



Troy is one of several epic historical films that has been inspired by the box-office success of Gladiator. Other upcoming releases include King Arthur, Alexander the Great and Hannibal the Conqueror.

Homer's Iliad has fascinated readers for centuries and is considered an indispensable part of a good classical education. I was introduced to the Iliad in Rhodesia, in my first year in high school.

The Iliad was written about 800 BC concerning the siege and destruction of Troy 400 years earlier. Phrases like the "Trojan Horse", "Achilles' Heel", "Beware when the Greeks come bearing gifts" and "The face that launched a thousand ships" have become a permanent part of our language as a result of the Iliad. The battle for Troy must be one of the most famous wars in history. Certainly Helen and Paris must be the most famous and tragic lovers ever. And Achilles and Hector two of the greatest warriors.

Wolfgang Petersen's Troy is an ambitious retelling of Homer's Iliad. It is reputed to be the most expensive film ever made, even eclipsing the cost of Titanic. Troy includes awe inspiring scenes such as the thousand Greek ships sailing to Troy, majestic battle scenes and three incredible duels.

However, anyone familiar with the first great work of Western literature, the Iliad, on which this film is based, will be disturbed by the many liberties and distortions of the source material. For example, far from being killed on the second day, the king of Sparta, Menelaus was definitely alive at the fall of Troy, and was actually reunited with his wife Helen. Prince Paris of Troy, however, died in a duel with one of his brothers shortly before the fall of Troy. Achilles was killed by Paris, also before the fall of Troy.

Similarly, the role of Hector's sister, Polyxena, in setting up the ambush of Achilles in the temple of Apollo does not feature in this film.

Although the Producer's Synopsis states that Troy was a "a citadel that no army had been able to breach" and numerous reviewers have repeated the "fact" that Troy had never before been conquered, history records that there were several Troys before the last one fell. In fact King Priam sat on his father's throne which had been blackened by the fire of the earlier burning of Troy by the Greeks.

Human sacrifices were offered by both sides to propitiate their gods, including King Laomedon of Troy offering his daughter, Hesione, to Poseidon. When she was rescued by Heracles, she ransomed the life of her brother, Podarces, who later became known as King Priam - the ransomed one.

Although in this film, Prince Paris is depicted as an ineffectual warrior and a coward, history records Prince Paris as having proven himself to be a skilful archer, an accomplished hunter, and as distinguished in courage and intelligence. Paris had been condemned to death and abandoned at birth because of a prophecy that if he lived Troy would be destroyed. The King gave the order to take him outside the city and kill him. The one entrusted with this responsibility left him to die of the elements. But a mother bear came and suckled the child giving him nourishment and warmth.

Paris was later adopted by a herdsman and in one famous incident at age ten, with only seven arrows in his quiver, he fought off nine armed assailants who were attacking his defenceless foster father. Paris later came back to Troy, challenged his brothers in contest and won, and was welcomed back into the family as a Prince of Troy.

Other significant omissions in the film include the fact that Helen, the daughter of the King of Sparta, was kidnapped when she was only twelve years old. Although Theseus of Athens had planned to rape her, something about her shocked innocence made him draw back and mutter that her beauty was more of a curse than a blessing. Helen was deeply traumatised by the abduction, and after her rescue a year later, she was reclusive and fearful. Incidentally, Helen is recorded as having long straight black hair and green eyes.

Helen's elder sister Clytaemnestra, to avoid her father marrying her off to King Agamemnon, the powerful King of the Mycenaeans, fled to the city of Pisa in Elis and married her sweetheart King Tantalus. Agamemnon launched a military expedition, treacherously defeated Tantalus by buying off much of his army, and then conquered the kingdom of Elis, in order to bring Clytaemnestra back and make her his wife. Similarly, Agamemnon pressured Helen's father, King Tyndareus, to give Helen in marriage to his brother Menelaus. The throne of Sparta fell to whoever would marry Helen.

When Queen Helen of Sparta eloped with Prince Paris she left her baby behind, but took much of the treasury of Sparta.

Incorporating these and other elements of the Greek mythology on which Troy was based would have only enhanced the film.

Anyone seeing Troy would be forgiven for assuming that the siege of Troy lasted a few weeks. Actually the siege of Troy lasted ten years.

The belief was that Achilles' mother, Thetis, dipped him as a baby in the river Styx making him invulnerable except for the undipped heel by which she had held him. As a legend that developed from the first century AD onwards. Homer said that Achilles' weakness was his pride. Later authors said it was his love for a Trojan princess. In this film version we get all three.

One of the most effective messages that one can take from this film is how our own actions can effect the lives of others. The Bible teaches us: "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit; from the Spirit will

reap eternal life." Galatians 6:8

Troy is an epic film well worth seeing. However, based as it is upon the pagan and humanistic worldview of the time its story lacks the depth and satisfying fulfilment that one gets from the greatest epic of them all, Ben Hur. Just as Gladiator was consistent with the Stoic worldview (fatalistic humanism) the conclusion is ultimately pessimistic and depressing. By way of contrast, Ben Hur, which has a thoroughly Biblical worldview, is uplifting and inspiring.

Despite having a 45 year advantage in special effects and technological development, neither Troy nor Gladiator can come close to the great story of Ben Hur.

"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" Mark 8:36