

# CLASSICAL MYTHS

## Unit 3. The Trojan War

### The Trojan War: Truth or myth?

The Trojan War, if happened, took place centuries before Homer wrote down the *Iliad* in about 800 BC on the basis of an oral tradition which goes back to the Mycenaean period (1600-1100 BC)

But if it happened, it was quite different from the war described by the Greek myths, because the *Iliad* is a literary work. Moreover stories are a bit different at each telling when they are passed on orally rather than written down

1. 1.1. In pairs, write down a list including three parts of the story explained by the myth of Troy which must be just fantasy:

- a) One story related with the CAUSE of the war:
- b) One story related with the DEVELOPMENT of the war:
- c) One story related with the END of the war:

1.2. Write down some aspects of the myth that you think might be true

2. Look carefully at the following sources and classify them into primary and secondary sources:

#### Source A

Dardanelles



Troy lies at the point where East and West, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean all meet – a location very favourable to trade and ideal as a centre of power. Maintaining a strategic maritime advantage due to its position at the opening of the **Dardanelles**, it also controlled a land route that came up along the western coastal region of Anatolia to the shortest crossing of the straits from Asia to Europe. From its vantage grounds it could dominate traffic both across and up and down the narrow straits, and presumably tolls of some

kind were extracted from those who passed by land or by sea. As a result, Troy gained wealth – and made enemies.

Text from N. Fields, *Troy c. 1700-1250 BC*, Oxford 2004, Osprey Publishing, p. 14

### Source B



On the left, Mycenaean objects found in a shipwreck excavation (picture on the right) at Uluburun (Southern Turkey) Dendrochronological dating of a small piece of presumably fresh-cut firewood or dunnage suggests a date of 1306 BC, or sometime shortly thereafter, for the sinking of the ship.

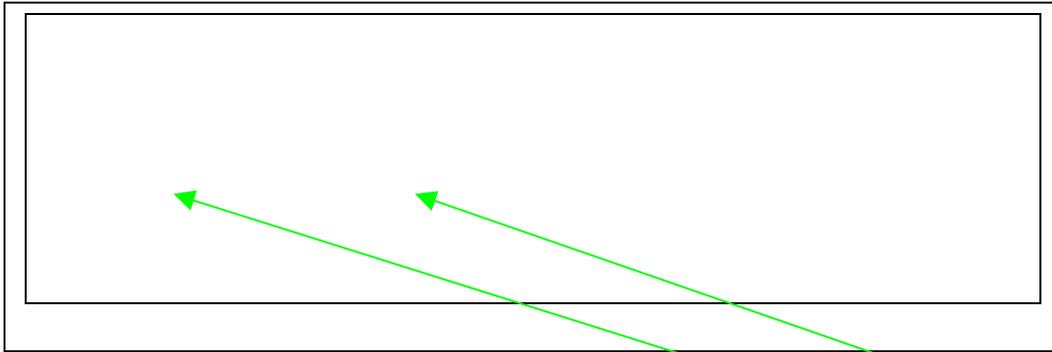
### Source C



Offerings found in a burial in Besik-Bucht (harbour of Troy).  
Ca. 1300BC

The vase is Mycenaean, or maybe a local imitation.  
Over 50 burials in the same cemetery contained imported Mycenaean goods.

### Source D



Gold and bronze Mycenaean dagger showing shields: figure-8 shields and tower-shields. These shields match remarkably well those described by Homer.

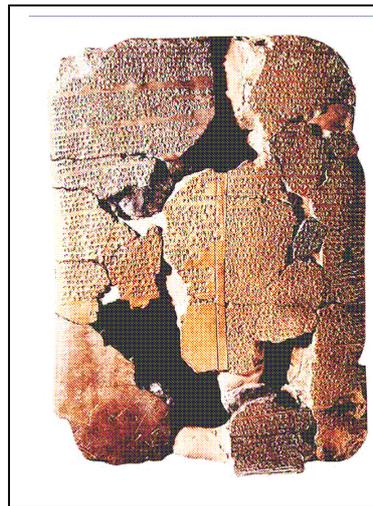
### Source E

Archaeological evidence of a Mycenaean helmet made from the tusks of wild boars as it was described by Homer in the *Iliad*.



