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HOMER and TROJA:

Shedding a new light on the relationship Between Mythos and Reality

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Synopsis

The location of Ilion, the sacred city of Priam, was disputed and contested during Antiquity, as was in general the case with about half the Homeric toponyms. Even though the inhabitants of the “New Ilion” (present day Hisarlik) very early on secured the titles of the “capital” of the Trojans – aided by the support of the powerful of the day– up to the beginning of the Christian Era there were still some scholars who disputed this claim. In modern times, to the end of the 19th century, most Homerists regarded the searches for Troy as futile, since they believed that the city of Priam was the product of poetic imagination.

According the prevailing archeological view, the Ilion sung by Homer is to be placed at Hisarlik, where, finally and irrevocably, Schliemann’s pick supposedly located it. Most Hittitologists tend to agree with this view identifying the T(a)ruisa of the Hittite texts with the Troad and Wilusa with Ilion, identifications which linguists hold as extremely likely. Indeed according to the team which today carries out excavations at Hisarlik, the latest archeological finds as well as the recent interpretations of previous finds render almost certain these identifications.

But despite this, there are serious reasons to doubt this claim and they demand re-examination of the issue. Indeed the recent finds strengthen these doubts. Schliemann concluded the identification of Hisarlik with Ilion, convinced that the coastline was in his day at the same distance from the fort as during the poet’s era or that of the Trojan War, thus allowing for the engagement of the belligerents. Recent geological research though has shown that in the Bronze Age the mound of Hisarlik was a coastal promontory, with two bays, one to its north and one to its south. In the 8th century B.C. (the supposed time of Homer) silts had pushed the coastline a little farther from the mound but not that far. Thus the site of “New Ilion” proves to be completely incompatible with the geographic setting of the *Iliad*, which demands ample space -uninterrupted by marches and rivers- between

Achaean and Trojan. The recent archaeological finds, despite the hasty interpretations, have not proved the identification of the New to the Homeric Ilium. Neither the disputed existence of a "lower town" on the south slopes of the mound, nor the unconfirmed city walls, nor the dubious fortification ditch, nor the "sources" fit the epic's descriptions.

One of course could very well point out that the poet described the landscape through his imagination; hence the discrepancy of the descriptions of the Homeric Ilium with the real Ilium does not exclude the identification of the two. But neither is there archaeological proof for the identification of the prehistoric settlement of Hisarlik to Ilium. The fact that intervened over 200 years of abandonment between the last prehistoric settlement ('Troy VII') and the first one of the historic era ('Troy VIII'), strengthens the hypothesis that the name 'New Ilium' was imposed within the framework of the extensive assertions of Homeric toponyms due to the wide circulation of the epics.

But is the identification of New Ilium to the Old Ilium guaranteed by the Hittite texts which refer to Wilusa and T(a)ruisa? A radical reexamination of these texts in the light of the recent finds leads to completely different locations: most probably **Wilusa** was the prehistoric city of Beycesultan, on the Maeander's upper course, where in the early Christian period the Episcopal seat of **Ilusa** was located. **T(a)ruisa**, participating along with Wilusa (as well as with Lukka and Karkisa) in the Assuwa Alliance, coincides with **Trysa** in the south of Lycia. Geographic descriptions support the **identifications** of **Wilusa/Ilusa** and **T(a)ruisa/Trysa**. The linguistic similarities are equally impressive, undoubtedly far more satisfactory to the similarities of Wilusa/Ilium and T(a)ruisa/Troia.

By contrast, the state of Arzawa is to be located in the Troad district, the Hittites' 'thorn in the flesh'. Arzawa's coastal capital, Apasas, was likely located on the mound of Hisarlik. It may have extended into the bay to the north of the mound – an area that has not yet been excavated, but which has produced rather encouraging chance finds.

The descriptions in the *Annals* of Mursilis' about the occupation of Arzawa and of the destruction of its capital Apasas coincide astonishingly well with the archaeological finds of Hisarlik and Sigeion. The Hittite emperor Mursilis II declared war on Arzawa in 1315 B.C. While he had mustered his troops at the frontier, the 'Thunder of the God of Lightning' ruined Apasas, Arzawa's capital, seriously wounding its king Uhhazitis. Following a first victorious battle at the frontier, Mursilis marched unrestrained through Arzawa and entered its ruined capital which he found abandoned. Uhhazitis had escaped along with a number of his court to some close by island where he died of his wounds. Most of the city's inhabitants had taken refuge on the nearby peninsula of Arinnanda. As this peninsula was inaccessible to chariots, the Hittite army besieged the fugitives and because of thirst and hunger they surrendered.

