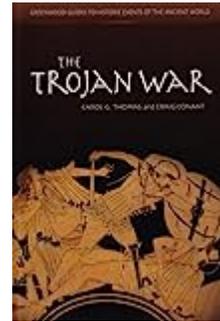




Carol G. Thomas, Craig Conant. *The Trojan War*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005. xvii + 209 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-32526-7.



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While Helen may, in reality, have been only responsible for launching a few hundred ships, the *Iliad* has been responsible, over the millennia, for launching a countless number of archaeological, historical, and literary studies on the Trojan War. One of the latest additions is this volume by Carol G. Thomas and Craig Conant.

This book is divided into five main chapters and four ancillary/supplementary chapters. The book opens with a quick overview of the *Iliad* and the rest of the Trojan War legends, and then a review of the archaeology and history of the Late Bronze Age Aegean and East Mediterranean. With both of these topics crammed into twenty-one pages, only a cursory review is provided.

Chapter 2 moves into the actual archaeological and historical evidence for the Trojan War. Hisarlik—believed to be the ancient site of Troy—was first excavated by Heinrich Schliemann in the late nineteenth century. Schliemann's assistant, Wilhelm Dorpfeld, continued excavations there, followed later, in the 1930s, by Carl Blegen from the University of Cincinnati. Since 1988, archaeologists from the University of Tübingen and the University of Cincinnati have been excavating at Hisarlik. Despite the abundance of archaeological work at Hisarlik, this chapter contains little overview or survey of the results and findings of any of these excavations. For that, the reader must go elsewhere, to either recent vol-

umes by Trevor Bryce, *The Trojans and their Neighbors* (2006) and Donald Easton, *Schliemann's Excavations at Troia, 1870-1873* (2002), or to Michael Wood's more popular account, *In Search of the Trojan War* (1985). The relevant archaeological work at Mycenae, Pylos, and Tiryns also receives short shrift in this chapter.

Homer and the epic tradition are discussed in the third chapter. Like others before them, Thomas and Conant examine the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in light of Milman Parry and Albert Lord's work on oral epics. Drawing on Parry and Lord's research, both poems are seen as being the product of an oral tradition that was written down as Greek society became literate. While dealing with events from the Late Bronze Age they are rooted in the mentality of ninth-century B.C. Greek society.

Although they fit into the archaeology of the subject, the Akrotiri frescoes are discussed in chapter 3 rather than the previous one. Two frescoes in Room 5 of the West House, despite being destroyed around the year 1625 B.C. (long before the Trojan War), show scenes apparently related to passages in the *Iliad*. On the south wall is depicted a fleet of ships, while the north wall contains a battle scene replete with marching soldiers. Drawing on Sarah Morris's work, the authors note that part of the epic traditions for the *Iliad* could lie centuries before the Trojan War.[1]

In their discussion of the epic tradition, Thomas and Conant focus largely on the *Iliad* and to a lesser extent the *Odyssey*. The other epic poems dealing with the Trojan War, namely the *Aethiopsis*, the *Cypria*, the *Iliupersis*, the *Little Iliad*, the *Nostoi*, and the *Telegony*, do not warrant discussion in their book. Admittedly, these epics only survive in fragmentary form, but their essence still forms part of the Trojan War legend as we know it today.

The power of the legend of the Trojan War is examined in chapter 4. Thomas and Conant examine how classical Greece and Rome used and responded to the Trojan War legends. In the case of Greece, the legends concerning Troy are seen as being spread by Euboean traders and colonists throughout the Mediterranean basin. The legends concerning Achilles are believed to have been an inspiration for Alexander the Great. In the case of Rome, though the traditional Greek heroes are abandoned in favor of the Trojan Aeneas, the Trojan War is seen as a facet of Roman nationalism both for the Roman Republic and Empire.

In their closing chapter, entitled "Troy and the Twenty-First Century," the authors try to provide a summary to the previous four chapters. The chapter opens well with their appreciation of the *Iliad* and by looking at the issue of oral history versus myth and legend. While they stress the importance of archaeology in understanding Troy and the legends associated with the site, their arguments are less than convincing in the light of the short shrift given to the work at Hisarlik in their earlier chapter.

Biographies of the Greek and Trojans involved in the

Trojan War (or at least accounted for in the *Iliad* and other texts) are reviewed in the first supplemental chapter. This is a handy chapter to have if you are a student reading the text for the first time. The second supplemental chapter covers primary documents. While Herodotus and the *Iliad* may be easy enough for readers to find elsewhere, this section does contain translations of harder to find materials such as the Hittite texts concerning Ahhiyawa and Wilusa (possibly the Greek peninsula and Ilios respectively) and one of the Pylos tablets concerning the Sea Peoples. The book concludes with a glossary and annotated bibliography.

As stated in the preface, the volumes in this series are intended to provide an overview and introduction to events in world history. The audience they are aiming at is secondary school students and lower-level college students. With these goals in mind, one can ask: "How well does this book satisfy them?" My answer to this question is that while the writing and language used in the book are suitable for younger audiences, this is not an integrated text on the Trojan War. Each chapter reads much like a specialized essay, and implicitly assumes a certain familiarity with the topic of the essay. In the end, this volume ends up serving much more like a supplemental handbook or study guide, than it does as an introduction to the Trojan War.

Note

[1]. Sarah Morris, "A Tale of Two Cities: The Miniature Frescoes from Thera and the Origins of Greek Poetry," *American Journal of Archaeology* 93 (1989): 511-535.

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