This kind of object would have been exotic to Homer's contemporaries

### Source F



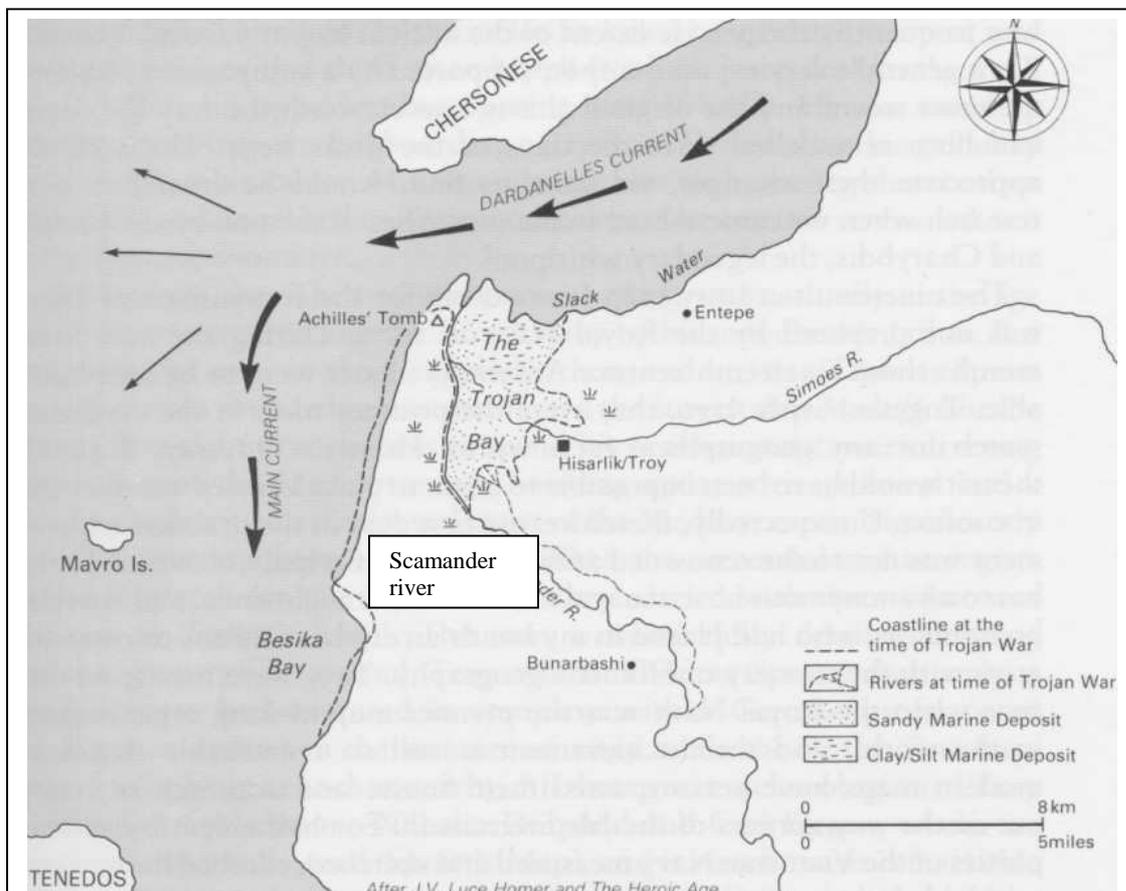
Clay tablet from the Royal Archive of Hattusa / Boğazköy, the so called Alaksandu-Treaty. Documents and treaties among the Hittites may indicate that they had relations with the Greeks and the city they call Wilusa that they mention may be what the Greeks called (W)Ilios, and we now call Troy. This document mentions Wilusa in Hittite writing.

### Source G



The inscription on this coin shows that in the 2nd century Greeks recognized the place as the Ilios of the myths.

