

Film analysis troy (2004) | historical accuracy of troy



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As generations continue to revolutionize, various new prospects lie ahead for the many inhabitants of earth, no matter what corner they live in. At a time when technology is changing so rapidly, the histories, traditions and cultures of the past are sometimes forgotten, if not lost altogether. To counter this, Hollywood directors and producers alike create fantastical films that bring to life the many stories and legends that are carried down through generations, but have a chance of being lost forever. One of the stories that was written down rather than told was Homer's epic poem, the "Illiad" which was basically the legend of the Trojan War. The story which is thought to be based on history was turned into a film in 2004 by director Wolfgang Petersen. The films plot is based on the King of Mycenae, Agamemnon, who has forced the kingdoms of Greece into a loose alliance after decades of war. Menelaus, the King of Sparta and Agamemnon's brother, strives to make peace with Troy, who is the most powerful rival to the emerging nation but when the Trojan prince, Paris, steals away Menelaus's wife, Helen, Agamemnon strives to get her back for his brother and in the meantime, using the event as an opportunity to fight Troy and bring it down, so that Sparta could be the strongest Greek nation. Although an ingenious plot, based on the Greek epic poem, many things can be questioned, as it is unknown if the epic poem was even based on history itself. A film that is historically inaccurate gives no benefit to its viewers as the story can be so twisted and changed that it is no longer, a tale of history, tradition or culture. When examined meticulously, it is clearly evident however, that the film Troy, is historically accurate as it is based on true facts from the ancient Greek life. The military, portrayed through fighting formations, weapons, and naval warfare, the culture of the Greeks portrayed through burial customs,

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belief in gods and architecture as well as class structure, portrayed through the roles of women, the respect to the king, and the respect to the Myrmidons, Achilles fighting group, are all pieces of evidence that lead to the verdict that the film Troy is historically accurate.

The military and its different parts that it is made up of are essential to any nation, particularly one which is emerging to be the most powerful. The military not only protects the nation from invaders but also helps in the conquering of new territories to expand the nation so that it can grow. Expansion and conquering enemies all bring up a nation's status, which is why the Greeks fought with each other to gain power and respect from others. Part of the military's practices which were essential to its existence were fighting formations. The fighting formations of the Greeks were tightly formed and organized so that the enemy could not penetrate. "The battle line a carefully built wall, the warriors standing with shield touching shield in a solid line. This is likely to have been the position before a battle, with armies drawn up in opposing lines and meeting in this simple formation. The battle probably broke up into a *mêlée*, only after one side had given way, followed by individual duels and single combat."^[1] It is evident that the fighting formations were strongly structured so that the army appeared not only more powerful and mighty, but more organized and therefore more likely to intimidate the enemy. Once the formations were broken, the warriors fought individually, trying to kill as many of the opponents as possible. This sort of fighting in formation was also portrayed in the film "Troy" where Hector's army gathered outside of the Trojan walls standing side by side, with their large rectangular shields touching each other for

protection. Once battle was initiated however, the men separated and fought individually. This event in the movie was clearly an accurate portrayal of fighting formations in Greece during 1250 B. C. E and thus starts to prove that the film Troy is historically accurate.

Another division of the military, one of the most important in fact, is the weapons. Without weapons, battle would be very hard to win because warriors would need to be clever and exceptionally strong so that they could overtake their enemy with their bare hands. Luckily, the Greeks had very developed weapons, which proved to be useful against opponents. Weapons like spears and swords were used extensively in the Greek military, although spears were the first weapon of choice. “Swords always seem to have taken second place after spears.”[2] This is also portrayed in the movie “Troy” as when Hector faces Achilles in one on one combat, they use their spears first and then their swords. Spears in the film were constructed in such a manner that they looked like they were supposed to. “Throwing spears (javelins) were usual, but some were obviously thrusting spears, such as Hector’s, which was supposed to be 11 cubits long. Spear shafts were made of ash wood.”[3] Although it is impossible to tell the exact length of the thrusting spears used in the film, they were pretty long, visually looking to be about 5 metres, which is approximately the length of 11 cubits. The rod of the spears were all made out of wood, although again, it is impossible to tell whether or not it was particularly out of ash wood, however it was definitely made out of wood. Therefore it is obvious that the film Troy sticks to history because of the materials and props they used on set to film the production, the same materials and objects which were used over three thousand years ago.

