The Trojan War

An extract from the historical monography: “The Hellenic Middle Ages” by Luciano Rizzuti, translated by Giovanna Farrugia

In Troy, on the hill of Hissarlik, nine layers have come to light from the excavations effected by Heinrich Schliemann (1870 - 1890) and his coadjutor Wilhelm Dörpfeld (1893 - 1894) first and by W. T. Semple and Carl Blegen later. Each layer was 60 - 90 centimetres thick. This means that the city was destroyed many times and rebuilt again upon its ruins.

There is a question about the year in which the city sung by Homer was destroyed. Duride of Samos dates the event in 1334, Herodotus in 1250, Eratosthenes in 1194, Apollodoro in 1184, Ephor of Cumae in 1135.

It is not easy to establish the right date, but if we compare the above mentioned dates with the chart drawn up by C. Blegen, who has overseen the excavations from 1932 to 1938, we may notice that each of them can be situated in as many layers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Troy</th>
<th>Year</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>3000 - 2500 B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>2500 - 2200 B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>2200 - 2050 B.C.</td>
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<td>IV</td>
<td>2050 - 1900 B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>1900 - 1800 B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>1800 - 1300 B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIIa</td>
<td>1300 - 1260 B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VII b</td>
<td>1260 - 1190 B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VII b2</td>
<td>1190 - 1100 B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>700 - 85 B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>85 - 500 AD</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If we keep in mind that the Achaeans destroyed Troy, according to this chart the fall of the city should be put in the layers VI (1800-1300 B.C.), as Duride of Samos refers, or VIIa (1300-1260 B.C.).
B.C.), as Herodotus hands down to us or VIIb1 (1260-1190 B.C.) as Eratosthenes and Apollodorus assert; in fact, their dates agree exactly with the period in which the Mycenaean civilization flourished.

The date asserted by Ephor of Cuma, placeable in the layer VIIb2 (1190 - 1100), should be excluded instead because it corresponds to the time of the decline of the palace kingdoms.

Thanks to the electromagnetic prospecting chart, in 1988 the German archaeologist Manfred O. Korfmann discovered a circuit of walls at the bottom of the hill of Hissarlik. The remains of a city were found within its bounding line. The city was about 30 hectares wide and could receive up to 10,000 people. Its dimensions would have allowed its inhabitants to withstand a prolonged siege.

- Its most recent ruins date back to the XIV century B.C., therefore they can be placed in the layer VI (1800 - 1300 B.C.). However it is certain that the city was destroyed by an earthquake, but neither weapons nor human rests have been found in the site. The demolition caused by the earthquake didn't determine the final desertion of the city, because it was rebuilt soon after. The presence of the bastion in the northwest, dating back to this period and still existing, would testify that the Trojans rebuilt the walls of the acropolis adopting the wave lines in order to absorb the seismic energy.

After a few years from its reconstruction, the city went through another destruction because of an enemy attack.

- In the layer VIIa (1300 - 1260 B.C.) Blegen discovered the ruins of a small palace, inside he found furniture and ornaments artistically similar to Mycenaean models. This shows that its revival was followed by a presumable Mycenaean settlement whose existence would have left some traces in the Trojan people’s culture.

In this period the problem of the tin provision created some political contrasts between the Mycenaeans and the Hittites. In this context the Trojan saga would be confirmed in its substantial truth of historical event.

This thesis would be supported by the finding of a list of names of women working in the palace in the archives in Pylos, in Linear B. They are indicated as coming from To-ro-ya, place in which the philologists aim to recognize the city of Troy. However the destruction of this city cannot be related to the one described by Homer. When the Achaeans returned home after the fall of Troy, their kingdoms suffered a definitive collapse, so in such circumstances they would not have been able to lead other military expeditions anymore.
Instead we know, as the layer VIIb1 (1260 - 1190 B.C.) shows, that the city was rebuilt in reduced dimensions, but it suffered another siege and was destroyed again in 1190 B.C.

The ruins, in fact, have given back boundary city walls and the foundations of several small houses bound together. A great amount of jars meant to contain solid and liquid food were buried up to their opening in their floor, in order to save the little space available.

This detail brings to our mind that the city inside its boundaries held a greater number of inhabitants than it would have been able to contain. However it could not have withstood ten years of siege because of its small dimensions; for this reason, the war cannot have been of such great importance as it is described in the poem Iliad.

By reporting in the catalogue of the ships the names of 29 peoples that took part in the expedition and by making 1186 ships, 120,000 men and 44 leaders go to Troy, Homer exaggerated the enterprise to such a degree as to make it unbelievable even to Thucydides, eyes who didn't hesitate to say that for lack of necessary means, as the preceding expeditions had been meaningless, so even this one, that was the most famous, is not truly up to the fame and the opinion that we have had for the lyric of the poets.

This event might be connected to a serious food crisis that would have forced the Mycenaeans toward the coasts of the Black Sea or the fertile lands of Urartu, an eastern region of Anatolia, whose inhabitants at that time were capable craftsmen in the manufacture of metals and skilled farmers too. However, in order to get there, it was necessary to cross the Dardanelles Channel which was controlled by Troy.

In such circumstances the destruction of the city cannot have been caused by a great coalition of Achaean warriors, but probably by a great number of starving refugees; in fact, from its remains you can only perceive the collapse of one of the many centers of the Aegean Sea that disappeared at the end of the Bronze Age. Therefore we believe that this destruction cannot have been caused by the army driven by Agamemnon but by that coalition of Aegean people that the Pharaohs of Egypt called Peoples of the Sea.

There are valid reasons for believing that Homer really drew inspiration from this attack of refugees in describing the famous siege, because it was remembered as an extraordinary historical event for

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1 Thucydides: The War of the Peloponnesus, I, 11
the large number of people that occupied the Troad and also because it would be the last possible event in which the Mycenaeans would have been able to venture.

*Sic stantibus rebus*, the only hypothesis that we may propose about the famous war sung by Homer is that, upon composing its poem *Iliad*, the poet joined together the three historical periods of Troy. They occurred in different time but in the same space in a unique great event; as a consequence, the dates, we underlined, would be paradoxically all valid, because from their combination:

- layer **VI** (1800 - 1300 B.C.) *the big city* of Manfred O. Korfman destroyed by the earthquake;
- layer **VIIa** (1300 - 1260 B.C.), the small city of Blegen *besieged and destroyed* by the Mycenaeans;
- layer **VIIb1** (1260 - 1190 B.C.) the attack of a *great coalition* of refugees and the *fire* of the city it would result that

\[
\text{a great city was besieged and destroyed by a great coalition}
\]

Of course an heroic epic cannot ascertain the historical truth.

- The dates provided by *Ephor of Cumae* (1135 B.C.), that can be placed in the layer **VIIb2** (1190 – **1100** B.C.), would point out a new reconstruction and a further destruction that took place in a period in which the palace kingdoms had collapsed decades before. The findings that came to light (a free-hand made piece of pottery produced with de purated mixture, bone points of arrow) testify that the site was inhabited by extremely poor people and didn’t exceed the dimensions of a simple village.

After its destruction, the hill of Hissarlik was abandoned for four centuries (from **1100** to **700** B.C.), as one can see by the dates of the following layer **VIII** (700 - 85 B.C.), and it was again repopulated at the time of the historical colonization.