According to the archaeologists' evaluations, 'Troy VIh' was occupied by enemy forces having been previously destroyed by an earthquake *just before* 1300 B.C. approximately the date which, as we have seen, Mursilis entered the already ruined Apasas. Furthermore, the ridge of Sigeion, then a peninsula, fits very well with the continuation of the Hittite narrative about Arinnanda. The ridge's narrow neck, situated approximately at its middle, was cut vertically by a deep trench which began from the then internal bay and reached the Aegean coast, hindering invasion by chariot from the south. This trench, from which the modern name Kesik (= trench) derives, could not be convincingly explained up to now. That the trench was dug in the Bronze Age – something supposed by geologists – could be deduced from the fact that it was known to Homer, who provided us with a mythical explanation for its presence: it was the passage through which the sea-beast that chased Hercules invaded the plain of Troy. As it seems, the trench was dug by the inhabitants of Apasas/Hisarlik seeking refuge at the north side of the Arinnanda/Sigeion peninsula, hoping to escape from the Hittite army.

Although of a different era and source, the Homeric epics match up astonishingly well with the Hittite texts in producing a geographic setting which throws new light on the late Bronze Age as well as on the Early Iron Age (sub-Mycenaean and Proto-Geometric periods).

An analytical comparison of the Homeric descriptions with the prehistoric geography of the Troad, leads to the conclusion that **the poet placed Priam's Ilion, a shepherds' town of the 'Dark Ages', on the mound of Bali-dağ**, eight kilometers to the south-east of Hisarlik and the Achaeans' camp in the Besika bay, almost opposite the island of Tenedos. **In the Hisarlik district the poet put the city of Apaisos which had previously been strong but in his era in decline.**

The **coincidence of the Hittite Apasas with the Homeric Apaisos** is impressive not just by the geographic descriptions – Homeric and Hittite – and archaeological finds, as much as the linguistic fit; it is far more satisfactory than the prevailing identification of Ephesus to Apaisos, which does not satisfactorily fit the geographic information from the Hittite texts. The name of the state of **Arzawa** may have survived down to Homers' era in the city of **Arisbe** which controlled the Hellespond's Straights.

The correctness of our proposals could be further tested through excavations:

- a. in the Dumbrek Valley where, presumably, in the Bronze Age there was a bay equally protected from the wind as that of the Besika, but far closer to the Hisarlik fort; thus it is in this direction that the "lower town" of the prehistoric settlement may have been located.
- b. in the Bali-dağ district, which will show if indeed there was a shepherds' settlement of the "Dark Ages". The finds could resolve the dilemma: did the poet have in mind a real settlement or did he simply choose this

particular landscape in order to place here a city that according to the tradition had been completely destroyed (as is the case with the Achaean's Wall)?