The last division in the military which was of high importance to the Greeks, was naval or the sea category. Without naval ships, armies could not have gotten around and travelled to other areas to expand their territories or challenge their enemy as a consequence for a wrongdoing. The Greeks used many different types of warships, although the ones that were most common during the Trojan War and which were described in Homer's epic poem "Illiad" were Pentekonteres. "Two types of ships are mentioned by Homer: light, fast ships powered by 20 oars, and heavier warships powered by 50 oars. These 50-oared galleys had one level only. They appear to have been built mainly from pine wood, with oars of polished spruce. while the bow terminated in a nearly vertical prow with a metal sheathed ram at the waterline. Pentekonteres had a mast with a square sail that was taken down before going into battle"[4]In the movie "Troy" the ships used also had one level of oarsmen and about 50 men rowing with oars. The front of the ship had an almost vertical prow that was slightly curved to the shape of the ship that helped stop the ship when it reached the shores. The ships used in the film also had square shaped white masts that were lowered when the ship reached the shore. Evidently, the portrayal of the military in the film, whether naval or on land, was historically accurate because the things depicted were truthful to history and actual Greek objects and occurrences.

The culture of any nation, whether emerging or already established plays an important role in the everyday lives of citizens. Culture is a development in inhabited area that shows how prosperous the place is, because the main focus is no longer on just mere survival, as there are things to do. Religion, architecture, art, beauty, sports are just some of the aspects of culture that

show how rich a nation is, because the people can have an average income, but if they are culturally satisfied, they will be happier than those who have no culture. Culture played an important role in the lives of the Greeks and they had advanced burial customs, religion and architecture, which made their nation a better place to live. Burial customs are one aspect of culture that was sophisticated and there was always a belief in the afterlife in the Greek culture, no matter what religion. “ Inhumation was most common in Mycenaean times, but by c. 1200 BC cremation became the main method of burial and was universal”[5]Evidently, by the time of the Trojan War, cremation was used most often and this is depicted in the film as well because everyone who dies in the film, whether it was Patroclus, Hector or any other warrior; they were all collected and burned. “ In cremation, bodies were burned on a pyre soldiers killed in warfare were only rarely buried on the battlefield. Very often they were cremated on the battle site and their ashes taken home.”[6]It is obvious that soldiers were generally not buried at the site of the battle in which they fought, rather just cremated and the ashes were gathered and taken home. This was the case in the film “ Troy” when many soldiers died; chariots collected the bodies and carried them just outside of the battle field where there was a huge fire where other soldiers would cremate the bodies. Again it is clearly portrayed that the film “ Troy” was historically accurate because it followed the burial customs that the ancient Greeks practiced themselves.

Religion was another important aspect of the ancient Greeks life and they all worshipped some gods. To some Greeks, certain gods were unimportant, but others were considered almighty to them. To the Trojans, the God Apollo was

of high importance. “ A god worshipped throughout the Greek world, and the embodiment of moral excellence... He was the god of prophecy, healing, archery. He was also a god of light (sometimes being identified with the Sun and with the god Helios).”[7]In the film “ Troy” the main worship was to Apollo and this is portrayed through frequent reference to Apollo, when King Priam or his men were prophesising. Everything centered on Apollo, who Priam prayed to nightly and to whom he assumed the wooden Trojan horse by the Greeks was built. “ The precious temple of Troy’s patron god Apollo (complete with 5 foot high solid gold statue of Apollo) is located outside the city, down the beach.”[8]This was the case in the film because the Trojans created a temple just outside the city and in front of it was a massive gold statue of Apollo. Clearly, the historical accuracy of the film “ Troy” is yet again proved as it supports the facts from ancient Greek religion.

Another form of culture is the art through mainly architecture that is apparent in any nation that is on the rise to being one of the best.

Architecture shows how culturally rich a society is because again the main focus is no longer survival, but other things as well, which show how prosperous a nation may be. Troy had a massive wall that protected the city on the inside and that was their main form of architecture. “ The walls of fortifications are an average of 16. 5 ft thick and are built of massive stones weighing up to 10 tons.[9]Evidently the fortifications at Troy were extremely large which is why no one could penetrate them until the Greeks created the Trojan horse. This is also portrayed in the movie “ Troy” when the Greeks attack but cannot penetrate the walls until they sneak in through the horse. The walls used in the film are visibly made out of stone and very large,

although it is impossible to tell the exact measurements of the fortification. Overall, the portrayal of culture in the film “Troy” is historically accurate because the burial customs, religion and architecture portrayed in the film is the same as that of the ancient Greek world.

