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## **HEINRICH SCHLIEMANN: IMPACT OF EXCAVATIONS AT TROY AND MYCENAE**

Fascinated by Homeric works such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* since childhood, Heinrich Schliemann set out to uncover the remains of the fabled city of Troy in 1870. Schliemann began his excavations in April of 1870 as a self-made man and typical dilettante of the times. The task he set upon with little scientific planning and scholarly research if successful, would lend historical significance to the works of Homer and bring the fabled city to life.

His excavations from 1870 to 1882 were filled with events that took him from the heights of ecstasy to the depths of despair. Beginning with nothing but his fortunes and his religious devotion to Homer, he started a journey that would not only change the way we view parts of the ancient world but also changes within himself. Few things are more humbling than admitting that you do not know. In time, his invasive methods began to yield to more scientific and preservative ones. Input and experience was sought from others who could contribute knowledge which he lacked and in doing so impacted more than just his own work. Despite early shortcomings, Schliemann's work was noteworthy in terms of accomplishment even if not in definitively proving the location of Troy. How his methods evolved, the incorporation of other professions into his archaeological endeavors, and what we can take away from it today will be the subject of this paper.

While it was his calling in life to explore and excavate, it was business and trade that were the foundations for what he loved. Early years spent shop-keeping and doing bookwork was certainly not able to hold Schliemann's attention for long. They did however prepare him for making his fortunes through commodity trading, primarily indigo. Deuel states that his early excavations were "haphazard and reckless—reminiscent of speculations that rested on shrewd intuitions like trading in commodities" (5). At the time of the first excavations this is what he knew and it was sound reasoning to start off with what he knew best, even if it was not in the best interest of the site or his later reputation.

This is not to say that he was going into this matter completely blind, however. Schliemann's first season at the site of Hissarlik, later to be labeled Troy, resulted in a feature that bears his name to this day. The Schliemann Trench was much like the man. It was an imposing feature that dominated the site it cut through while

demolishing all that stood in its way that was not deemed to possess value. While this trench and the manner of excavation continue to mar his reputation, it reveals something else. It seems likely that he had at least heard of what has since been credited as the first scientific excavation in the history of archaeology.

Renfrew, Colin, and Bahn present that Thomas Jefferson is credited for this first excavation by digging a trench or section across a burial mound on his Virginia property in 1784 (17). Heizer further elaborates that the three-foot trench dug through the mound by Jefferson allowed one to pass through the heart of the site and examine multiple levels of strata (220). Thomas Jefferson was not the only one whose work Schliemann consulted before beginning, however. Heinrich Schliemann had been previously acquainted with Frank Calvert, a local expert who had previously excavated at Hissarlik and whose family owned half the land where it resided. Frank Calvert, after helping Schliemann with his manuscript *Ithaka*, became one of the few whom he would bow to due to his “total ignorance of archaeological technique” (Deuel 157). Heinrich wrote to him from Paris in 1868 with a lengthy questionnaire covering a number of topics such as:

“What is the best time to begin work?  
What medicines have I to bring with me?  
Can I get laborers enough, where and at what wage?  
What led you to conclude that the hill is artificial?” (Deuel 158)

With this information in hand he headed off with the bravado and self confidence that served him well throughout his mercantile endeavors. As he would soon learn, however, all his fuming and pressuring would do no good with the Turkish government (Deuel 163).

In April of 1870, Heinrich Schliemann arrived again at the Hissarlik Hill with his patience at an end and his enthusiasm at its peak. So great was his determination he proceeded to begin excavations while his newly wed wife was convalescing in Greece and while his firman, or petition to dig, had yet to be granted by the Turkish government. Knowing this it is easy to see why this first foray did not last long. Within twelve days of arriving things came to a head with the local landowners on whose property he was trespassing and digging. Forced to abandon the site and return to Athens, leaving things intact at Hissarlik for now, he had managed to do damage to relationships that would reappear in the future. Frank Calvert sums up the gravity of what he had done in a letter, “I cannot conceal how injudicious I think it is of you to have made a boast of what you did and we must suffer the consequences and get the firman when the Government are in a better humor” (Deuel 165). In time his firman was granted but with an added provision that would plague him for the years to come. In the permit granted by the Turkish government it stipulated that all finds must be

divided, one half going to the Turkish archaeological museum and the other to Schliemann. Furthermore, the uncovered ruins must be left in the state in which they had been recovered, and lastly that all expenses related to the expedition must be borne by Schliemann. It was the addition of the government supervisor to watch over his actions that was to cause him the most grief he would later find.

By the 1872 season his excavation was still far from being labeled a “scientific excavation” but his methods had become more efficient. Accomplishing little in the short season of 1870 and realizing his own academic limitations in the course of 1871 he took an important step when preparing for work in 1872. Eager to find results and prove what he had believed in for his whole life, Heinrich Schliemann began planning a huge undertaking. To aid in this he changes tactics from simply asking advice and opinions to hiring from other fields. Admittedly only a railway engineer, Adolphe Laurent, was brought on board this season, but the act no doubt gave him access to resources he did not have before (Schliemann 98). Whereas previous years the stability of the walls as he made cuttings into the mound were dubious and collapsed on occasion, the engineer he hired increased productivity and safety on the site. An unexpected boon was that the engineer also helped Schliemann draw more orderly and detailed maps of the surrounding site and excavation itself. Aside from having experienced hands present, Schliemann continued his letter campaign even if he did not always heed the advice. This was a trait that followed him throughout all his endeavors and makes one wonder if he wrote truly to learn or more to establish connections and make inroads into academic circles that had largely been closed to him.

It is the excavations at and around the site of Troy in 1882 that really begin to show how much Schliemann’s approach had changed. First, the roster of experienced individuals was expanded for this season. Deuel lists that a Polish engineer, Greek photographer, and two architects: Joseph Hofler and Dr. Wilhelm Dorpfeld were to accompany Schliemann (Deuel 287). It was Joseph Hofler and Dr. Dorpfeld who were to be the most noteworthy contributors however. Dorpfeld had just the previous year been named to the German Archaeological Institute in Athens after proving great aptitude in uncovering the Hera Temple. With the addition of the two architects an image of the successive layers of Troy began to appear that never would have been possible for Schliemann himself. While his three previous excavations always left him confused and downtrodden at times, this year’s left him overjoyed to be sure. In short time after arriving the architects had “managed to clear much of the hopeless jigsaw puzzle of intertwined walls, jumbled blocks of stone, warrens of ditches, and amorphous masses of debris” (Deuel 288). Very detailed maps of the city throughout the stratified layers were created and a more precise period of history applied to them.

It was not just the caliber of talent that changed this year however, it was also the mission.

By this point in his archaeological career, Schliemann had long been criticized by critics and scholars for his methods, but this year would be different. Deuel writes that “he intended to proceed layer by layer, studying and recording each successive settlement until he reached the lowest stratum” furthermore that “he would reexamine the debris he had mercilessly discarded in his first years” (286). Especially today, it is a common practice to go back and reexamine work done by oneself and others both in the last century and the last decades. So a major shift in Schliemann’s practices is coming about at this time. Throughout this season with all that he planned for and all those that participated, he was able to paint a greater picture of Troy. It is also not a stretch of the imagination that by taking this closer look at the layers of deposits and the surround area to an extent he was able to present a clearer picture of the context in which the various settlements at Hissarlik interacted with the region surrounding it.

No one figure is responsible for the foundation of any field. Things are learned and developed through experimentation and failure; to not learn from those who have come before is an even greater failure however. Renfrew, Colin, and Bahn say that “it was only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that a sound methodology of scientific excavation began to be generally adopted” (22). Knowing this, how can one be judged for not knowing what we know now, a century later? Heinrich Schliemann was a dilettante, a capitalist, and a dreamer. Without men like him who is to say what the world would look like today. He certainly was not the only one. Even in the field of archaeology there are other figures who would have erred by our standards but brought forth what they knew best. For example, Sir Mortimer Wheeler was a British army officer who developed a grid square method for dividing a site and Alfred Kidder who created a blueprint for a regional strategy of excavation (Renfrew, Colin, and Bahn 24). Robert Virchow, the “Pope of Medicine,” goes so far to write the following of Schliemann after his death:

“It may be that his hypotheses were too bold, nay arbitrary; that the enchanting picture of Homer’s immortal poetry proved somewhat of a snare to his fancy; but this fault of imagination, if I may so call it, nevertheless involved the secret of his success” (Deuel 349).

Furthermore, stating that if Schliemann had not endeavored to dream, “The Burnt City would still have lain to this day hidden in the earth, had not imagination guided the spade” (Deuel 349). What Heinrich Schliemann did was nothing short of extraordinary. Other scholars and academics may have shown us how to record, analyze, or even properly interpret data but Schliemann did something more important. He shows us how to endure. He endured the criticism, harshly at first, but

responding with academic form in his later years. Most importantly, his story teaches us to dream. Like any other area of study, it is more than just the collection of facts and data that comprise it. Through it we can rediscover worlds lost to time and almost alien to our own. But they are not just fantasy and fun stories as Schliemann showed concerning Homer's works. They are stories of real peoples' lives. These lives separated from our own by hundreds or thousands of years can still shape and influence ours today. He showed us that if someone can dream it then attempting to prove it will never be a wasted effort.

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