

Barry Strauss. *The Trojan War: A New History*. New York: 2007. Simon & Schuster. 258pp

The Trojan War invokes images of warriors clashing in romanticized combat where the combatants, despite knowing their fates, heroically face death in return for immortal glory. Yet, behind the glamour of Hollywood movies and stage dramas that permeate our modern culture, the Trojan War occurred in what is now Turkey around 3200 years ago. Much of what we know of this war comes from a mixture of Ancient Greek sources and archeological discovery. Strauss argues that within this combination of poetry and pottery the modern world can grasp a better understanding of the events as well as find more truth in the Homeric version of the conflict than previously held to be believable. Strauss mixes the Homeric stories of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with the known history of the era providing the proper imagery to witness the events surrounding the fall of Troy unfolding.

Within the preface, Strauss provides a brief background of the Ancient Greek world and the impact that archeology has had on research as well as our understanding of that world. The intent is established early that Strauss will combine the poetic and historical sources from Ancient Greece with the archeology of not just Troy, but of the whole of the Bronze Age. Homer is not the lone source for the events of the Trojan War. Within the works known as the 'Epic Cycle,' a collection of poems written in Archaic Greece, six poems, *Cypria*, *Aethiops*, *Little Iliad*, *Iliupersis*, *Nosti*, and *Telegony*, provide aspects of the Trojan War not touched upon by Homer. Moreover, Herodotus and Thucydides both comment upon the Trojan War in their works. Strauss takes all of these sources into account to provide the narrative of his history of Troy.

Strauss' work was first published in 2006, and relies heavily on the more recent excavations of Troy than those digs of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century's. He

cites the archeological effort of 1988 going forward as changing what we know of the scope of the city and its fate during the time period that fits Homer's war. Troy rested between the empire of the Hittites and the world of Mycenaean Greece. The argument put forth shows Troy as having more an Anatolian style than Mycenaean. Anatolia was more advanced and sophisticated than the Greek world at this time. Strauss even refers to the Greeks as the 'Vikings of the Bronze Age.' (2) The political climate of the Ancient Greek/Near East relations exposes the threats the Greece provided to Troy. As a trading power, Troy enjoyed wealth and prosperity. The Mycenaean Greeks most assuredly coveted that wealth and status. Strauss validates that too often in the past the Homeric version of events has been dismissed, yet the words of Homer echo what we know of the ways of the Bronze Age derived from archeological evidence as well as corroborated by sources from around the Near East.

Strauss' assertion that the Homeric version be taken, not so much more literally, but at face value for their description of the character of kings and the social mores of those in the Bronze Age are strengthened with the known evidence from the region. The war was fought somewhere between 1230 and 1180 BCE. Strauss argues for a more precise date range of 1210 to 1180 BCE, citing the abandonment of surrounding cities around 1200 BCE. While the introduction prepares the reader for an academic journey into the Bronze Age, the following chapters evolve into the story of the characters from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. This method of relating the story of Homer as the framework for the history while using the known evidence of the Bronze Eastern Mediterranean not only makes for a fascinating read, but one that non-historians could grasp and indulge in as well.

The story of the Trojan War, according to the sources, begins with Helen, wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta. Bronze Age queens held considerable sway at court in Anatolia.

While the abstract notions of war, such as justice, security, etc., are popular causes for modern war, in the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean politics and war were more often more personal in nature. Strauss connects this to declarations and inscriptions of Bronze Age kings to show the personification of war. (18) Around 1280, Troy allies itself and becomes a vassal state of the Hittites. However, during the next century, the power of the Hittite waned while the strength of Mycenaean Greece ascended. While trade routes, wealth, and resources have always been the true nature of war, we see Bronze Age propaganda exploiting honor and faith as causes. "Helen was not the cause but merely the occasion of the war." (28) Throughout Bronze Age Egypt and the Near East, warfare was driven by the kings and their personal desires and popularity. Kings who lost at battle or lost face to enemies would not remain kings long. The culture of the Bronze Age matches the Homeric versions of the Trojan War.

Strauss introduces the characters of the Greek force with a mix of the Homeric descriptions and that what we know of Bronze Age warriors kings. The Mycenaean force enjoyed a sizable technological naval advantage with their use of the galley. These rowed ships were fast and effective in the use of naval combat. While the war was fought entirely in the region in and surrounding Troy, supply lines were an important concern for the invading Greek. By controlling the seas, the Greeks were able to be more easily resupplied. They also were able to create havoc in raids on the islands between Greece and Troy. The shields, long spears, and galleys used by Mycenaean warriors provided for a relative easy landing on the mainland and the establishment of a beachhead. Moreover, of the few warships in the Trojan fleet, none were of the quality of the Greeks and the Trojans were horsemen not 'sea-goers.' History has shown that even small nations may control vast areas if a strong naval presence is maintained.

Strauss explains the nature of Bronze Age warfare and the likely atmosphere of the two sides as well as the tactics and rituals of war consistent with the era. A custom among the Hittites had them hosting the enemy's gods at a ritual meal where blame is laid on the aggressive enemy and their gods. (50) Prior to the arrival of the Greek warships on the horizon, Troy knew of their advance through their allies and a system of watchers and lookouts that used fire towers to communicate and provide warning. To counter the Trojan chariots and archers, the Greeks employed a primitive version of the phalanx. In typical Bronze Age bravado, the sources speak of the combat deeds of the heroes and virtually nothing of the common soldier. Despite the early warning system of the Trojans, the Greeks established their beachhead and made camp.

