In the footsteps of troy research paper samples

[Literature](), [Mythology]()

Introduction

The ancient city of Troy is perhaps one of the cities that have generated waves of disputes over time, as to whether it has been an actual city or a legendary one. However, due to extensive archaeological research, Troy is a city that indeed existed, and maybe its remains do not bring back pictures of its old glorious days, yet, there is so much to learn from its passage through time. In greater detail:

Ancient Greek epic poet wrote in his infamous epic " The Iliad": " Generations of men are like the leaves. In winter, winds blow them down to earth, but then, when spring season comes again, the budding wood grows more. And so with men: one generation grows, another dies away."(Iliad 6. 181-5). In this verse, Homer draws a resemblance between mankind's perpetual cycle of death and rebirth to a forest in which leaves dry up and fall and are replaced by new leaves, that are destined to dry up and be replaced as well; though leaves on a tree change quite frequently, they all seem to share a similar form, a similar life-cycle and similar patterns of existence. Similarly, mankind is built as layers and layers of generations, each differing from their predecessors and yet sharing great resemblance as well.

In 1870 an archaeologist named Heinrich Schlimann followed the geographical clues in the classical 'Iliad' and began excavating North West Turkey. He was convinced he had found the legendary city of Troy. Whether he was right or not was just a matter of time. In 1988, Manfred Kauffman along with a Team from the University of Tubingen and Cincinnati excavated this site further. Findings included arrowheads that dated to the 12 Century

BC.

Nevertheless, the factual nature of Troy remains controversial; there are those who believe that the city, as part of the greater frameworks of the literary depictions of it in Homer's writings, is as fictional as the characters appearing in it. Others believe that myths and folk tales reflect a universal 'truth', that in their essence they are rooted in real life.

In this paper, I will attempt to use the debate regarding Troy's existence as a platform for discussing mythology as an integral part of culture and socialization, reflecting the building-blocks of society as we know it. Many modern terms and phrases are based on mythology, including the terms " Trojan horse" and " Achilles heel", as well as depictions such as " Narcissistic", to name but a few. I believe these are reflections of the powerful basis of mythology and its role in culture, society and human thought.

- The Trojan War in Greek Mythology

According to Greek mythology, a Great War known as the Trojan War was waged by the Achaeans (the Greeks) against the city of Troy after Troy's Prince Paris took Helen from her husband, King Menelaus of Sparta. One of the pivotal events in Greek mythology, this war has appeared in many classical works, most notably Homer's 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey'; as the Iliad depicts the last year of the siege of Troy, the Odyssey describes Odysseus's journey homewards. However, Paris' infatuation with Helen is not what truly sparked things up. There was a background.

The Trojan War began in the marriage between Peleus and Thetis, a sea-goddess who had not invited Eris, the goddess of discord, to their marriage.

Insulted and enraged, Eris stormed into the wedding banquet and threw a golden apple onto the table. She said that the apple belonged to the fairest woman.

Three goddesses- Hera, Athena and Aphrodite each reached for the apple. Zeus proclaimed that Paris, prince of Troy who was thought to be the most beautiful man alive, would act as the judge. Paris chose Aphrodite, and she promised him that Helen, wife of Menelaus, would be his wife. Paris set off to Sparta to retrieve what was promised to him. When Menelaus left Sparta to go to a funeral, Paris abducted Helen. Menelaus then declared war in Troy. The first nine years of the war consisted of both war in Troy and war against the neighbouring regions. Seeking to gain entrance into Troy, clever Odysseus (some say with the aid of Athena) ordered a large wooden horse to be built. Its insides were to be hollow so that soldiers could hide within it. Once the statue had been built by the artist Epeius, a number of the Greek warriors, along with Odysseus, climbed inside. The rest of the Greek fleet sailed away, so as to deceive the Trojans. Once introduced into the walls of the city, the Greeks attacked and defeated Troy (Martin 2003).

The ancient Greeks believed that the Trojan War was a true historical event that had taken place in the 13th or 12th century BC, in an area located in today's Turkey. Nevertheless, during modern times the war and the city were regarded as a myth, up to 1868, when the German Archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann met a man named Frank Calvert, who convinced him that Troy was at a place named Hissarlik.

- Mythology, ethnos and founding stories

The term ethnicity refers to one's cultural origin. The word comes from the

term Ethnie, referring to a community of memory that transmits myths, symbols and customs across generations (Schiff 2013).

