

DESTRUCTION OF TROY

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When the Trojans saw the enemy depart, and the Greek camp in flames, they believed themselves safe at last, and streamed in great numbers out of the town in order to view the site where the Greeks had so long encamped. Here they found the gigantic wooden horse, which they examined with wondering curiosity, various opinions being expressed with regard to its utility. Some supposed it to be an engine of war, and were in favour of destroying it, others regarded it as a sacred idol, and proposed that it should be brought into the city. Two circumstances which now occurred induced the Trojans to incline towards the latter opinion.

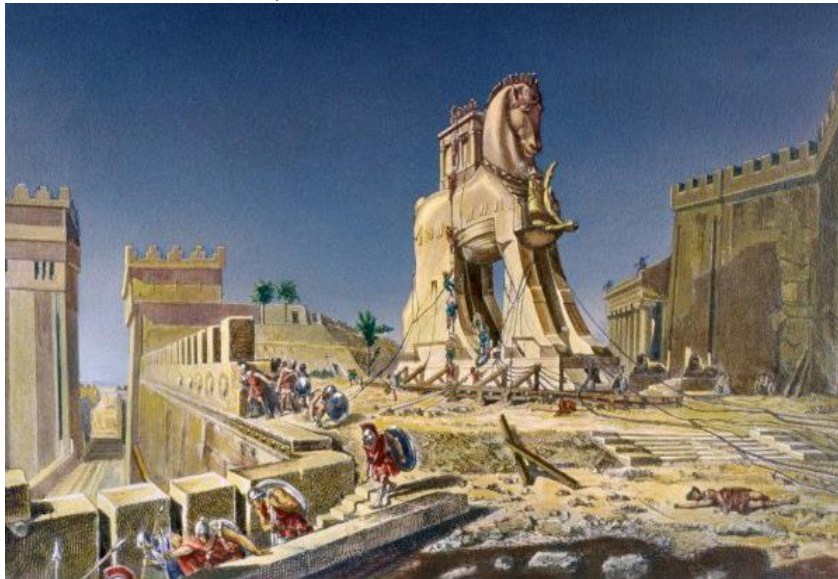


Figure 1-The Trojan Horse – Based on an oil painting by Henri Motte.

Chief among those who suspected a treacherous design in this huge contrivance was Laocoon, a priest of Apollo, who, in company with his two young sons, had issued from the city with the Trojans in order to offer a sacrifice to the gods. With all the eloquence at his command he urged his countrymen not to place confidence in any gift of the Greeks, and even went so far as to pierce the {302} side of the horse with a spear which he took from a warrior beside him, whereupon the arms of the heroes were heard to rattle. The hearts of the brave men concealed inside the horse quailed within them, and they had already given themselves up for lost, when Pallas-Athene, who ever watched over the cause of the Greeks, now came to their aid, and a miracle occurred in order to blind and deceive the devoted Trojans;--for the fall of Troy was decreed by the gods.

Whilst Laocoon with his two sons stood prepared to perform the sacrifice, two enormous serpents suddenly rose out of the sea, and made direct for the altar. They entwined themselves first round the tender limbs of the helpless youths, and then encircled their father who rushed to their assistance, and thus all three were destroyed in sight of the horrified multitude. The Trojans naturally interpreted the fate of Laocoon and his sons to be a punishment sent by Zeus for his sacrilege against the wooden horse, and were now fully convinced that it must be consecrated to the gods.

The crafty Odysseus had left behind his trusty friend Sinon with full instructions as to his course of action. Assuming the rôle assigned to him, he now approached king Priam with fettered hands and piteous entreaties, alleging that the Greeks, in obedience to the command of an oracle, had attempted to immolate him as a sacrifice; but that he had contrived to escape from their hands, and now sought protection from the king.

The kind-hearted monarch, believing his story, released {303} his bonds, assured him of his favour, and then begged him to explain the true meaning of the wooden horse. Sinon willingly complied. He informed the king that Pallas-Athene, who had hitherto been the hope and stay of the Greeks throughout the war, was so deeply offended at the removal of her sacred image, the Palladium, from her temple in Troy, that she had withdrawn her protection from the Greeks, and refused all further aid till it was restored to its rightful place. Hence the Greeks had returned home in order to seek fresh instructions from an oracle. But before leaving, Calchas the seer had advised their building this gigantic wooden horse as a tribute to the offended goddess, hoping thereby to appease her just anger. He further explained that it had been constructed of such colossal proportions in order to prevent its being brought into the city, so that the favour of Pallas-Athene might not be transferred to the Trojans.

Hardly had the crafty Sinon ceased speaking when the Trojans, with one accord, urged that the wooden horse should be brought into their city without delay. The gates being too low to admit its entrance, a breach was made in the walls, and the horse was conveyed in triumph into the very heart of Troy; whereupon the Trojans, overjoyed at what they deemed the successful issue of the campaign, abandoned themselves to feasting and rioting.

Amidst the universal rejoicing the unhappy Cassandra, foreseeing the result of the admission of the wooden horse into the city, was seen rushing through the streets with wild gestures and dishevelled hair, warning her people against the dangers which awaited them. But her eloquent words fell on deaf ears; for it was ever the fate of the unfortunate prophetess that her predictions should find no credence.

When, after the day's excitement, the Trojans had retired to rest, and all was hushed and silent, Sinon, in the dead of night, released the heroes from their voluntary imprisonment. The signal was then given to the Greek fleet lying off Tenedos, and the whole army in unbroken silence once more landed on the Trojan coast. {304}

To enter the city was now an easy matter, and a fearful slaughter ensued. Aroused from their slumbers, the Trojans, under the command of their bravest leaders, made a gallant defence, but were easily overcome. All their most valiant heroes fell in the fight, and soon the whole city was wrapt in flames.



Figure 2- "El incendio de Troya" by Fransisco Gutiérrez

Priam fell by the hand of Neoptolemus, who killed him as he lay prostrate before the altar of Zeus, praying for divine assistance in this awful hour of peril. The unfortunate Andromache with her young son Astyanax had taken refuge on the summit of a tower, where she was discovered by the victors, who, fearing lest the son of Hector might one day rise against them to avenge the death of his father, tore him from her arms and hurled him over the battlements.

Æneas alone, the son of Aphrodite, the beloved of gods and men, escaped the universal carnage with his son and his old father Anchises, whom he carried on his shoulders out of the city. He first sought refuge on Mount Ida, and afterwards fled to Italy, where he became the ancestral hero of the Roman people.



Figure 3-"Flight of Aeneas from Troy" by Girolamo Genga

Menelaus now sought Helen in the royal palace, who, being immortal, still retained all her former beauty and fascination. A reconciliation took place, and she accompanied her husband on his homeward voyage. Andromache, the widow of the brave Hector, was given in marriage to Neoptolemus, Cassandra fell to the share of Agamemnon, and Hecuba, the gray-haired and widowed queen, was made prisoner by Odysseus.

The boundless treasures of the wealthy Trojan king fell into the hands of the Greek heroes, who, after having levelled the city of Troy to the ground, prepared for their homeward voyage.