Strauss reminds the reader that while Homeric tradition places the length of the war at near a decade, the actual duration would have been considerably shorter. Yet, the implication may be that the war took longer than the typical Bronze Age struggle. Ancient Near Eastern etiquette demanded that a king lay down a formal challenge, thus Menelaus and Odysseus' original journey into Troy. It was considered quite unmanly to start a war by sneak attack. (70) Civil war 'lurked' in the Near East as well as in Greece. The unrest of the citizenry would eventually explode and acts of unnecessary wars were heavy matters. (72) The backdrop of the Trojan War is a period of great social upheaval. Strauss reminds the reader that only a few years are needed to show great swings in the fortune of nations; such as the difference between Japan in 1940 and 1945. Troy, being a position of defensive strength, did not fight often enough for Greek satisfaction, nor did they fight far from their walls until towards the end of the conflict. Late Bronze Age warriors knew three ways to conquer a fortified city; assault, siege, or ruse. (76) The Greeks tried assault and no evidence of siege weaponry has been discovered. The

Trojans would have assured the Greeks little time for the construction of siege weapons. In the end, if the sources are to be believed, a ruse would win the day.

The first half of the Strauss work reads as a history supplemented by the ancient sources. He speaks, and correctly so, that the Trojans sought to defeat an enemy army, yet the invading Greeks employed a strategy of total war, sacking neighboring cities and ravaging the countryside and Troy's allies. Beginning the second half of the work, Strauss begins to tell more the story of Homer and supplements this with archeological evidence and our knowledge of Bronze Age culture. This change in direction becomes necessary if we are to understand the why of the war and the nature of its course. Yet, the actions of the combatants must be measured with a grain of salt. The lack of external evidence of the names of the principle characters creates a situation where the victors provide the only source. Insights are still provided to the how of Bronze Age warfare and the use of famous characters allows the imagery to easily paint itself within the mind's eye.

Intermingled with the Homeric story of Troy are insights to the Bronze Age warrior and his mentality. Strauss explores the nature of the rift between Achilles and Agamemnon over the spoils of war and honor. It is also pointed out that the Bronze Age warrior, much like those in the *Iliad*, not only wept openly but was expected to do so. One on one combat was a Bronze Age practice meant to minimize loss of life and resources. It was used to settle disputes and conflicts in an attempt to quickly return to normal life, which in itself was difficult enough. While weaponry and tactics are addressed by Strauss, his explanations of Bronze Age literature support the Homeric descriptions of the great one on one combat between named heroes that would exist and provide a resting period for the tired armies. Within his examination of tactics, Strauss decries the lack of Trojan guerilla tactics and how Bronze Age records show that while such

tactics did not fit the heroic propaganda of the literature, they surely occurred with regularity. The old saying goes, 'all's fair in love and war.'

The importance of religion cannot be understated when discussing Bronze Age society. Strauss sees the Homeric version of events as supporting that notion. The warfare of the day witnessed the prominence of seers and religion as well as the influence they had over the kings. The slain, but self-absorbed, Hector became a martyr to his city, while the fall of Achilles changed the battle plans of the Greeks leading to the unorthodox strategies of Odysseus. Odysseus leads the raid that steals the Palladium, the symbol of the Trojan mother goddess. The spy Sinon was left by the Greeks to deceive and lure the Trojans into believing that the Greeks had sailed home in defeat. The idea of a Trojan Horse has merit in that the use of subterfuge in siege warfare and well placed 'traitors' were common place in Bronze Age warfare. The horse was also a symbol of Troy and its faith. "Prudent Bronze Age warriors knew better than to insult an enemy's god." (179) Archeological evidence is consistent with a sacking of Troy, or what we call Troy VII. The seers of Troy had been ignored, according to the sources, and the honor of men caused the collapse.

"It was cunning not courage that killed Troy." (185) Strauss' conclusion provides insight into the nature of the era and the strife that was to befall the Mycenaean. After the success of the war, the Greeks were soon fighting one another again. Mycenaean palace life was destroyed around 1190/1180 BCE and there were similar 'revolutions' throughout the Near East with only Egypt weathering the storm of what we now call the 'Sea Peoples,' who would, according to some theories, settle in Canaan and become the Philistines. Troy would find a rebirth and be rebuilt after its fall. Strauss argues that the sources provide the flesh to the skeleton of archeological research of the Anatolia and the cultures of the Near East.

Strauss' take on Troy relies heavily on the story of Homer and the supplementary sources that give the modern world its knowledge of the story. While the nature of Bronze Age hero-driven storytelling is their way of providing history, a question to ask is which sources are missing from the equation and what do we not know of the characters. Society has always preferred a good story to bland fact, but the age of heroes provides a fair balance between culture and drama. Strauss succeeds in applying Bronze Age culture and history as we know it to the traditional story of the fall of Troy. While lacking footnotes, a healthy and lengthy glossary of terms and list of sources, with explanation, strengthens the work. The presentation makes for a fast read and makes Bronze Age society easier to understand than Linear B.