A group's stories and customs are what bind them together as a group, providing a past as well as a future, along with a feeling of belonging, purpose and destiny. In the past, and to some extent to this day, leaders have attempted to use mythology or some ancestral destiny as means to mobilize people, bring them together or turn them against others. One such example was Adolf Hitler, calling upon the great Aryan nation as means to unite the Germanic people wherever they may be.

Any ethnie is fundamentally a product of memory and discourse. It is not based on actual biological descent or territorial residence, but rather relies on poets and writers of history to consolidate ethnic traditions. Passed down from generation to generation, these stories are construed as historical, factual and canonical.

Consequently, ethno-history, referring to ethnically-based history, is always a contested discourse and subject to change, as are the Zeitgeists (spirit of the time) guiding the poets and historians who in turn have a significant influence on the stories of ethnies. To this extent, one may say that ethno-history is an ideological tool, as invented traditions use the consolidating power of antiquity to transform opportunistic conquests into signs of destiny (Schiff 2013).

Myths and folk tales seem to prosper in modern times as well, though they defy modern knowledge and reason; it seems that their appeal and influence are rooted in emotion rather than reason. In addition, it seems that in modern times there is a tension between emotion and reason when it comes

to myths and stories, including biblical stories.

Sigmund Freud, founder of psychoanalysis had insinuated that one can interpret myths as one interprets dreams, and had even coined one his seminal psycho-sexual stages after Oedipus, referring to the Oedipal stage in which a male child fears and rivals his father while wishing to take his place alongside his mother. This stage was named for King Oedipus, who had unknowingly killed his father and married his mother (Dowden 1992). His student Carl Jung (1958) posited a collective unconscious; Jung suggested that a preconscious psyche, shared by all human beings, is comprised of 'archetypes', primordial patterns inherited by all mankind, serving as a mold into which each culture casts its own content. In addition, Jung used the term to refer to " a universal and recurring image, pattern, or motif representing a typical human experience." It is this that gives archetypes their power, the ability to evoke themes to which a vast majority can relate. The archetype has been used to describe original or ideal model phenomena and characters, such as easily recognizable type-roles in drama - like the evil stepmother, the miser, the brave hero. In the case of drama and literature, such archetypes are usually traceable back to myth and fable (Jung 1958). What is more, " Archetypes create myths, religions, and philosophical ideas that influence and set their stamp on whole nations and epochs." (Jung, 1958).

Jung points to common denominators in ancient mythology as indicative of these archetypes. These include the hero, who pursues a great quest to realize his destiny; the shadow, the amoral remnant of our instinctual animal past; the persona, the mask and pretense we show others; the anima and

animus, our female and male roles and urges (Jung 1958).

In addition, Jung believed that the similarities in myths and folk-stories are a reflection of this unconscious, these motifs that are shared among nations that have no contact whatsoever, a connection surpassing time and space. Therefore, it might be wise to turn to examining the Trojan myth and its role in forming culture and a sense of belonging in two cultures; the Greek-Roman and the British.

- The story of Troy and its depiction in folk-tales

The great majority of people have probably heard as children the stories of Helen and Paris, of the great heroes Odysseus, Achilles and Hector, and the famous Trojan horse, which has become a code name for computer viruses in recent years, among others (Bryce 2002).

On a national and ethnic level, Trojan identity became a rich mythical source for cultural consolidation in ancient Greek literature, and was then embraced by Roman, Frankish and British imperial origin histories. Myths and stories are used as a glue of sorts, binding together people through time and space, providing a shared belief system and a shared history, together with a shared future (Schiff 2013).

Although founding figures such as Aeneas and Brutus are fictional, their status as Trojans was believed in, and hence reproduced by, the storytellers and chroniclers who profoundly shaped subsequent ethnies. As stated earlier, by dating back one's ancestry to ancient times, one can claim to have a stake in and a right to land and control (Schiff 2013). One such story teller was Homer, whose seminal writing ' The Odyssey' and ' The Iliad' are an integral part of almost every literary education.

Some say that the Iliad is the essence of what used to be called western civilization. To ancient Greeks, the Iliad reflected the nature of man and the nature of divinity; to the Romans, Troy was sacred, the origin of Aeneas, the Trojan refugee who escaped the burning city and was the mythic founder of Rome (Fleischman 1994).

Another example is Gawain, writing in 14th century England about King Arthur's court; the poet presents an ethno-historical portrait of Britain, linking the founder of Britain, Brutus, with members of a noble race who, after Troy's collapse, conquered and colonized areas throughout what is currently known as Western Europe (Bryce 2002).

