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Review of

Joachim Latacz, *Troy and Homer: Towards a Solution of an Old Mystery*. Translated from the German by Kevin Windle and Rosh Ireland. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Pp. xvii +342. Cloth (ISBN 0-19-926308-6) \$45.00.

In Search of... books and television documentaries are hugely popular these days, from the space-invader fantasies of Erich von Daniken to the more serious-minded “investigative journalism” of Michael Wood to *The Da Vinci Code*. The subtitle of Joachim Latacz’s *Troy and Homer* hints at the allure of the genre. Notices of the German original, blurred here on the dust jacket, acclaim “a scholarly detective story,” “as exciting as a thriller,” and so this book is, with a heavy emphasis on *scholarly*.

Latacz searches for answers to four overarching questions: (1) Is Hisarlik in present-day northwest Turkey, where Schliemann began his excavations over 130 years ago, in fact Homer’s Troy? (2) What was this place like ca. 1200 B.C.? (3) How did Homer learn anything about Troy after a lapse of 450 years? (4) How much, if anything, can the *Iliad* tell us about the ancient city?

Part I, “Troy,” addresses the issue of historicity on the basis of archaeological and documentary evidence. From 1988 to 2005, the recently late lamented German archaeologist Manfred Korfmann led annual excavation campaigns at Hisarlik. Although the spectacular findings of Korfmann’s international team of experts have been appearing in a yearbook series, *Studia Troica* (see also *Project Troia* online), they are better and more widely known in Germany than in the United States. *Troy and Homer* will help correct that situation.

Korfmann has proved that Troy, more precisely Troy VI/VIIa, was in fact a substantial place in the latter half of the second millennium B.C. Thanks to new technologies like cesium magnetometry, the site plan now extends over some 200,000 square meters, far beyond the walled citadel unearthed by Schliemann, to a long speculated about “Lower City” with protective walls and typically Anatolian encircling ditches likely meant to obstruct chariots. This thriving city of 7,000–10,000 inhabitants enjoyed a strategic control of vital trade routes intersecting at the mouth of the Hellespont: “Troy, the purchasing, collecting, and organizing centre, functioned as the capital of this ‘Union of the Three Seas’ (Aegean, Sea of Marmora, and Black Sea) and as an entrepôt, whose unimpeded operation was in the interests of all” (p. 48), much like, as Latacz puts it, a leading member of the Hanseatic League. At the same time, more ominously, Troy’s dominance of the straits “could have become a thorn in the side to many” (ibid.) and its accumulating commercial capital a temptation to others.

Unlike previous excavators of Hisarlik, Korfmann, as a specialist in the archaeology of Anatolia, comes to Troy “from the east,” that is, for the period in question, the empire of the Hittites. Now the ongoing study of the vast archives of cuneiform-inscribed tablets at the Hittite capital, Hattusas, has disclosed diplomatic communications between the Hittite kings and smaller states in western Anatolia, among them a place called Wilusa. Latacz con-

structs an airtight argument for identifying Wilusa with Ilios (earlier Wilios), the name Homer prefers for Troy and from which the title of his great epic derives. The pertinent documents feature names, for example, Alaksandu (=Alexandros) and Taruwisa (=Troia), familiar from the saga of the Trojan war and presuppose a significant city of great foreign policy interest in precisely the area of Hisarlik. It emerges that Wilusa/Ilios was a kind of Hittite vassal state or outpost, where, as elsewhere in western Anatolia, Luwian, a language related to Hittite, was spoken. In 1995, the sole object bearing writing at the site, a biconvex seal bearing hieroglyphic Luwian, was found at Hisarlik. Latacz also shows how Hittite and Egyptian references to Achaians and Danaans help refine our knowledge of Mycenaean-era political geography and reaches the convincing conclusion that Homer's backdrop is historical.

Part II, the "Homer" half of the book, approaches the Troy mystery from the literary angle. Although, in Greek and Roman antiquity and long afterward, the *Iliad* was assumed to memorialize actual historical events, the emergence of classical studies as a modern academic discipline in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries changed things dramatically. Rigorous methods of analysis, pioneered in the area of biblical studies, have demonstrated that, in the famous phrase of Franz Hampl, "The *Iliad* is not a history book." That is, the narrative *foreground* of Homer's epic, its particulars of plot and character, is entirely fictional. Yet, as Latacz so persuasively demonstrates in Part I, archaeology and Hittitology are revealing its historical *background* in ever-clearer contours. What then is the relation of the eighth-century Homer and his poetic tradition to political and other conditions of the Late Bronze Age?

As an essential preliminary step, Latacz carefully distinguishes between Homer's *Iliad* (really, the tale of Achilles) and the much more expansive, pre-existing "Tale of Troy," recoverable in fair, if sporadic, detail from diverse ancient sources, notably epitomes of the archaic-era "Cyclic Epics." He then outlines the importance of archaeological work, beginning with Schliemann's excavations, and of the decipherment of Linear B in 1952. Crucial to his argument is the presence of the digamma (w) in the Linear B tablets (datable to ca. 1200). Although the digamma had disappeared from Greek by the eighth century, its prior existence in the poetic language employed by Homer must be posited at many points in the extant text for reasons of meter. It follows that the traditional language of the *Iliad* antedates the lifetime of Homer. Latacz carefully marshals evidence, both archaeological and linguistic, that makes the Late Bronze Age the likeliest time of origin.

The single most striking evidence for the *Iliad's* preservation of knowledge of the Mycenaean era is the famous "Catalogue of Ships" (*Il.* 2.494-759), an elaborate muster-record of Greek forces, including numbers of ships and men and their points of origin. Of the 178 sites mentioned, many are Mycenaean, none is demonstrably fictitious, and none designates an area settled only after Mycenaean times. Moreover, Linear B tablets found at Thebes in Boeotia in the 1990s strongly suggest a greater prominence for that city than hitherto suspected and make sense of the till now inexplicable emphasis on Boeotian sites in the Catalogue.

A final question concerns how to bridge the gap in any possible literate transmission of the Troy story between the disappearance of Linear B (never used for literary texts in any case) around 1100 and the appearance of the alphabet in Greece around 800. To answer it,

Latacz draws on his deep understanding of the Greek oral tradition to explain how generations of singers built and handed on a repository of poetic narrative.

Throughout *Troy and Homer*, potentially daunting intricacies of argument and evidence are mitigated by the translators' serviceable prose and the author's provision of many charts, maps, plans, and explicit section and subsection headings. These help make a meaty volume readily intelligible to a broad non-specialist readership, Latacz's stated target audience, but scholars and serious students, too, will appreciate this exciting and up-to-date overview of the current state of Troy research.

Latacz entitles his book's final section "The Result: There Probably Was a War over Troy." His conversance with the rapidly growing information about Troy will likely enable him to change the adverb to "certainly" in subsequent editions.