea-coast at the Trojan epoch." In other words, the location of Troy is now four times farther from the coast than it used to be.

On October 10, 1871, Schliemann left the Dardanelles and arrived in Troy on October 11. Prior to this, Schliemann had bought the field surrounding Hisarlik from the Turkish government for 3000 piasters (about 60 British pounds), a relatively small amount to pay for such a valuable piece of land.

Upon arriving at Hisarlik, Schliemann described it as being upon a plateau lying on an average about 80 feet above the Plain, and descending very abruptly on the north side. Its north-western corner is formed by a hill about 26 feet higher still, which is about 705 feet in breadth and 984 feet in length, and from its imposing situation and natural fortifications this hill of Hisarlik seems specially suited to be the Acropolis of the town.

Modern day archaeologist J. Fleischman describes his conception of Hisarlik and Troy by saying “Hisarlik is a small place, a sandy stone-strewn ridge cut up into gullies and hummocks. Troy, however, is immense. Its story sprawls across cultures, time and geography. Few places on Earth have so much heft in the human imagination.” As far as the location of Troy as being on a hill rather than a plain like the surrounding area, Schliemann provides the following explanation:

As it is an established fact that hills which consist of pure earth and are brought under the plough gradually disappear...so it is equally a fact, that hills on which, in the course of thousands of years, new buildings have been continually erected upon the ruins of former buildings, gain very considerably in circumference and height. The hill of Hisarlik furnishes the most striking proof of this.

Schliemann then began digging. He started with eight workers, which soon increased to 74 workers. He instructed his workers to dig until they found ashes or burned remains in accordance with the legendary destruction of Troy by fire found in the Iliad. Unfortunately, this was not the best approach to excavate Troy; however, archaeology was a relatively new science and the techniques had not been perfected. Furthermore, Schliemann’s only goal was to find Troy, nothing else. As Schliemann was digging through the different layers, he just got rid of what he dug through saying, “I have of course had all theses foundations removed as, being within my excavation, they were of no use and would only have been in the way.” To him the other layers were simply debris; unfortunately, this destroyed years of priceless historic artifacts. Schliemann dug through several layers of history, thus creating “Schliemann’s Trench”, a gaping hole that runs through the country side.
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However, Schliemann’s workers found the ashes they were instructed to look for. Based on modern classifications, Troy is located at level VII and there is proof that “settlement VIIa was almost wholly destroyed by fire”34. Over the next five years Schliemann made his most important discoveries yet, discoveries that helped anchor his theory of an ancient city of Troy true to the Homeric Corpus, and an ancient Greek civilization previously refuted by Grote.

His theory received dramatic confirmation at the end of May 1873, when, with the help of his wife Sophia, he discovered a large treasure on the city wall, which he called ‘Priam’s Treasure’. In 1876 at Mycenae, again with the help of his wife, Schliemann excavated gold masks and masses of other jewellery from the mud of the Shaft Graves. In one of the graves he found a mummy wearing a gold mask, which he ripped and, finding the remains of a human face underneath, telegraphed the King of Greece, ‘I have gazed on the face of Agamemnon’ and it is still known by that name35. Schliemann was right after all. He had said, “I never doubted that I should find the Pergamus of Priam in the depths of this hill”36. No discovery at Troy since then could outweigh this, especially in the eyes of Schliemann whose life-long dream had finally been realized.

(Above left: “Priam’s Treasure”, Above right: “The Mask of Agamemnon”)

Unfortunately for Schliemann, “the riches [he] found and touted as the Trojan king’s turned out to be a thousand years too old for Homer’s tale”37. Regardless, Schliemann at least proved the existence of an ancient civilization.

Although Schliemann was able to unearth hard, historic evidence to prove the existence of Troy, many people still doubted him, largely due to his character and personality. As mentioned before, Schliemann had to leave California during the Gold Rush due to accusations of unbalanced scales. This is quite representative of the way many people perceived the very nature of Heinrich Schliemann. Could his nature discredit his work, or was he simply an over-zealous discoverer? Caroline Moorehead takes this question into account, providing an answer generally accepted in the academic world.

