Heinrich Schliemann and Troy
History and Archaeology

- **archaeology** is the most visible form of “recovered” history today

- rarely a “treasure hunt”
  - Tut’s tomb is the exception

- archaeology is, after all, rooting through other people’s garbage
  - so is it likely we’ll find anything of value?

- but the dirt dug up by archaeologists is pure “gold” to historians, cf. pollen
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History and Archaeology

• cf. the ivories found in Nimrud
  – Nimrud was an important Neo-Assyrian city
  – ivories were dumped into a well
  – ivory itself was not valuable, cf. plastic
  – the gold and jewels were stripped off the ivories by the invading Medes
  – it was “garbage” to them!
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History and Archaeology

• let’s look at one case where archaeology informs our understanding of history: how historical is Homer’s Troy?
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Heinrich Schliemann

• one of the most sensational news stories of the 19th century was the discovery by Heinrich Schliemann of what is now widely assumed to be the site of Troy
  – Troy is the setting of Homer’s *Iliad*
  – prior to Schliemann’s excavation, most scholars considered Troy to have been merely a mythological place
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Heinrich Schliemann

• Schliemann’s life
  – young businessman proficient at languages
  – became rich as a trader in the Baltic region
  – retired in his 40’s and decided to pursue his lifelong dream of finding Homer’s Troy
    • *The Iliad* seemed so real to him he felt it must be based on history
    • people in later antiquity believed there was a site called “Ilion” (Ilium/Troy), cf. Alexander
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Heinrich Schliemann

- Schliemann went to Greece where he married a woman named Sophie who could recite Homer from memory.
- Looked east for Troy.
- Especially, near the Hellespont.
  - Straits provide wealth in the form of taxes and tariffs.
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Schliemann’s Troy

• Schliemann found a promising mound near the Turkish village of **Hissarlik**
  – just one of many promising *tells*

• though clearly this city was once important
  – has nine major levels
  – and large walls, just as Homer describes Troy
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Schliemann’s Troy

• Schliemann announced that he’d found Homer’s Troy
  – the implication was that Troy was more than a mythical place but had some historical basis

• this opened the world’s eyes to the value — and glamour! — of archaeology
  – or at least its potential for sensationalism
  – this led to funding for excavations at Ur, Goshen and other biblical sites
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Schliemann’s Troy

• Schliemann found a cache of “hidden” jewelry and dubbed it “Priam’s Treasure”
  – and on top of this, told a remarkable story about sneaking this treasure out of the site under the noses of his Turkish guards
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Schliemann’s Troy

• but problems soon emerged with all of this
  – Priam’s treasure is a motley collection of artifacts attributable to various styles/periods
  – moreover, Troy at its prime peaked too early to coincide with Homer’s “Ilium”
    • Troy VIIA is a shabby resettlement of a formerly great city
    • and it has no burn level above or below it!
  – all in all, if Schliemann’s Troy was Homer’s Troy, archaeology didn’t confirm literature
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Schliemann and Mycenaean Civilization

• unfazed by such discrepancies, Schliemann turned his attention to Mycenae
– Mycenae is Agamemnon’s home city in myth

• he uncovered Mycenaean civilization
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Schliemann and Mycenaean Civilization

• at Mycenae, Schliemann excavated the **Grave Circle** of Mycenaean princes

• in it he discovered a series of death masks
  – cf. Tut’s death mask
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Schliemann and Mycenean Civilization

- when he found a particularly fine mask, he wired back to newspapers in Europe: “I have looked on the face of Agamemnon.”

- the Mask of Agamemnon became one of the most famous archaeological artifacts ever brought to light
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Schliemann and Mycenaean Civilization

• but what did Schliemann really find?
  – there’s no doubt his “Troy” was an important city in the 2nd millennium BCE
  – and Mycenae was part of an important civilization on mainland Greece at that time

• but is Schliemann’s “Troy” the Troy of legend?

• Did some real king named Agamemnon ever rule “Mycenean” Mycenae?
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Schliemann and Mycenean Civilization

• because of these finds, Schliemann has been dubbed the “Father of Mediterranean Archaeology”
  – but how valid is the presumption that the world depicted in Homer’s epics represents what-really-happened — or even comes close?
  – remember that Homer was an oral poet writing at least three centuries after the Trojan War, with a dark age intervening!
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Who was Schliemann?

- Schliemann’s real achievements:
  - laid the groundwork for scientific archaeology
  - popularized the discipline and trained many graduate students who were important later
- but he still had a foot in archaeology’s more sensationalist past
  - for instance, he played up his “treasures”
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Who was Schliemann?

• more important, Schliemann kept meticulous and voluminous records

[Image of handwritten note]

"both in the Comptes rendus des Sciences de l’Institut in in the Memorie University. I trust the thousands of different symbolic signs which I have published in vol. 103. If passionate will lead to some important discoveries. I remain with profound respect your Excellency’s constant admirer.

Schliemann"

To the Rt. Honble. W.E. Gladstone
London
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Who was Schliemann?

• these records reveal disturbing tendencies in his character
• he says he met President Millard Fillmore, when he couldn’t have
• he describes an earthquake in San Francisco when he wasn’t there
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Who was Schliemann?

• and the tendency to exaggerate does not seem to have stopped there
  – childhood dream of finding Troy?
  – Sophie and the discovery of Priam’s Treasure?
    • is it just a collection of things he found in various graves at Troy?
    • it was lost until recently
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Who was Schliemann?

• and the Mask of Agamemnon?
  – very different-looking from other death masks
  – especially the handle-bar moustache

• some scholars have suggested Schliemann forged this mask!
  – n.b. note in Schliemann’s archives about a goldsmith
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Who was Schliemann?

• and the Mask of Agamemnon?
  – very different-looking from other death masks
  – did Schliemann plan to say “I have looked on the face of Agamemnon” but first he needed an appropriate mask?
  – did he sneak it in—not out!—past the Greek guards at Mycenae?
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Who was Schliemann?

• and the Mask of Agamemnon?
  – very different-looking from other death masks
  – or did he just improve an existing mask’s look, i.e. add the handle-bar moustache?
  – see the article on reserve: “Behind the Mask of Agamemnon”
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Who was Schliemann?

• and the Mask of Agamemnon?
  – very different-looking from other death masks
  – if so, it has to be one of the greatest con jobs in history!
  – the Greek government won’t allow any testing on the mask, claiming it might damage a national treasure
  – more likely, tourism!
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Who was Schliemann?

• from all this only one thing is absolutely certain: Schliemann would love all the press he’s still getting!
Heinrich Schliemann and Troy

Conclusion: Archaeology and History

• what’s the lesson to learn from Schliemann’s life and career?

• and how much of the lesson is about the past versus the present?

• to answer questions such as these, we must look at Schliemann in his own day
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Who was Schliemann?

• while Darwin was saying we “come from monkeys,” Schliemann was digging up evidence of a heroic past

• cf. Wagner’s operas about the heroes of German legend

• Schliemann handed Europe a past they liked much better, all neatly wrapped up in the trappings of science
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Conclusion: Archaeology and History

• remember that this is the same age that denounced Herodotus as the “Father of History and Lies”
  – but they bought wholesale into the story of Sophie and Priam’s Treasure

• that’s the power of invented history!

• so whose death mask is this . . .
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Conclusion: Archaeology and History