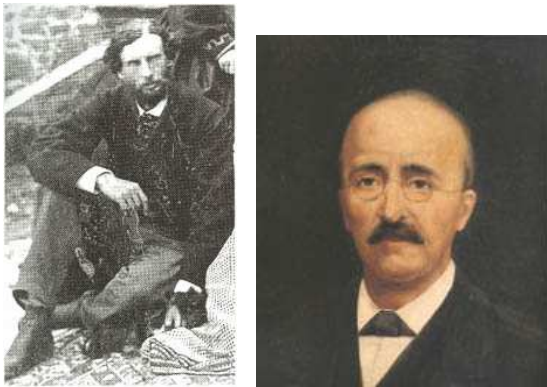


Heinrich Schliemann

By the beginning of the eighteenth century AD, Homer and the Trojan War had lost much of their popularity. Many looked at Homer as a primitive curiosity but not much of a poet, while Troy was a fantasy, long since gone if anything like it ever existed. By the beginning of the 19th century, however, both Troy and Homer enjoyed renewed popularity and respect. An industry of scholarship had developed which examined the construction of the Homeric poems in aching detail. Explorers also started roaming the Troad, the plain where Troy reputedly sat, trying to find Troy itself.

Frank Calvert and Heinrich Schliemann

These two men were to do what a hundred years earlier was deemed impossible: they found Troy. I need to tell you a little about each man. On the left is Frank Calvert. Frank Calvert and his two brothers were Englishmen, businessmen who also held some diplomatic posts. All three were very interested in the problem of finding Troy, but Frank actually lived in the Troad and knew the land better than anyone from his own observations.



Schliemann is a more complex individual. He grew up in Mecklenburg, and became a very successful, if at times deceitful and unscrupulous, businessman. In his 30's, he seemed to desire a more respectable occupation and tried variously to become a plantation owner and a scientist, but did not succeed. He ended up becoming the father of a whole new scientific field, that of archaeology. Since he truly was a pioneer in his field he had to figure out many techniques and procedures we take for granted today. He was well-read in the scientific literature of his day. He knew more than a dozen languages. He was a prolific writer. For the twenty-some years of his excavations, he worked long days in conditions modern archaeologists would not tolerate--suffering through blasting winds and flooding storms, all of which certainly contributed to his death at age 68, relatively early for a man of his drive and energy. He left a written legacy of eleven books, something of an autobiography, eighteen travel diaries, 20,000 papers, 60,000 letters, not counting the excavation records filling 175 volumes plus numerous other records, plans, and the like. His genius is undeniable. That said, he also suffered from a tendency to combine fantasy and fact as much as anything he read in Homer. He was prone to exaggeration, rash conclusions, and outright fabrication, especially when it came to his own life experiences and reputation. Every bit as much as every facet of bronze age archaeology owes something to Schliemann, at every turn we must confront the legacy of Schliemann's paradoxical brilliance.

Finding Troy

What happened was this: Frank Calvert disproved several abiding theories about the location of the city of Troy and instead focused his attention on a hill called Hisarlik. Calvert did some preliminary excavations and felt sure this was the site of Troy, but he could not get money from

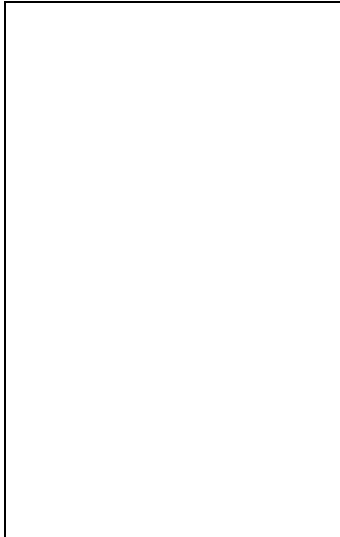
the British Museum to fund a full excavation. Then Schliemann stepped in with the necessary money and took over-- in many ways.

Schliemann excavated and Calvert was right. It seemed like Troy and the site turned out to be deeper and richer than anyone had anticipated. But the headlines that appeared told a surprising story. Schliemann claimed to have developed an obsession with finding Troy ever since childhood and finally fulfilled his destiny by excavating Troy. Calvert's contributions were omitted or dismissed and to this day Schliemann's name is the one synonymous with discovering Troy.

"Priam's Treasure"

But Schliemann always told the better story. One of the more famous was his account of finding buried treasure. His diary recounts how one day he was walking through the excavation site and caught a glint of metal in a dirt wall. He started digging with his bare hands and uncovered a huge hoard of bronze and gold treasures, which he and his wife stealthily removed from the site so the workers would not steal them.

He promptly identified the find as the "Treasure of Priam" and claimed that the jewelry in it had been worn by Helen. Here you can see a picture of his wife Sophie wearing the so-called "Jewels of Helen." Unfortunately, Schliemann was a better storyteller than archaeologist in this case. He forged the diary entry and the story of the find. He seems to have cobbled together the objects over a period of weeks and some have even argued he had some of them fabricated. Moreover, he had the objects illegally shipped to Germany, effectively stealing them from the Turkish government.



This story becomes still more mysterious. In World War II, the objects disappeared from Berlin and no one knew where they were until the early 1990's when the Russians announced they found them in their basement and briefly put them on exhibit.

Adapted from Wilfred E. Major, *The Historical World behind the Trojan War*
<http://home.att.net/~a.a.major/troy.htm> (Access date 8 March 2007)