

Examining the Trojan War through the film named Troy

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Abstract

Numerous ancient films play a quality role in depicting history, which had happened several years ago. Though these films indeed have fictional scenes to grab more attention of the audience, most still revolve around the actual history of the past. Among these, “Academy Award Nominee,” Troy is one of the films that showcases the Trojan War to a great extent. A brief plot of the film, catastrophe of the Trojan War, its effects, and the aftermath of the war are touched upon in this paper. Also, other ideas such as whether the war was a myth or real were discussed.

Keywords: Trojan War, Troy, Greeks, War, Ancient history, Mythology, Film study

Disclaimer

This paper is a mixture of facts, inferences, and extrapolations, based on my personal experience of watching this film and researching it. All views expressed here are solely mine and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of anyone else.

1 Introduction

War has existed throughout history. Some men fight for power, some for glory, some for honor, and some for love. Wolfgang Petersen’s Troy (2004) is an “Academy Award Nominee” film inspired by Homer’s epic tale “The Iliad,” in its narration of the decade-long Trojan War [1, 2]. The film itself is set in the past and a good amount of cultural setting was emphasized as well. It tells the story of two worlds that go to war for honor and power. Both sides are in pursuit of glory, but love turns out to swindle their hopes and aspirations (as with Paris and Achilles), causing a nation burnt to the ground and the death of an invincible warrior. Although the story has been manipulated in many aspects, it is an entertaining movie with copious visual actions and effects that blends love, revenge, and betrayal.

Troy had just made peace after years of war with the Greeks. Menelaus, the Spartan King, was tired of war and thought it was wise to make peace with Troy. Troy was considered their most powerful rival at that time. He invited Paris and Hector, two princes of Troy, to celebrate the reconciliation. But it was unknown to him that Paris was having an affair with his wife Helen, described as the one who was blessed with incredible beauty. After the reconciliation gathering, it was found that his wife Helen eloped with the Trojans. This enrages him, and he turns to his brother, Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, who is soon united by a vast army to capture Helen back from the Trojans to defend his brother’s honor.

Agamemnon, corrupted by his overwhelming greed, saw the situation as a cover-up to open war against the Trojans and take control of the greatest and well-defended city in the world. He wanted to ensure the superiority of his empire and his economy. He needed to conquer Troy to gain control of the Aegean. Therefore, in the film, he is portrayed as a merciless tyrant who only craves power.

This resulted in benefiting Agamemnon, whose honor was corrupted by his baffling greed. He saw this situation as a perfect cover-up to declare war on Troy and take over the greatest city since he needed to conquer Troy to gain control of the Aegean and thus, ensure the superiority of ‘his’ empire and ‘his’ economy. Therefore, in the film, he is portrayed as a merciless tyrant who only craves power.

Among his soldiers was the great Achilles, believed to be the greatest warrior alive. He was overconfident, rebellious, and invincible. Achilles’ desire of being remembered throughout history for his courage and bravery was what led him to attack the Trojans. He was not at all pleased serving Agamemnon. On the other hand, Agamemnon also hated Achilles, but he knew he needed him to accomplish his tasks. And, although it was hard for him to admit, Achilles was his most valuable warrior.

Achilles did not fight for wealth or power, unlike Agamemnon. He did not fight for kings. He fought for himself so that he could become a legend. Hector was just the opposite. He fought for his people, and to defend the honor and safety of Troy. He was represented as the key to ‘victory’ or ‘defeat’ over Troy, and he was conscious of it. If not, he wouldn’t have told his wife to flee when the Greeks attacked.

With the unbreakable walls of Troy and the courageous Prince Hector as their leader and defender, the Greeks had no hope of winning the war. Although the outraged Achilles had killed Hector, for killing his

cousin Patroclus, it did not make it easier for them to take over the Trojan fortress. Until Odysseus came up with the idea of the ‘Trojan Horse,’ which was offered as a gift to the Gods, particularly Poseidon [3]. The Trojans rejoiced their victory and danced around the horse. When everyone was asleep, the Greeks began to sack the city, sparing no one and destroying everything in their way [4].

An interesting factor in the movie is that none of the men on either side of the conflict, except for King Agamemnon, can be considered ‘villains.’ Indeed, they were all noblemen who were fighting from different perspectives. The Greeks were practically dragged to war for one man’s greed. When they are told to fight, they fight; when they are told to die, they die. The Trojans, as well, had no choice but to fight against the Greeks because of one man’s love. And if they fought, they would fight till the end, because being held as a slave was much worse than death.

2 Discussion

The portrayal of the film Troy deviates away from the true story which was written by Homer, in the poem, “The Iliad.” Troy showed that the Trojan War was caused by Helen, the wife of Menelaus, who is the king of Sparta, was secretly having an affair with the youngest son of the king of Troy named Prince Paris. He smuggled Helen on-board their homeland vessel while coming back from the reconciliation gathering in Greece. While in the case of “The Iliad,” the war was started by a religious conflict over who was most beautiful between Athena, Aphrodite, and Hera, with Zeus placing Paris as the judge who chooses Aphrodite, who in turn gives Helen to him. This action taken by Paris would lead to what is known as the Trojan war and the epic demise of the greatest warrior of Greek mythology, Achilles. Though the film was a hit worldwide, it failed in comparison with the actual historical account based on Homers’ Iliad that shows the actual events of what happened during the Trojan war. Though Homers’ Iliad over time has no doubt, been altered from the real Iliad. The most disappointing aspect of the film was the absence of gods. A godly intervention and divination were the basis of the Homers’ Iliad as they affected almost every part of the poem [5]. According to Homer, Helen had a “face that launched a thousand ships”, as exactly one thousand ships carrying 50,000 troops, including the warrior Achilles, sailed from Sparta to Troy to reclaim her.