Reverse of a silver coin from Troy. Hellenistic period (188-166 BC).



### Source H

In the 2nd millennium BC Troy may have been a commercial city which profited from its location on the Dardanelles, blessed by an unusual combination of strong winds and currents which prevented ships sailing to it from the Aegean. As long as ships could not sail against the wind, they often lay for a long time in the bay of Troy. What matters here is the flat sandy beach and the lagoon which, as palaeogeographers have established, once existed here. It was the perfect place for beaching ships. The Trojans could earn money on cargoes of foodstuffs, provide towing services, levy customs duties and exact pilot fees. The location of the site fits the description in the *Iliad*.

Adapted from *Project Troia* <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/troia/eng/korfmanninterview.html>

### Source I

**NARRATOR:** After three thousand years the legendary city of Troy seemed to have become a reality. It seemed there was some historical truth in the myth. But there was still no evidence that Troy had been destroyed as Homer said by an enemy army. Then Korfmann's team began to look for clues about the fate of Troy in the late Bronze Age. Soon they began to find evidence of violence. They began to uncover arrowheads in the lower city. It suggested close quarter fighting. Korfmann began to build up a picture of what had happened.

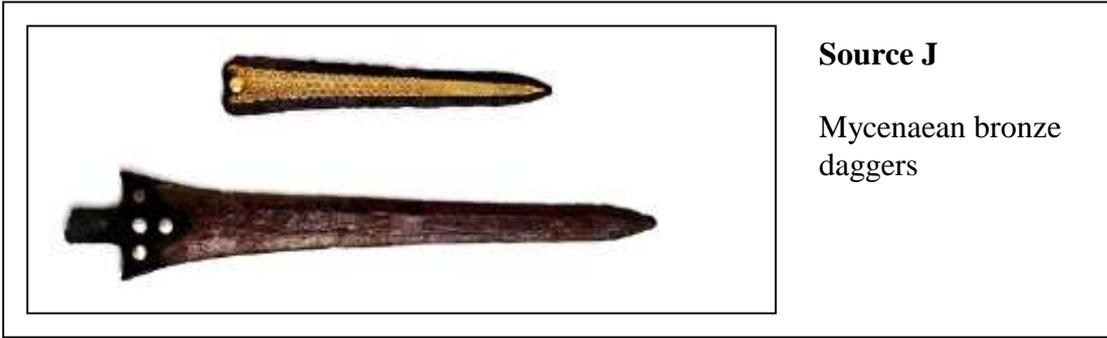
**MANFRED KORFMANN:** Now the evidence is burning and catastrophe with fire. Then there are skeletons, we found for example a girl, I think sixteen, seventeen years old, half buried, the feet were burned by fire. Half of the corpse was underground. This is strange so a rapid burial was in public space, inside the city, and we found sling pellets in heaps.

**NARRATOR:** He believes these pellets had been assembled by the defenders of Troy and then abandoned after they lost the battle. It pointed to a clear conclusion.

**MANFRED KORFMANN:** It was a city which was besieged. It was a city which was defended, which protected itself. They lost the war and obviously they were defeated.

**NARRATOR:** Korfmann had shown that Troy had been destroyed in a battle at the end of the Bronze Age, just as the legend had said it was.

Transcription of a fragment of 'The Truth of Troy, in *Horizon*, BBC Two, Thursday 25 March 2004



- Tick the boxes of the chart according to the kind of evidence that each source may provide:

|   | SOURCES |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | A       | B | C | D | E | F | G | H |
| The archaeological site at Hisarlik hill may have been Troy / Ilion                               |         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Mycenaean Greeks may have had relationships with cities in Asia Minor in 13th – 12th centuries BC |         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Much of what Homer tells may have a historical basis  |         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Troy may have been located in a strategical place   |         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Troy may have been a commercial city  |         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Mycenaean Greeks were   |         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

|   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| traders   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Mycenaean civilisation was a warrior culture                  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Troy may have been destroyed by fire                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| There may have been a Trojan war for economic reasons         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| The Trojan War started because of the kidnap of a Greek woman |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |