

Heinrich Schliemann

According to legend, the finder of the true site of Troy was Heinrich Schliemann, adventurer, speaker of 15 languages, world traveler, and gifted amateur archaeologist. In his memoirs and books, Schliemann claimed that when he was eight, his father took him on his knee and told him the story of the *Iliad*, the forbidden love between Helen, wife of the King of Sparta, and Paris, son of Priam of Troy, and how their elopement resulted in a war that destroyed a civilization. That story, said Schliemann, awoke in him a hunger to search for the archaeological proof of the existence of Troy and Tiryns and Mycenae. In fact, he was so hungry that he went into business to make his fortune so he could afford the search.

And after much consideration and study and investigation, on his own he found the original site of Troy, at Hisarlik, a tell in Turkey.

Ah, Romance!

The reality, according to David Traill's 1995 biography, *Schliemann of Troy: Treasure and Deceit*, is that most of this is romantic baloney. Schliemann was a brilliant, gregarious, enormously talented and extremely restless con man, who nevertheless changed the course of archaeology and focused interest in the sites and events of the *Iliad* and created widespread belief in their physical reality. During Schliemann's travels around the world (he visited the Netherlands, Russia, England, France, Mexico, America, Greece, Egypt, Italy, India, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Japan, all before he was 45), he took trips to ancient monuments, stopped at universities to take classes and attend lectures in comparative literature and language, wrote reams of pages of diaries and travelogues, and made friends and enemies all over the world. How he afforded such traveling may be attributed to either his business acumen or his penchant for fraud; probably a bit of both.

In 1868, at the age of 46, Schliemann took up archaeology. There is no doubt that before that Schliemann had been interested in archaeology, particularly the history of the Trojan War, but it had always been subsidiary to his interest in languages and literature. But in June of 1868, Schliemann spent three days at the excavations at Pompeii directed by the archaeologist Guiseppe Fiorelli.

Three Candidates for Troy

At the time Schliemann's interest was stirred by archaeology and Homer, there were three candidates for the location of Homer's Troy. The popular choice of the day was Bunarbashi (also spelled Pinarbasi) and the accompanying acropolis of Balli-Dagh; Hisarlik was favored by the ancient writers and a small minority of scholars; and Alexandrian Troas, since determined to be too recent to be Homeric Troy, was a distant third. Schliemann excavated at Bunarbashi during the summer of 1868 and visited the Troad and Hisarlik, apparently unaware of the standing of Hisarlik until, at the end of the summer he dropped in on the archaeologist Frank Calvert. Calvert, a British archaeologist, was among the decided minority among scholars; he believed that Hisarlik was the site of Homeric Troy, but had had difficulty convincing the British Museum to support his excavations. He had put trenches into Hisarlik in 1865 and found enough evidence to convince himself that he had found the correct site. Calvert recognized that Schliemann had the money to get the additional funding and permits to dig at Hisarlik. Calvert spilt his guts, beginning a partnership he would learn to regret.

Schliemann returned to Paris in the fall of 1868 and spent six months becoming an expert on Troy and Mycenae, writing a book of his recent travels, and writing numerous letters to Calvert, asking him where he thought the best place to dig might be, and what sort of equipment he might need to excavate at Hisarlik. In 1870 Schliemann began excavations at Hisarlik, under the permit Frank Calvert had obtained for him, and with members of Calvert's crew. But never, in any of Schliemann's writings, did he ever admit that Calvert did anything more than agree with Schliemann's theories of the location of Homer's Troy, born that day when his father sat him on his knee.

K. Kris Hirst, 'Heinrich Schliemann and the Discovery of Troy', *About: Archaeology*
<http://archaeology.about.com/od/ancientgreece/a/homeric1.htm> (Access date 8 March 2007)