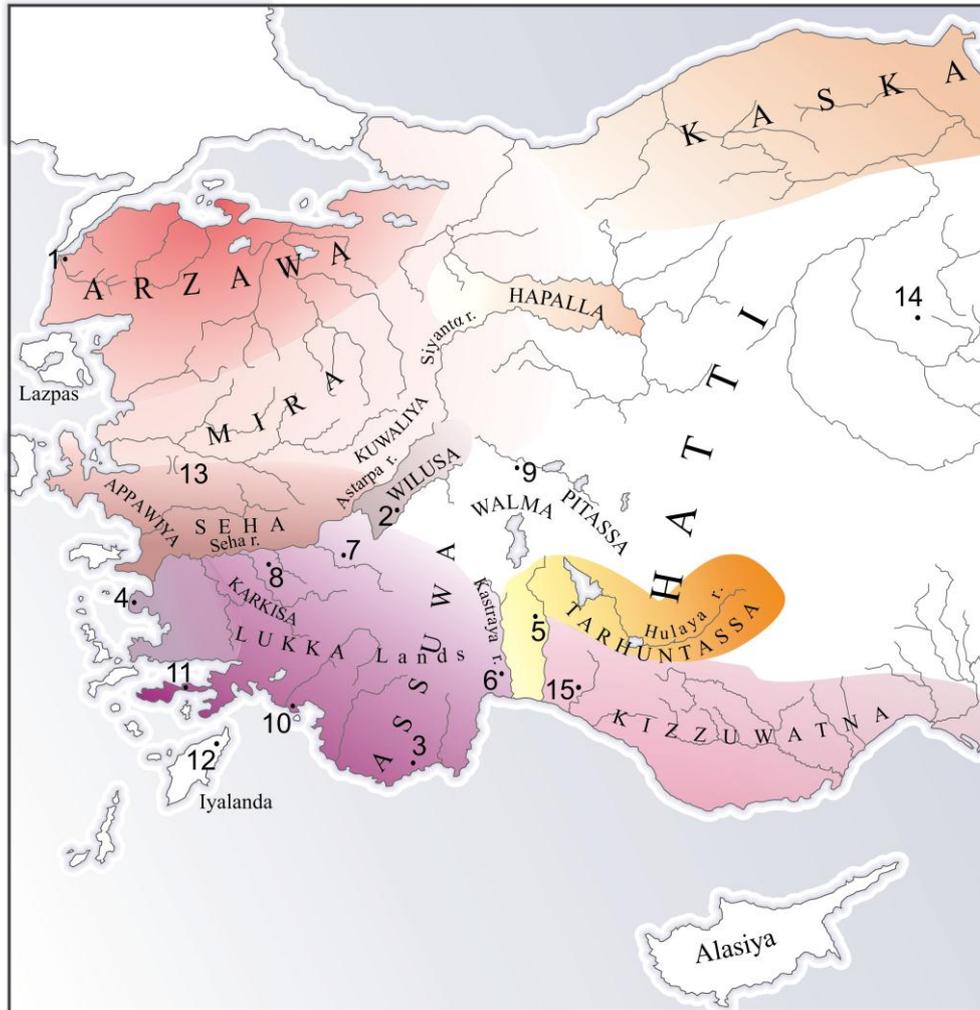
This reexamination of the Homeric geography of the Troad, as well as that of the Allies of the Trojans, develops a completely different picture and demonstrates that the Achaeans bestowed on irrelevant places the already lost Homeric toponyms of Ilion and of allied states. This has created a falsified "Homeric geography", which bears little resemblance to that known to Homer, thus greatly complicating the Homeric Problem as well as the related archaeological investigations. The excavations of Schliemann and of his successors did not resolve these problems; on the contrary they complicated them further still, deepening the wrong river bed in which the relevant discussion has been diverted already since Antiquity.

transl. Nikos Axarlis



Το σκηνικό της Ιλιάδας,

σύμφωνα με τον συντάκτη του παρόντος: 1. Ναύσταθμος (α θέση Αίαντα, β είσοδος αρμάτων από πεδίο μάχης, γ θέση Αχιλλέα), 2. Ιλιον –Πέργαμος άκρα, 3. Τύμβος Αισυήτη, 4. Πόρος ποταμού και Τύμβος Ίλου, 5. «Πλυνσί», 6. Τύμβος Μυρίνης, 7. Καλλικολώνη, 8. Σκαιές πύλες, 9. Δαρδάνιες πύλες, 10. Η «ήμων» του θαλασσίου κήτους, 11. Τείχος Ηρακλέους, 12. Θαλασσία «λίμνη», 13. Απαισός (μτγν. «Νέον Ιλιον»).



Hittite Geography of Asia Minor

according to the author of the present treatise:

1. Apasas (Απαισός), 2. Wilusa (Φίλουζα/Μπεύσέ-σουλτάν), 3. Truisa (Τρούσα), 4. Milawanda (Μίλητος), 5. Saliya (Σέλγη), 6. Parha (Πέργη), 7. Lukka (Λύκος-πόλη), 8. Karkisa (Κάρουρα), 9. Walma (Ολμοι), 10. Attarimma (Αττεμίσιον), 11. Hursanassa (Χερσόνησος), 12. Iyalanda (Ιαλυσσός/Ρόδος), 13. II: the pass of Karabel, 14. Hattusa, 15. Lamiya (Λαμίς).