

# Barry strauss

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



In Barry Strauss', "The Trojan War: A New History", he discusses a topic that has been talked about for thousands of years, yet is able to bring new interpretations and arguments about it. While Strauss shows that many of the accepted ideas about the Trojan War can be disproved, he also fails to support his claims with adequate historical references and analyzes. To begin the book, Strauss introduces Helen of Troy. Helen was the wife of King Menelaus and had attracted the attention of the Prince Priam of Troy. Strauss introduces that the reason that Helen left Sparta could have been for two reasons: one idea was that Menelaus was oppressive and Paris was a good looking prince, while the other idea that Strauss explores is that Anatolian women had more power than Greek women. Paris probably thought that the Greeks would not attempt to bring Helen back, but Agamemnon was able to convince them of this risky war in order to profit from the wealth that Troy contained, "Helen was not the cause of the war but merely the occasion of the war. By seducing a Greek princess, Troy had interfered in the politics of the Greek kingdom and humiliated a powerful man" (Strauss p 28). In order to beach their ships at Troy the Greeks had to fight to win their spot. The Greeks did not win their first fight for a spot though, because Hector of Troy was able to prevent them from establishing camp. In order to be able to land the ships, Achilles goes into Trojan territory and kills Cycnus, Son of Poseidon. The Greeks were soldiers who fought with swords and spears at close range while Trojans fought mostly with their many chariots. If Priam had returned Helen, he would be admitting that his son was at fault. He could not afford to admit this because it would have sparked a civil war and the overthrow of his power. In order to keep the allies happy, the Trojans

were forced to fight on the defense and minimize casualties. In the ninth year of war Achilles was said to have destroyed 23 cities; in his attack of Thebes-Under-Plakos Chrysies was taken and given to Agamemnon as a prize. He also attacked Lyrnessus where he killed the brothers and husband of Briseis and took her as his prize. The Greeks are then struck with a plague and they turn to an explanation from the prophet Calchas; he explains that Apollo has sent the plague because Agamemnon had not returned Chrysies to her father. Agamemnon returns Chrysies, but then takes Briseis from Achilles. This causes Achilles refuse to fight in battle along with his troops and causes the Greeks to suffer from mass casualties. Paris and Menelaus agree to dual for Helen and the wealth of Sparta, however when they are fighting Paris is taken away by the goddess to save him, but then Pandarus breaks the truce and wounds Menelaus. Since the truce is broken, battle can no longer be avoided and many deaths occur. Paris and Priam suggest the return of the treasure in hopes of a ceasefire to bury the dead; the Greeks reject the offer but allow the ceasefire, which they use to build a palisade and trench. After the ceasefire Hector sets out to meet the Greeks and they are able to push them behind their palisade. The Greeks begin to panic and turn to Nestor who tells them that they need Achilles and his Myrmidons. Achilles lets Patroclus wear his armor and lead the Myrmidons but tells him not to follow the Trojans back to their city; however Patroclus does not listen and is killed by Hector who stabs him in the belly. Achilles then returns to battle and confronts Hector face to face stabbing him in the neck and killing the Trojan Prince. Achilles meets his death when he forces himself inside the walls of Troy. To avenge Achilles' death Philoctetes kills Paris with the bow of

Hercules. Odysseus sneaks into Troy and steals the palladium, with the help of Helen, in hopes that it would weaken Troy, however Strauss believes it might have been a fake palladium. Strauss shows that destruction of Troy does not rest on the literal existence of the Trojan Horse; the Greeks could have attacked the Trojans in their drunken festivities. Evidence from an archaeological settlement shows that Troy suffered destruction via fire, between 1210 and 1180 BC which is the time period of the Trojan War if it did occur. While the topic of Strauss' book is quite old, he is able to introduce new arguments and interpretations about the story of the Trojan War.

Strauss argues that the Trojan War was motivated by personal vendetta, not just a political one. While the story that Strauss presents is interesting and flows nicely, unfortunately when presenting the historical information about the Trojan War it is hard to separate what is historical fact and what Strauss has taken the liberty to interpret and expand upon using his imagination.

When explaining Helen of Troy Strauss integrates the image that Homer presents but then continues to expand on her beauty, adding details that are not given but rather a part of his imagination and creation of Helen, "Helen is dressed in a flowing, woolen gown, deftly woven by slave women, in black taupe, and crimson stripes, and soft shimmering from oil which it had been treated.... Her elegant coiffure consist of pin curls and tendrils about her forehead, and long, glossy curls that fall below her waist"(Strauss p. 13). This liberty in the description of Helen causes the reader to wonder when Strauss is using historical information and when he is inserting his own ideals into the story to make it more appealing for the reader. Unfortunately this causes the validity of his arguments to decrease, because he is not

presenting facts but inserting his own imagination. When Strauss does use historical references that support his claims, he fails to analyze and explain the significance of the discoveries and how they support the reasoning. When describing how the Greeks made a sacrifice to Apollo Strauss claims that there is evidence that supports this ritual but then does not explain why, “ Archaeology confirms Homer’s description, showing that Bronze Age Greeks such as the warriors in the Iliad slaughtered bulls as a sacrifice to the gods and then, after cooking the men ate most of the ceremonial meal” (Strauss p. 105). While the statement begins to show validity of the ritual, it does not explain how this is known and in turn fails to prove why the reader should believe the statement. While Strauss is able to present the history of the Trojan War in a pleasant story, he fails to use adequate historical references to prove his claims. While the story does not allow us to accept the claims of Strauss immediately, it does allow the reader to explore new ideas and reasoning for the Trojan War rather than accepting the story as historical proof. Strauss’ story is successful at invoking new ideas and presenting alternative reasoning for the poem. While reading the “ The Trojan War: A New History”, one must remember that it is not an exact historical reference, but rather one person’s interpretations.