The eighth-century BCE Iliad was produced by a Homer who was raised in a mixed Greek-Anatolian (Turkish) culture; therefore his depiction of the Trojan War was that of two kin nations rather than two rivaling and separate people at war.

Conversely, the Gawain poet in 14th century Britain sees the British nation as an eclectic mixture of identities, and had therefore depicted the Trojan War as one waged between two very different and rival cultures (Schiff 2013).

Some scholars believe Homer, 'the blind poet', was in fact not one person but rather a band of poets, travelling from city to city and performing their works. Similarly, the British Gawain may have been the personification and consolidation of folk-tales and myths passed down for generations (Fleischman 1994).

Regardless of their true identity, Homer and Gawain, as many others like them, provide written and dramatized accounts of history, whether true or

mythical.

- Historical debate and archeology

The ancient Greeks mostly believed Homer's Iliad to be a depiction of the Trojan War, though probably far from accurate. The fifth century Greek historian Herodotos believed that there was indeed a war between the Greek and Trojans, but its reason was not the abduction of a beautiful woman by a Trojan prince, but rather a mistake in navigation that had led the two to Egypt. The true story, according to Herodotos, lacked dramatic flare and a romantic motive, therefore Homer took artistic liberty in creating characters and scenes. Moreover, once can easily find classical literary elements of Homer's time such as divine interaction with humanity as well as historical prototypes. (Bryce 2002).

A commonly held view is that in spite of the many historical inconsistencies and anachronisms that arose in the handing down of the tale, the basis of the Iliad was indeed a conflict between Mycenaean Greeks and Trojans in northwest Anatolia towards the Late Bronze Age (Bryce 2002).

An examination of other nations during that period, namely the Hittites, indicates similar stories of war and conquest in that area. Troy had indeed been found in the texts of the Hittites (Bryce 2002).

- The search for Troy

During the 19th century, a German archaeologist named Heinrich Schliemann, having heard stories of the Trojan War and rumors of the whereabouts of the ancient city, had decided to search for its ruins and prove its existence. While his findings are controversial, Schliemann was indeed able to prove that ancient Greek civilization had dated at least 1000

years earlier than has been assumed (Mourby, 2004).

Schliemann discovered nine distinct layers, indicating nine distinct eras, from a large settlement dated back to the Early Bronze age in 3000 BC to an elegant Roman city in the fourth century AD. In one of the bottom layers Schliemann uncovered a great treasure- the Treasure of Priam that was donated to Berlin and after World War II was taken as part of the Russian spoils of war (Fleischman 1994).

According to Schliemann's excavations in Hisarlik, located in today's Turkey, the ancient city of Troy's destruction is dated back to the middle of the 13th century BC. Seeing as Homer lived in the late eighth or early seventh century BC, he must have compiled these tales half a millennium or more after the events on which his writings are allegedly based (Bryce 2002). Nevertheless, archaeological excavations have indicated that after 1250 BC population had massively condensed within the walls of the citadel, suggesting a possible siege (Mourby, 2004).

Some archaeologists believe that the site was destroyed by an earthquake, as can be inferred from cracks in the buildings, and not war. A compromise has been proposed in which the citadel's fortifications were seriously weakened by earthquake to a point where they were vulnerable to enemy conquest. This proposal was also used to explain the wooden horse tradition; the horse was a well-known symbol of the sea-god Poseidon, also known as " the Earthshaker", as according to theory he inflicted a devastating earthquake upon the citadel, demolishing its walls to a point where it could easily fall into the hands of its besiegers (Schiff 2013).

While his character and activities may be controversial, one cannot ignore

the fact that Schliemann indeed uncovered and discovered history, and perhaps the true city of Troy (Snodgrass 1995).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the existence or not of Troy is part of the myths and stories, which are the building blocks of any culture and tradition. Passed down from generation to generation, they reflect society's core beliefs, the main essence of human nature. Stripped of their cultural nuances, ancient mythologies have much in common; some interpret this as a reflection of a shared belief system, humanistic spirit or a shared unconscious. Others claim that myths are dramatized depictions of true historical events, and the similarities among cultures serve as proof of their existence.

Either way, whether or not the city of Troy had truly existed, and a long war was waged over a woman, there is still much to learn from mythology throughout the ages and in years to come.

If we put aside the dichotomous categories of " truth" and " not truth", we may be able to better understand ourselves, our history, and possibly our future. We may very well never know whether there was or wads not a city named Troy and whether it was besieged by an angry king whose wife was taken from him.

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