

War Breaks Out Again Over Troy, and the Truth of History

by Rosa Tennenbaum

The main auditorium of the University of Tübingen, Germany was packed to the rafters for two days on Feb. 15-16, with dozens fighting for standing room. Newspaper and journal articles had drawn the attention of all scholarly Europe to a highly unusual, extended debate. Though Germany is holding national elections, the opposed speakers were not politicians. They were leading archaeologists. The magnet of controversy, which attracted more than 900 listeners on the 16th, was: the ancient city of Troy; and Homer, the deathless bard who sang of the Trojan War, and thus began to bring to birth Classical Greece out of the dark ages which had followed that war.

One would never have expected such a turnout to hear a scholarly debate over an issue of scientific principle. But where Troy is concerned, expect the unexpected. For the 2,800 years since Homer composed his great epics—or more precisely, for 3,200 years, since the time the Trojan War Homer sang of in his *Iliad* probably was fought—mankind has been concerned with the fate of Troy.

The contestants on one side of the Tübingen debate, were the leaders of an archaeological team directed by Tübingen Prof. Manfred Korfmann (see *Interview*), who have been making new discoveries at the site of Troy (near today's Hisarlik, Turkey) for more than a decade. In 2001 they coordinated an exhibition, "Troy: Dream and Reality," which has been wildly popular, drawing hundreds of thousands to museums in several German cities for six months (see *EIR*, Feb. 8, 2002). They gradually unearthed a grander, richer, and militarily tougher ancient city than had been found there before, one that comports with Homer's Troy of the many gates and broad streets; moreover, not a Greek town but a great maritime city allied with the Hittite Empire. Where the famous Heinrich Schliemann, in the 19th Century, showed that Homer truly pinpointed the *location* of Troy, and of some of

the long-vanished cities whose ships had sailed to attack it, Korfmann's team has added evidence which tends to show that the bard also truly gave us the city's *character and qualities*.

On the other side, were European archaeologists who, for the most part, have not excavated at Troy, but who have taken up public opposition to the Tübingen group's findings, and to its exhibition. They have been determinedly fighting to cut the Troy of Korfmann and his team back "down to size," and above all, to keep Homer out of it! As in the many scholarly battles over Troy for hundreds of years, the eternal works of the great poet are always in the center of the controversy.

Homer's Epics Speak to Us Still

Scholars have dueled incessantly over the Trojan Wars for more than two centuries. But their differences often featured episodes dreamed up by latter-day mediocrities, who thought thereby to acquire for themselves something of Homer's glory, by lying outright about the poet and his works. Homer sang of the First Trojan War. The second broke out in 1795 when, out of the blue, one Friedrich August Wolf suddenly claimed that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were just cut-and-paste jobs of a number of different songs—poetic inventions, not histories—by, not one, but several different poets. Thus the historical Troy was disposed of; as for Homer, *dixit* Wolf, he had simply never existed. Lo and behold, during the 19th Century, Wolf's brainstorm came to dominate scholarly opinion.

When, in 1871, Schliemann began to dig on the hill at Hisarlik, to which he had come using the *Iliad* literally as his guide, the Third Trojan War promptly broke out: a sizable chunk of the scientific community could not tolerate the idea of someone digging up out of the mists of history, a Troy they had labelled deader than the dodo.

Since 1988, under the leadership of Professor Korfmann, fresh excavations have been under way. His team of 75 scientists from around the world, with widely varying expertise, has made discoveries that have come to revolutionize our notion of Troy. Through his work, it has become manifest that Troy could not have been a Greek city, as dozens of generations have assumed, but rather belonged to the broader cultural area of Anatolia. From that vantage point, earlier finds have been given their proper significance, and many disputed points cleared up.

Among the most significant recent finds have been, *inter alia*, a defensive trench completely around the city; an extensive tunnel system which collected and distributed potable water; and a large “lower city,” surrounding the hill where Schliemann excavated. All these discoveries have placed Homer squarely in the center of the debate—yet again!

There is, among many examples, the discovery in 1997 and 1998 of reservoirs and a subterranean supply well outside the lower city’s wall to the west. Homer described this in Book 22 of the *Iliad*, when Hector, being pursued by Achilles around the city wall, reached “where those two mother springs/ Of deep Scamander poured abroad their silver murmurings—/ One warm and casts out fumes as fire, the other, cold as snow/ Or hail dissolved. And when the Sun made ardent summer glow,/ There water’s concrete crystal shined, near which were cisternes made/ All paved and clear, where Trojan wives and their fair daughters had/ Laundry for their fine linen weeds, in times of cleanly Peace/ Before the Grecians brought their siege.”