Heinrich Schliemann, one of the acknowledged fathers of modern archaeology was a strange man. Few dispute the fact that his achievements led to a new chapter in the exploration of the ancient world; that, almost single-handedly, he opened the early pre-Hellenic civilizations to students of antiquity. Yet archaeologists are still quarrelling, a hundred years after his death, as to whether or not his personality was so flawed that all his work needs to be reappraised. Schliemann told
lies, certainly; he fabricated events; he introduced characters into places where they had never been; he rounded and perfected his reminiscences. But whether he did so more than many other driven and self-made men of his day, whether hid embellishments actually distorted his contribution to archaeology seems improbable.38

Contrary to Moorehead, some still consider Schliemann’s personality to be too flawed to be taken with full credibility. “Some maintained, for instance, that the artifacts unearthed at Mycenae and Tiryns belonged to the Byzantine period. Others said that Schliemann was a charlatan who had salted his sites with purchased or manufactured pieces”39. Vladimir Tolstikov and Mikhail Treister give the most well-rounded portrayal of others’ perceptions of Heinrich Schliemann saying: in the eyes of some he was a selfless archaeologist-enthusiast, preserving throughout his life, so beset by controversies, a childlike faith in Homer and a determination to prove the historicity of Troy. Others see in Schliemann no more than an excavator-delittante obsessed by a mania for treasure hunting, who destroyed by incompetence and arrogance a significant portion of the remains of the historical Troy.40

Just like any other public figure, Schliemann had his admirers, showing unquestionable respect and reverence; he also had his critics, those who searched for flaws in his work and character. All in all, Schliemann’s work at Hisarlik, whether respectable or not, proved there was an ancient Greek civilization and, more particularly, proved the authenticity of the Homeric Troy.

The ancient city of Troy is a significant discovery for history. Since Schliemann’s discoveries, archaeologists have continued to dig to Hisarlik, uncovering new layers and new clues to ancient civilizations. In fact, “few comparable ancient sites have been so extensively and so searchingly excavated as Hissarlik. After Calvert’s initial scratching of the surface in 1865, Schliemann carried out seven major campaigns of digging, besides several minor operations, between 1870 and 1890”41. Heinrich Schliemann died in 1890, but his name will live on in history as the man who discovered Troy.42 Since his death, most criticism of his work has subsided to praise, disregarding his destruction of several layers of history, but “clearly it should not be forgotten that Schliemann began his excavations when archaeology as a science was taking its very first steps”.43 Schliemann’s primary goal was to find Troy and archaeological techniques had not been perfected to what they are today; the combination of these two factors may have caused Schliemann not to fully realize or understand the importance of the layers of “debris” that he was discarding. David Traill asserts that those who still criticize Schliemann for his techniques are non-professionals; the response of professional architects is that “it is anachronistic to criticize Schliemann for not
showing the painstaking care and circumspection that are expected of archaeologists today.” Ultimately, Schliemann should be praised for his work, however primitive it may have been.

Schliemann claimed, rightly, to have opened up a whole new world for archaeology. The gold jewellery he unearthed at Mycenae bore eloquent testimony to a society of remarkable wealth, skill, and sophistication that had inhabited Greece a thousand years before Socrates. Before Schliemann, no one had dreamed of its existence. Unquestionably, these are great and lasting achievements.

Indeed, Schliemann’s achievements provided unimaginable contributions to the archaeological world, but more importantly, the historical world.

Today, most people consider the story of Troy found in the Iliad to be a factual account of a historic event due to the work of Heinrich Schliemann. Schliemann has gone down in history for his work at Hisarlik. While there may have been flaws in his techniques and character, Schliemann fulfilled a life-long dream of uncovering the ancient city of Troy. While he may have gotten the idea that Troy was located at Hisarlik from others, particularly Frank Calvert, Schliemann carried at the first successful dig there. Schliemann provided both the fields of archaeology and history with major contributions, most importantly, Schliemann was able to prove George Grote and several others wrong who said there was no Troy or an ancient Greek civilization. Schliemann proved that Troy existed, true to the Homeric Corpus, and rewrote history books with proof of an ancient Greek world.

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