The class structure of the ancient Greek world was much different than ours today, although some things are similar to today’s world. Historical accuracy in the class structure system is key to a successful depiction of the ancient Greek world in film. The respect given to women, to the king, and to Achilles’ elite warrior group, the Myrmidons, all are historically accurate because it is very similar to the respect given in the ancient Greek world. The respect given to women in the ancient Greek time period was small but there were enjoyable parts to it. “Female characters of the upper class led a relatively independent life.... Although women were technically of citizen status, they had no rights of citizenship. Women had no political rights and could take no part whatsoever in government.”[10]Evidently women had small respect but those of the upper class were fairly independent, being allowed to do more than the poorer women, although none of them could participate in politics. This is also portrayed in the film “Troy.” The women of the palace who were princesses or so took no part in the politics of the palace where all the men assembled, led by the king and his princes to plan out things for Troy. Although women had no role in politics and government, they played an important role in religion. “Within religion women did play an important role, such as a dominant role at funerals, weddings.... There were many priestesses.[11]This is also portrayed within the film “Troy” as when Briseis, the cousin of Hector and Paris, decided to become Apollo’s servant she was

commended and it was said that Apollo is going to have a wonderful servant. Although women had this advantage, they were considered weak and a reference to this is made in the movie when it is said that “ peace is for women and weak” by Agamemnon. Evidently using that metaphor, women were considered fragile and therefore peace went straight along with women since peace did not show off nations might or power. Evidently, the film “ Troy” is historically accurate because it correctly portrays the respect given to women in the ancient Greek class system.

In the ancient Greek world, there was always a lot of respect given to the king of the nation, whether he deserved it or not. Kings were very respected officials and demanded that they were given honour even if they were wrong on something. In the film “ Troy” the respect given to the king, particularly Agamemnon was very high although he did not do anything. Odysseus, comments on this to Achilles who gets angry over the fact that warriors are giving the king things that they stole, even though he did nothing at all to deserve the gifts. Odysseus says “ War is old men talking, and young men dying.” Evidently it is portrayed that the king had much respect whether he deserved it or not, and in this case, it is evident that Agamemnon did not deserve the respect that he was being given. Nonetheless, the king continued to be showered with gifts, as warriors were honoured to be in his presence and to be given a promise by him.

Achilles’ elite group of warriors, the Myrmidons, were also a group that was given a lot of respect and was allowed to be different because they were necessary to the winnings of many battles. Although the king, particularly Agamemnon disliked Achilles and his group very much because of their

individuality, he used them because of their skill. For example, all Greek warships that sailed had white sails but the ship that was used by the Myrmidons, had a black sail and was a showcase of their individuality. The Myrmidons, led by Achilles were so skilled that when they went out on their own onto the beaches of Troy, instead of waiting for the other Greek ships behind them, Agamemnon complained but soon acknowledged that it was the group's choice to do what they want. Evidently Achilles' group, the Myrmidons, had a lot of respect from others, even Agamemnon who let them do what they wanted to, because of the Greek need for them and their skill. Overall class structure and the respect that was given in the film "Troy" was historically accurate because it truthfully portrayed women, the king and the Myrmidons.

From the beginning of the film "Troy" directed by Wolfgang Petersen, right to the end, the film proves that it is historically accurate and thus keeps the legend of the Trojan War, written down by Homer through his epic poem the "Illiad" alive. When analyzing the military portrayed in the film through the fighting formations, weapons and naval warfare, it is evident that the producers stuck to history and made an accurate portrayal of the Greek military. Culture as well is an aspect that proves to be truthful to the ancient Greek world through the portrayal of burial customs, religion and architecture. Finally, class structure and respect is yet another part of the film that remains historically faithful through the portrayal of the respect given to women, the king and Achilles' elite group of warriors, the Myrmidons. Overall, it is apparent how new periods of time can still maintain history and portray legends, traditions and cultures of the past accurately, so

that the audience can benefit from the film and the story of the ancient world will never be lost.