Evidence from the aforesaid finds has been collected in a touring exhibition that has, over the past year, been at Stuttgart, Braunschweig, and now Bonn, drawing almost 1 million visitors. The press has reflected that keen interest—hundreds of articles have appeared, and dozens of new books on Troy, while the *Iliad* itself has gained pride of place in the bookshops. Works of a scientific bent on Troy and Homer have been selling well, and conferences on this topic have pulled in a flood of participants.

As little as ten years ago, interest in this ancient world was virtually extinct outside a narrow circle of experts. Things have certainly changed! Korfmann’s excavations, and his exhibition, have unleashed in Germany, what one may fairly call a renaissance of interest in the ancient world in this period when the great war broke out across the Aegean Sea. And they have triggered, predictably, a conflict along well-known factional lines.

The Fourth Trojan War

Since the Summer of 2001, the Fourth Trojan War has been raging, provoked by a Tübingen professor of ancient history, Frank Kolb. In an article in the daily *Berliner Morgenpost*, Professor Kolb declared war on his colleague Manfred Korfmann. Just as one might think a daily newspaper something of an inappropriate forum for such a debate, so was Professor Kolb’s language something less than choice.

TROY - Dream and Reality
15 November 2001 - 1 April 2002 (extra 1)

- **Special hours, admission, arrival**
Extended opening hours for the "Troy" Room Starting on Saturday, Dec. 1, the Exhibition Hall, in order to face up to streams of visitors, extends its opening exhibition "Troy - Dream and Reality" The new opening hours are:
Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Up to 2. February 2002:
Tuesday through Wednesday 9 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Thursday through Saturday 9 a.m. - 7 p.m.
on Sunday all our exhibitions, including the usual from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- **Information in French (PDF-file)**
- **Information in Dutch (PDF-file)**
- **THE CATALOGUE**
- **Links**
- **EXHIBITION PLAN**

In the 8th century B.C. the poet Homer's 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey' grand epic, marks beginning of Western literature. Ever since has characterized more than just a city Asia Minor. As a legend it has captured imagination for over centuries and could referred to by artists, poets and writers. In 1990, Troy was included in UNESCO's 1 Cultural Heritage Sites.

For the first time an exhibition has been

“Troy: Dream and Reality”—the archeological exhibition based on the last 15 years’ discoveries at the site of Homer’s Troy—has drawn nearly a million visitors to German museums. The public enthusiasm has also reignited scholarly arguments, directed against the evidence of the historical truth of Homer’s Iliad.

He alleged that Dr. Korfmann has been leading the public down the garden path, that he has falsified his excavations and over-interpreted his finds; in a word, that Korfmann is twisting historical truth, in order to be the Great Popularizer.

With throngs flocking to the “Dream and Reality” exhibition, Kolb’s remarks against it were trumpeted high and wide by the mass media; then, interviews and scholarly declarations began to rain down from all sides. The Feb. 15-16 “seminar,” which became a packed and widely watched debate under the title, “The Significance of Troy in the Later Bronze Age,” was held, ostensibly to clear the air. In attendance were the two main protagonists, along with 11 scientists from the relevant disciplines, from all over the world: archaeologists, experts on ancient history and on the ancient Orient, philologists, Hittite scholars, and experts on Homer.

The battle got going over a wooden model of Troy, shown at the exhibition, which includes the citadel and a well-built, far-spreading lower city. Professor Kolb decried it as “public trickery,” on the ground that each little house shown on the wooden model does not correspond to a particular find at the excavation at Hisarlik. Kolb had previously protested—and he brought this up several times during the symposium—that in Homer’s days (the Eighth Century B.C.) Troy had been “but a smallish settlement with scrubby little dwellings.” As for the trench excavated by Korfmann’s team, which they



What remains of the large city walls excavated around the ancient city of Troy, with a section of its controversial defensive trench shown at right. The exciting discoveries and the many controversies have drawn wide public interest, and led to a full-dress debate over the finds, at Tübingen on Feb. 15 and 16.

believe to be a defensive trench against the most dangerous form of weaponry of that age—war chariots—Professor Kolb begs to differ. In his view, the trench must have been for drainage purposes.

In the *Iliad*, Homer precisely described such a trench as Troy’s defensive barrier against war chariots: “. . . which being so deep, they could not get their horse/ To venture on, but trample, snore and, on the very brink,/ To neigh with spirit, yet still stand off. Nor would a human think/ The passage safe . . . / The dike being everywhere so deep and (where ’twas least deep) set/ With stakes exceeding thick, sharp, strong, that horse could never pass,/ Much less their chariots after them” (Book 22, George Chapman translation).

The trench unearthed by Korfmann’s team around the “lower city” of Troy is a major work: roughly 10 feet wide, 5 feet deep, and the length of a quarter-mile running track, dug into the rockside. Digging such a trench would have taken great labor. The question naturally comes to mind, whether Troy’s inhabitants would willingly have put in so much time and work just for an irrigation canal, when one could have easily been dug into the loam, very close by to boot. War chariots, moreover, played a major role at Troy. In the treaty between Hittite overlord Muwattalli II (ca. 1290-1272 B.C.) and “Alaksandu of Wilusa,” Troy undertook to place troops and war chariots at the Hittites’ disposal in the event of war. A war chariot was a highly complex piece of equipment, which could not have been hammered up by some village blacksmith, but rather required both properly trained craftsmen, and specially bred horses, whose training took three

years. All of this represented a major investment, and called for upkeep and infrastructure.

The Hittite Empire would not likely have placed such demands, nor signed such a treaty, with a “scrubby little town.” But was Wilusa, with which the Hittites had that treaty, actually Troy? That is the second sticking point.

The Language of the Iliad

Frank Starke, a Hittite specialist from Tübingen, said during the symposium that “Troy’s geographical position has been ascertained with certainty.” His own work has shown that the place-name “Wilusa,” that crops up frequently in Hittite documents, is the same city known to the Greeks as Troy. Homer often calls it “Ilios”—very close to “Wilusa,” since Greeks of Homer’s time had ceased pronouncing “w.”

Starke was straightaway contradicted by Mrs. Heinhold-Krahmer, a Salzburg Hittite expert, who objected to the idea that “comparison might be sustained, solely on the basis of coincidental assonances.” She contended that one would first have to find written evidence with that name at the very site, if one was to be absolutely positive that the excavated hill was indeed Troy. Heinhold-Krahmer essentially demanded that Korfmann dig up a 3,000-year old street sign, before calling Troy, Troy.

And now to disagreement among the philologists, the scholars of language and meaning. This would seem, at first sight, astonishing, since research on Homer’s epic poems has been greatly stimulated by Korfmann’s excavations.

Troy was utterly destroyed some time around the year

How Troy May Have Looked in Third Millennium B.C.



This computer reconstruction of the layout of Troy II was done by the University of Tübingen team excavating at the site since 1988. The pattern was already seen here, of an upper city (the “fortress hill,” or citadel) and a lower city, which at the later time of the *Iliad*, had some 7,000 inhabitants and its own surrounding wall and moat.

1200 B.C., the point at which High Mycenaean culture (1600 to 1200 B.C.) collapsed, and Greece sank into a 400-year dark age. Homer sang of the disaster in his *Iliad*, composed after that dark age. Joachim Latacz from Basel, Switzerland, and Wolfdietrich Niemeier from Athens, pointed to indications in the *Iliad* that the entire original Troy story (not Homer’s epic) stems from the Mycenaean period, and was handed on down accurately for centuries by bards, to Homer in the Eighth Century. It is most remarkable that the *Iliad* contains a great many words and poetic epigrams that were no longer used in Homer’s day, and that his descriptions of armor, weaponry, battle formations, and even architecture, were Mycenaean.

At the debate, Wolfgang Kullmann of Freiburg University saw it otherwise. He argued that the “Troy story was [first] told after the dark age was past”; in other words, in Homer’s lifetime. Although Dr. Latacz showed that the “catalogue of the ships” that Homer gave at the end of the *Iliad*’s Book 2, follows a list dating from the Mycenaean era, Kullmann insisted that the original was “a list of participants in the upcoming Olympic Games.”

The third clash involved the expression “trading city.” To Professor Korfmann, Troy played an important role in trade. A member of his team observed with some exasperation, at the debate, “Had the Trojans ever imagined how acrimonious the dispute over their city was to become, they would doubtless have taken the precaution of depositing little signposts all round,” and taken care to stash away somewhere a ship’s cargo with freight from every known spot on the globe.

Though they didn’t bury such mercantile time-capsules for us, the Trojans enjoyed an outstanding strategic position,



The bronze signet seal of a scribe, evidence of writing in more than one script at Troy. This is the first time written “documents” have been found at the site.

with Troy lying precisely between the European and Asian continents, and at the head of the passage from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. But Dieter Hertel of Munich University, leading an attack on Troy’s maritime status, called this position “irrelevant.” Despite the fact that trade has been attested just about everywhere else in the world at that time, and although Kolb himself readily acknowledged that trade was intense throughout the Levant, Kolb and his colleagues arrayed against Korfmann insist that in the northern Aegean and in the Black Sea, there was no trade, nothing but “exchange of royal gifts.”

The same sort of reasoning was applied to writing systems. According to Bernhard Hänsel of the University of Bochum, the entire northern Aegean was a “writing-free zone” in Mycenaean times. Although all of Troy’s neighbors had been using writing systems for centuries—the Hittites, the Egyptians, the Mycenaean Greeks themselves—Hänsel claimed the Trojans were wallflowers in this regard. And what is one to say about the seal found at Troy, covered with Hittite and Luwian inscriptions? Kolb argued that one “cannot take seriously” Korfmann’s hypothesis that this shows that writing was in use, supposing instead that the seal was “brought there by some trader.”

A trader, visiting a city without any trade? It seemed that in their eagerness to dampen the public’s enthusiasm for Korfmann’s team’s new picture of Troy, Kolb and his colleagues caught themselves in some contradictions. From the outset of the debate, Professor Kolb accused Professor Korfmann of entertaining “other than purely scientific mo-



The epic poems of Homer, composed during the 8th Century B.C. after the centuries-long dark age which followed the Trojan wars, remain at the heart of the scientific debate over the truth of those times for universal history.

tives.” Motives outside science may be at work on the accuser’s side, though. What scientific motive could have impelled Kolb’s associates to intervene with the German Society for the Advancement of Research, which has been co-financing the excavations at Troy, to cut off Korfmann’s funding?

‘Hypothesis Non Fingo’?

For Hans-Peter Uppmann, the biologist of the Tübingen University excavating team, critical issues are at stake. For decades, archaeology, as a scientific discipline, had taken a back seat to so-called “pure historical studies.” But now, says Uppmann, it is in the spotlight, while the “pure” historical sciences are “backed up against the wall.” “Not a single drop more can be squeezed” from the texts over which the “pure” historians have been poring for decades. Those historians want to keep the upper hand over history, he maintains, and have been defending their position by gripping with “tooth

and claw,” onto fixed categories and concepts.

Oddly enough, the hard core of the accusation which Professor Kolb and his fellow attackers have been levelling at the Korfmann group, is that the latter have dared to formulate hypotheses about the meaning of what they have found. Kolb and others insisted that “one is not entitled to base one’s arguments on anything other than finds that one has actually got in hand, and certainly not on hypotheses.” Quite the opposite view was taken by Korfmann, who said, “a hypothesis may fairly be held to be valid, until such time as a fresh one come to replace it.”

That is the crux of the matter; that is why battles are being fought to this day over Troy. Was Troy a trading metropolis, as Korfmann would have it, or, in Kolb’s words, “an insignificant settlement of scrubby little houses”? Are the trenches defensive ones, as Korfmann would have it, or Kolb’s irrigation canals? Was the lower city “rather densely built-up with edifices of stone” (Peter Jablonka, Tübingen) or “a small, essentially agrarian outlying settlement” (Kolb)? Did it have “between 5,000 and 7,000 inhabitants” (Korfmann) or “something under 1,000” (Kolb)? All of these moot points show that we are faced here with “two quite different worlds,” as Korfmann said.

Does *science* involve nothing but collating data and facts, and then explaining them, or does it begin precisely where what one already knows, leaves off? In the German language, the word itself, *Wissenschaft*, means “creating new knowledge,” not merely interpreting the old in ever-more exhaustive detail.

In this controversy as in others, those like Professor Kolb who would reject the notion of hypotheses as something unscientific, as mere “speculation,” often turn out to cling like a barnacle to their very own hypotheses. To assert that Homer never existed, or to insist as Freiburg’s Prof. Wolfgang Kullman did, that the *Iliad* is a mere “poetic construct” and not the telling of history, is in itself, obviously making hypotheses. How these historians dealt with their adversaries at the debate, exhibiting self-righteousness and sometimes arrogance, as if from a bunker, was visible to the many interested laymen in the audience, and did nothing to improve the standing of their particular branch of science in the public eye.

Who Was Homer?

The question whether the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* possess an artistic unity, showing that they were composed by only one man of genius, is not just a falling-out between scholars. The dispute pertains to different notions of the nature of man’s creativity. Those who protest—as did Friedrich August Wolf in the 18th Century—that Homer could never have composed such epics, take that stand because they cannot accept the notion that man might be capable of such an outburst of pure genius. Thus, the outcome of the controversy over Korfmann’s excavations, and their interpretation, will prove to be critical to the future of science.