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Barry Strauss, *The Trojan War: A New History*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006. Pp. xxii, 258. ISBN 978-0-7432-6441-9.

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In his “New History,” Barry Strauss tells the story of the Trojan War from the very beginning. Paris, the “cosmopolitan prince” (22) from Troy, abducted the unhappy Helen in Sparta, not for love but for political reasons. Strauss sees the adulterous couple as “less like Romeo and Juliet than Juan and Eva Péron.” Helen escaped Sparta, and Paris “carried out a bloodless raid on enemy territory” (17). The war ignited in this way between two mighty powers, Troy and Greece, had been looming for a long time because “Troy invites war.” It is located where “Asia and Europe” meet (1). “Western Anatolia was the Poland of the Late Bronze Age: wealthy, cultured, and caught between two empires” (9). The Greeks, “the Vikings of the Bronze Age” (2), were eager to attack this “gold mine” (29). Agamemnon took advantage of this situation: he gathered the Greeks at Aulis, crossed the Aegean Sea, and took a beachhead on the shore in sight of Troy. Neither Troy’s weak sea forces nor its army was able to halt the disembarking Greeks. Three times the Greeks attempted to seize the city walls, but the lower city with its narrow streets hindered them from easily reaching the citadel, and in any case the city’s fortifications were too strong to break through. In consequence, a dirty war began: Achilles and the other Greek leaders attacked and plundered the country and towns around Troy. Among the abundant booty was one Chryseis, the daughter of an old priest of Apollo, who, at his priest’s request, afflicted the Greeks with a plague—Strauss compares it with anthrax or SARS. This in turn brought about the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles. Achilles’ subsequent withdrawal from action together with his Myrmidons entailed the loss of the elite troop of the Greek army. As a result, the plain in front of Troy turned into “killing fields” (title of chap. 7) and at the same time a place of honor for the Greek and Trojan heroes. The chapters describing these parts of the war—“Night Moves,” “Hector’s Charge,” and “Achilles’ Heel”—are the closest to the narrative of the *Iliad*. To round out the Troy story, Strauss adds a chapter, “The Night of the Horse,” based, he claims, on archaeological evidence. A final chapter is devoted to the argument that Aeneas did not leave Troy but succeeded Priam as ruler of the city.

Strauss, professor of history and classics at Cornell University, has written and edited other military histories, about the battle of Salamis and the Peloponnesian War.<sup>1</sup> In each case, he strives to compare ancient and modern life in such a way as to make ancient history useful and relevant to his readers. To that end, he re-interprets, at least to some extent, the results of scientific research in order to make his comparisons more convincing. For the Trojan War, he incorporates the few extant fragments of the so-called Cyclic Epics as well as (much) later ancient material on the war. In this way, he provides a “complete” story, but in the end it is his story rather than Homer’s.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece—and Western Civilization* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004), with D.R. McCann, ed., *War and Democracy: A Comparative Study of the Korean War and the Peloponnesian War* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2001).

Reading on the dust jacket that Strauss “[weaves] together fact and fiction in a beguiling tapestry of blood, guts, gore—and terrible feminine beauty,” one naturally looks for the premises on which he bases such a story.<sup>2</sup> In fact Strauss makes many prerequisite assumptions to create an easily readable story and connect it to questions and problems in our own lives. The first such assumption regards what may be construed historically from the ancient sources: in particular, a consistent Bronze Age Era lasting from the third to the end of the first millennium and comprising all known cultures of that period. Strauss follows those scholars who incorporate Troy into the history of Anatolia.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is not surprising that Alaksandu, Kukunni, and Walmu are presented as kings of Troy, and some Hittite kings, like Shuppiluliuma I, Hattushilish III, and Tudhaliya IV are mentioned to clarify the Iliadic and Cyclic narratives where Strauss feels the need. But it does come as a surprise to find him citing names not found in the Hittite texts—to name but the most astonishing ones: the Akkadian king Naramsin, the city of Ur, Iahdun-Lim and Zimri-Lim of Mari, Thutmose III and Ramses II of Egypt, the Assyrian king Shalmanesar I, the Canaanite ruler of Shechem and the mayor (!) of Megiddo. From these it is clear that Strauss presupposes a discrete and coherent Bronze Age Era allowing for the comparison of anything and everything within it.

Furthermore, Strauss extends his comparisons to later times without pausing to justify them. Hence we find the Second Punic War, the barbarian threat to Rome along the Rhine-Danube frontier in Late Antiquity, and, as mentioned above, the Vikings enlisted as points of reference. Moreover, this “new history” does not always adhere to the evidence of the texts from which it is derived; Strauss rationalizes them when it is advantageous for his argument, asserting that Homer is prone to exaggeration or constrained by the traditions of heroic story-telling, or that he, Strauss, is simply better informed.<sup>4</sup> This may of course be the case, but such claims must be based on careful explanations.