2.1 Symbolism that makes the audience engage with the film

“Sword-and-sandal” film-making was popular in the movie industry in 1950s [6]. This was so because, when something extraordinary had to be pulled off on the screen, potential film-goers would be away from their televisions. Petersen incorporated this very theme in this film and it payed off well. To be precise, the story demanded it. Above the industry standard computer generated images (CGI) were also made use of to create a real-world war environment in the cinema. Some of the cast members of this film are the product of the CGI which were generated by the talented members of the crew.

In the costume design and properties, Petersen entrusts it to Bob Ringwood as the costume designer. He remixed the original Greek costume to look more modern. This ensured in making the costumes look better and interesting, without ignoring the glamour and authority value. This effort received an Oscar nomination for its costume design. Besides the costume design, which supports the success of this film, there were also many other properties. Such as the equipment used in the scenes of the war.

This film is full of values. It brings the moral teachings of human nature that are expressed solely through skeletal details and their symbolism. It is evident in the realm of the characters and their characterization, the setting of the scenes, point of view, and theme. An example of this is Achilles, whose character is full of symbolism. Achilles is the symbol of power, a Greek warrior who was never defeated before. But of course, it is said that no one is perfect, and nothing lasts forever. He is killed by Paris based on his only weakness, his feet tendon (Achilles’ heel).

This film also reflects on the bad aspects of human behavior like greed, arrogance, and egoism will encourage people to do wickedness and wrongdoing which make suffering to many others [7]. The audiences hanging in Greek mythology as the past wrongdoing, the sin, and the human nature or myths are used as the major influence of the nature and human experience of life that will make the story up.

These elements make the audience engage with the film. Action packed fights, war scenes and star-studded cast members like Brad Pitt (Achilles), Eric Bana (Hector), etc. steal the show with their brilliant performance. This ensures in giving the film-viewers an immersive experience.

2.2 Is the Trojan War a real war?

The Trojan War was more than a myth for ancient Greeks. It was one of the defining moments in their distant past. It is difficult to read about the Trojan War epics historically. A number of the main characters are off-springs of the Greek gods like Helen, who was the daughter of Zeus. Much of the action

is also guided (or interfered with) by the various competing gods. For example, Paris supposedly won Helen's love after awarding the golden apple for the beauty of the Goddess Aphrodite. "The Judgment of Paris," tells the story of how Paris was asked to select the most beautiful goddess between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite by granting the winner a golden apple. Lengthy sieges were recorded in the era, but the strongest cities could only hold out for a few months, not ten full years.

Major excavations at the site of Troy in 1870 under the direction of German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann revealed a small citadel mound and layers of debris 25 meters deep. Later studies have documented more than 46 building phases grouped into nine bands representing the site's in-habitation from 3,000 B.C. until its final abandonment in A.D. 1350. Recent excavations have shown an inhabited area 10 times the size of the citadel, making Troy a significant Bronze Age city. Layer VIIa of the excavations, dated to about 1180 B.C., reveals scorched debris and scattered skeletons that serve as evidence of wartime destruction of the city that may have inspired portions of the story of the Trojan War [10]. Archaeologists and scientists are still trying to find evidence of the Trojan War. There is no evidence that Helen even existed. They are trying to peel away the layers of Homer's Iliad to find the cold hard facts if there are any.

2.3 Aftermath of the war

The main aftermath of the Trojan War was the loss of Troy to Greece. This also resulted in many deaths on either side of the battle. Aeneas, who escaped, and is said to discover ancient Rome where the surviving Trojans set up a city. The Greeks took over Troy, which was covered, and they thought it to be an imaginary land until it was discovered by Heinrich Schliemann, which is now known as Hisarlik in Turkey [8]. Troy is also Mycenae's last great conquest because they collapsed in 1200 B.C. Dorian Greeks took control over them.

After the Trojan defeat, the Greek heroes slowly made their way home. It took Odysseus ten years to make the strenuous journey home to Ithaca which was recounted in the "Odyssey." Helen, whose two successive Trojan husbands were killed during the war, returned to Sparta to reign with Menelaus. After his death, some sources say she was exiled to the island of Rhodes, where a vengeful war widow had her hanged [10].

3 Conclusions

The quest for power, greed and the influence of the beauty of a woman that would result in heavy casualties and destruction of the states were showcased appropriately through the film. The Trojan War still affects us today because people are working their tails to try and find evidence that the Trojan War happened. It provides a challenge for archaeologists trying to find evidence that validates the event [9]. People also hold lots of debates about it [10]. It is a story that encourages people to dig down deeper and peel away the layers. As I end this paper, I want you to dig deeper and try to find for yourself if there is any truth in the Iliad.

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