

The Character of Heinrich Schliemann

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Born in January 1822, Heinrich Schliemann was a German activist and a pioneer in the field of archaeology. He was one of the advocates of the historicity of place specified by Homer and an archaeological excavator of Hissarlik, now assumed as the site of Troy, Tiryns, and Mycenae. Heinrich Schliemann and Arthur Evans studied Aegean Civilization of the Bronze Age. The two men helped each other in different projects, but Schliemann could not accomplish many of his tasks and didn't fulfill his dreams because he received severe injuries in October 1890 and passed away two months later (Cremin, 2007).

Heinrich Schliemann belonged to a low-income family; his father was an ordinary Pastor, and his mother had died when Schliemann was only nine years old. After her death, Heinrich's father decided to send him to live with an uncle. At the age of 11, he was enrolled in a local school, followed by his transfer to a vocational training institute. His father's poverty made it impossible for Heinrich Schliemann to continue his studies, so it was his early academic experience that shaped the course of Heinrich's education as an adult (Easton, 1998).

Heinrich Schliemann was found of collecting ancient stones, and in 1868, he visited different sites in Greece. The same year, he published a number of books in which Heinrich apparently stated that Hissarlik was the original site of Troy. He later submitted his dissertation to the University of Rostock for further review. In 1869, he received his Ph.D. degree from the same institute. All Classics students and teachers believe that Heinrich Schliemann is the most celebrated archeologist and scholar of all time. Still, his name and reputation have been under attack because of a lot of reasons. Some people believe that Heinrich Schliemann did not contribute to the field of archeology. He was, instead, a person with insufficient reading and writing skills (Mühlenbruch, 2010).

Several groups of scholars call him a fraud, but others claim that Schliemann is the father of archeology. Turkish and Spanish scholars even argue that several artifacts Heinrich Schliemann had discovered at Troy have nothing to do with reality. During digs in Mycenae, Heinrich found a large funeral mask which he thought was originally used for covering Agamemnon's face after death. Some archeologists and historians suspected that Mask of Agamemnon was from 1550–1500 BCE, years before Trojan War took place (Wade, 2001).

Throughout his life and even after his death, Heinrich Schliemann was criticized in one way or the other. First of all, being the son of a poor father, he could not complete his higher studies and was forced to do an ordinary job. Later on, his companion published an article on their discovery without his permission or knowledge. And after his death, Heinrich Schliemann's work was criticized by several archeologists who claimed that he shared false stories and brought forward fake things for the sake of fame and popularity (Korres, 1990).

The Turkish government continued to claim that Heinrich Schliemann had kept artifacts, which he promised to hand over to them at his earliest. He had also agreed to split the objects with Ottomans as he was seeking their permission to excavate Troy. Once he successfully discovered silver and gold (Prisms' Treasure), Heinrich Schliemann began smuggling them to Greece, and this made the Turkish government feel sad. They criticized him a lot and ordered him to leave the country as soon as possible. Afterward, Heinrich accepted his mistake and declared that he had sent the treasure to Athens for money and to escape some corrupt bureaucrats who he claimed would extort him. According to the Turkish government, Schliemann then promised to return two portions of his finds to them, but he did not fulfill his promise, and they are still angry at him. Instead, he gave them some copies commissioned from an unnamed artisan (Kelder, Uslu, Şerifoglu, Beek, Eijnde, Wijngaarden, & Retèl, 2012).

Despite all the criticism, we cannot ignore Heinrich's contribution to linguistics. Schliemann was able to represent a number of companies and received appreciations for his contributions to Greek and Russian languages. He not only learned these two languages but also introduced new phrases and words. Heinrich employed a system that could be used to learn Russian, Greek and Chinese languages (Cremin, 2007).

He claimed that it took him two months to implement that system and learn those languages. He wrote various short stories in English, Dutch, French, Spanish, Swedish, Italian, Polish, Greek, Latin, Turkish, Arabian, Russian, German and Hindi. Different scholars continue to admire Heinrich Schliemann due to his unforgettable contributions to the fields of archeology and linguistics. There are on-going controversies about his works (Easton, 1998).

Was Heinrich Schliemann a hero or a fraud? If we see him as an archeologist, we get to know that Heinrich was a fraud since he told a lot of lies to the world and brought forward fake things. But if we see his contributions to the field of linguistics, we get to know that he learned a number of languages, introduced new phrases and words and wrote well-versed stories to inspire us. Thus, it is not possible to say whether he is a hero or a fraud because every person has his own perspectives (Wade, 2001).

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