

BOOK REVIEW

Troy on Display: Scepticism and Wonder at Schliemann's First Exhibition. By ABIGAIL BAKER. London, UK and New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Pp. xii + 263. Hardback, \$115.00. ISBN: 978-1-78831-358-2.

For those of us (and I include myself) who are still agog over the more than remarkable trajectory of Heinrich Schliemann's life and career, we might just blame it all on Frank Calvert (1828-1908). If Calvert's eye had not been drawn to the hill of Hisarlik, Schliemann in his quest to find Troy might well have remained digging at *Pınarbaşı* (17). Dr. Baker is assistant keeper of archaeology at the Great North Museum in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, and this book is based on a chapter, "Troy in London" (131-137), from her 296 page thesis titled "Ancient Narratives in the Modern Museum: Interpreting Classical Archaeology in British Museums," which was written at Birbeck College, University of London under the supervision of Dr. Caspar Meyer in 2015 (<http://bbktheses.da.ulcc.ac.uk>). It is a close study of the objects Schliemann brought from Troy and displayed at the South Kensington Museum in an exhibit that opened on January 28, 1877 and lasted until early 1880. The display was Schliemann's response after being rebuffed by the British Museum which did not want to buy his objects (the \$50,000 price tag was seen as too expensive) nor give them a short-term display, since exhibits at the British Museum were restricted to items in the Museum's own collection. His arrangements resulted in one of the first "popular" museum shows. It was a "blockbuster" before the term was coined decades later to describe a show which took the world by storm, namely, "The Treasures of Tutankhamun" which opened on March 29, 1972 and ran to December 31, 1972 at the British Museum. When Schliemann's show closed in early 1880 his collection left London for a three-year display at the Royal Museum in Berlin. The only other major exhibit in London on Troy occurred only recently when "Troy: Myth and Reality" went on display at the British Museum from November to March, 2020.

Dr. Baker shows us the care with which Schliemann staged his exhibit, revealing a clear and calculating intent on his part to persuade the viewers that his views

on Troy were the correct ones. Schliemann “had dragged Troy from myth to the headlines” (2) and his manipulative showmanship rivalled that of his American contemporary P.T. Barnum (1810-1891). “He became an instant sensation. . . visitors poured into the Museum’s recently completed South Court” where they encountered “case after case of strange-looking pottery, crumbling metalwork, stone tools and thousands of spindle whorls” (2). There they experienced a “point of crisis at which people who knew only the imagined Troy of text” were confronted with “Schliemann’s material Troy” (5). His exhibit shook people’s “confidence in philological approaches to the ancient world” (5). The audience began to wonder “what sort of truths” could be found “in an epic poem,” (16), and if Schliemann’s Trojans and their crude pieces of pottery were in fact Homer’s Trojans, then people would need to stop romanticizing the characters of the *Iliad*. Thus, the Victorians’ focus on texts shifted to a focus on objects and they were drawn “into contemporary debates about the relationship between Europe and Asia” or East versus West (163). One of the last reports published about the exhibit came from the British-American natural scientist Edward Waller Claypole (1835-1901), then teaching at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. “Dr. Schliemann’s collection of antiquities was one. . . which I was most desirous to see,” but after seeing a group of flat pebbles that Schliemann called “Minerva Ornaments” he felt that Schliemann was “trespass[ing] not a little beyond the due limit of the imagination when applied to science” (“Minerva Ornaments,” *Nature*, July 1880, 193). Dr. Baker has successfully shown us that “Troy with its untrustworthy excavator, archaeological complexity and combination of truth and fiction is an unusually fruitful site for thinking about what fascinates us about the past and questioning the methods we use to understand it” (16). As was said in 1901 and attributed to Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928): “Touch the Homeric Question and you gain, at length, the academic ear. This was the true mission of Schliemann. Schliemann sought and fancied he had found the treasury of Priam. . . Mr Gladstone believed him; and the world was awake” (187). We still are.

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