All this serves to fashion a story that prefigures certain realities of modern times. Most notably, a geopolitical dichotomy hovers over the Trojan War. Troy “stood exposed on the blood fault line where two empires met” (8) between Asia and Europe. From this statement it is a short step to compare the Trojan War with the war on terror and to specific events in World War II. For instance, the question whether the Greeks, that is, the thirteenth-century Mycenaeans, could have attacked Troy “with their own ruin looming” is answered by adducing the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor four years before most (!) of their “cities were rubble in 1945” (10). Such examples are not used only to illustrate single events in the run of the story but to buttress Strauss’s overall argument. The Greeks represent the western part of a divided world, while Troy, as Strauss puts it, based on “spectacular new evidence” (1) was an “Anatolian city.” So it is that from the very outset (see “Author’s Note,” xi) Strauss stresses that the various names Homer uses for the attackers of Troy can be identified as Mycenaeans (that is, Greeks) of the Late Bronze Age.

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<sup>2</sup> I leave aside the frequent incongruencies in Strauss’s construction of the Greeks and the Trojans. To give only one example, Agamemnon is compared with Iahdun-Lim, the king of Mari (1820–1798), to make his alleged power apparent, but at the same time his state is described as a “big household” and he as dependent on the other *basileis* (kings).

<sup>3</sup> References are given in two sections (225–232) of “A Note on Sources” mainly to scholars who have contributed to the journal *Studia Troica*, edited by the late Manfred Korfmann and, since 2006, Peter Jablonka, Ernst Pernicka, and Charles Brian Rose.

<sup>4</sup> The author’s translations of the *Iliad* as well are tailored to support his argument.

This tendency to divide the world in two is reflected in Strauss's depiction of the belligerents. But, surprisingly, the portrayal of the participants is turned upside down. The Trojan War should have been the conflict of two opposing mighty powers, one being the united force of the Greek mainland states. However, this huge army could not wage war like such a power. Rather, the Greeks become terrorists who fight dirty, that is, plunder cities, take booty, and enslave men and women, because their military capability is inadequate to win a conventional, "real" war. On the other hand, the Trojans, cultured people with advanced military and strategic skills, successfully defend their city so long as no treachery and/or betrayal occurs.

How to judge such a picture? Strauss's book is a "good read" that meets the needs of non-specialist readers. But is it a "new history" of the Trojan War or merely an arbitrary one? Where does fiction end and fact start? A look at the appendix, "A Note on Sources," shows that Strauss intends to do more than give non-historians access to a special part of ancient history, thus making it meaningful for as many people as possible. For Strauss is clearly taking sides in the ongoing scholarly debates about how to assess the impact of both new archaeological information about Troy and Near Eastern literary parallels on our understanding of the *Iliad*. He explains quite clearly why he locates the Trojan War in the Mycenaean period and in so doing is in accord with many scholars<sup>5</sup> who think that oral tradition could have transmitted a story of Mycenaean origin over several centuries in the "memory of the Greek people" (228). Furthermore, he refers to new evidence that he believes supports a date for the Trojan War between 1210 and 1180. In this regard, he sides with the "positivists" (as he calls them) who believe both in the length of the Greek oral tradition and in the results of the German excavations of Troy since 1988.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Strauss sees Troy as an Anatolian city and a city-map in the book duly shows a "Lower Town" surrounded by a wall with four gates. But in fact the most current archaeological reports indicate that this part of the city was not densely inhabited (the virtual reconstruction of the city-model is mainly pure guesswork); moreover, proving the existence of the putative ditch and wall is problematic.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Strauss mainly refers to one "fundamental work" that "rethinks the historicity of the Trojan War in the light of recent archaeology, Hittite studies, and work on Homer" (225), that is J. Latacz, *Troy and Homer: Towards a Solution of an Old Mystery*, trans. K. Windle & R. Ireland (Oxford: OUP, 2004). This book has been widely and rightly criticized by scholars from several disciplines (see, e.g., C. Ulf, ed., *Der neue Streit um Troia: Eine Bilanz*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Munich: Beck, 2004]). In comparison to this popular book, Strauss plays down the value of a scholarly handbook such as I. Morris and B. Powell, ed., *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), where rich material on all aspects of the topic, including the scholarly debates, is gathered.

<sup>6</sup> See the website *Project Troia* <<http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/troia>>.

<sup>7</sup> E. Pernicka, "Grabungsrundbrief 2007" (Sep 2007), addressed to the "Friends of Troy" society: "Eine schwache und undeutliche Spur in der Radarmessung wurde als fraglicher Hinweis auf den Grabenverlauf interpretiert. Bei den Ausgrabungen im Areal P 18 stellte sich diese Vermutung leider als falsch heraus .... Wenn es an dieser Stelle [Areale M18, N18, O18, P18] einen bronzezeitlichen Graben gab, ist er wahrscheinlich nicht mehr erhalten und könnte allenfalls weiter nördlich gefunden werden .... Eine Grabenkante müsste unter einem Erdsockel in der Arealmitte [G27], die andere östlich außerhalb der Grabung liegen. Der Grabenverlauf entspräche auch hier nicht einer fraglichen Spur in der Radarmessung." ("A weak and indistinct trace in the radar survey was interpreted as a questionable indication of the course of the trench. Unfortunately, this conjecture was shown to be false by the excavations in Area P18.... If there was a Bronze-Age trench at these locations [M18, N18, O18, P19], it is evidently no longer preserved and may possibly be found farther north.... A trench boundary would have to be under an earthen base in the center of the area, the rest would have to lie to the east outside the excavation. Even here the course of the ditch would not correspond to a questionable trace on the radar survey.") Cf. Frank Kolb's outspoken (and unanswered) critique of the conclusions derived from this meager archaeological report: "Entwicklungen im Troia-Streit seit 2003" <[http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/alte-geschichte/personen/kolb/kolb\\_troiaI.pdf](http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/alte-geschichte/personen/kolb/kolb_troiaI.pdf)>.

In addition, Strauss has not taken notice of current research on “the Greeks,” that is, the question of how a distinctly “Greek” identity arose in the archaic and classical periods.<sup>8</sup> Nor is he sufficiently familiar with research on the impact of the Ancient Near East on Homer.<sup>9</sup> It is not enough merely to label the scholarly work of others as persuasive or not without indicating the reasoning for such judgments.

Apart from Strauss’s one-sided reading of the various scholarly debates, it is noteworthy that he sees the Trojans as members of the Near Eastern world even though the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the Cyclic Epics are written in Greek. Quite apart from the misleading supposition of a coherent Bronze Age in a Near East that actually consisted of many disparate cultures, languages, and states, each with a different history, the impact of Near Eastern cultures on the Homeric world deserves much more attention. For almost two decades, research projects on the encounters between Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures have been under way at universities in Helsinki, Padua, Innsbruck, Kiel, Durham (UK), and elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> When this ongoing work has demonstrated in detail the interconnections between the relevant cultures, we may in fact be able to write a “new history” of the Trojan War based on firmer foundations and without the need to play down inconvenient scholarly opinions.

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), and *Hellenicity: between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago, IL: U Chicago Pr, 2002); I. Malkin, ed., *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity* (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2001); Kathryn Lomas, ed., *Greek Identity in the Western Mediterranean: Papers in Honour of Brian Shefton* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Cf., e.g., Alberto Bernabé, “Influence orientales dans la littérature grecque: Quelques réflexions de méthode,” *Kernos* 8 (1995) 9–22, and “Hittites and Greeks: Mythical Influences and Methodological Considerations,” in Robert Rollinger & C. Ulf, ed., *Griechische Archaik: Interne Entwicklungen—Externe Impulse* (Berlin: Akad. Verl., 2004) 291–310; Barbara Patzek, “Homer und der Orient,” in Ursula Magen & Mahmoud Rashad, ed., *Vom Halys zum Euphrat: Thomas Beran zu Ehren* (Münster: Ugarit-Verl., 1996) 215–225, and “Griechischer Logos und das intellektuelle Handwerk des Vorderen Orients,” in Rollinger & Ulf, *op. cit.*, 427–445; Robert Rollinger, “Altorientalische Motive in der frühgriechischen Literatur am Beispiel der homerischen Epen: Elemente des Kampfes in der Ilias und in der altorientalischen Literatur,” in C. Ulf, ed., *Wege zur Genese griechischer Identität: Die Bedeutung der früharchaischen Zeit* (Berlin: Wiley-VCH, 1996) 156–210, and “Die Verschriftlichung von Normen: Einflüsse und Elemente orientalischer Kulturtechnik in den homerischen Epen,” in Rollinger & Ulf, *op. cit.*, 369–425.

<sup>10</sup> Strauss cites M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Pr, 1997) and Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*, trans. M.E. Pinder & W. Burkert (Cambridge MA: Harvard U Pr, 1991), but is not aware of the huge amount of literature that deals with the interconnections of the Near East with the Mediterranean published since the 1990s and earlier than 2005: in addition to the works cited in note 8, see, to mention only a small selection of books of collected essays: Kurt Raaflaub, ed., *Anfänge des politischen Denkens in der Antike: die nahöstlichen Kulturen und die Griechen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993); Vassos Karageorghis & Nikolaos Stampolidis, *Eastern Mediterranean: Cyprus, Dodecanese, Crete, 16<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.: Proceedings of the International Symposium, Rethymnon, 13–16 May 1997* (Athens: Univ. of Crete, 1998), and *Sea Routes ... From Sidon to Huelva: Interconnections in the Mediterranean 16<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.: Proceedings of the International Symposium, Rethymnon, 29 September–2 October 2002* (Athens: Univ. of Crete, 2003); Sanna Aro & R.M. Whiting, ed., *The Heirs of Assyria*, Melammu Symposia 1 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2000); R.M. Whiting, ed., *Mythology and Mythologies: Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences*, Melammu Symposia 2 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001); Robert Rollinger, Christoph Ulf, & Kordula Schnegg, ed., *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World: Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction*, Melammu Symposia 5 (Stuttgart: Steiner Verl., 2004); and Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, M. Roaf, & R. Rollinger, ed., *Continuity of Empire (?): Assyria, Media, Persia* (Padua: Sargon, 2003).