

Appendix: Scholars Debate Homer's Troy

Hypothesis and the Science of History

The main auditorium of the University of Tübingen, Germany was packed to the rafters for two days on February 15-16 of this year, with dozens fighting for standing room. Newspaper and journal articles had drawn the attention of all scholarly Europe to a highly unusual, extended debate. Although Germany was holding national elections, the opposed speakers were not politicians; they were leading archeologists. The magnet of controversy, which attracted more than 900 listeners, was the ancient city of Troy, and Homer, the deathless bard who sang of the Trojan War, and thus sparked the birth of Classical Greece out of the dark age which had followed that war.

One would never have expected such a turnout to hear a scholarly debate over an issue of scientific principle. But, where Troy is concerned, expect the unexpected. For the 2,800 years since Homer composed his great epics—or more precisely, for 3,200 years, since the time the Trojan War Homer sang of in his *Iliad* was probably fought—mankind has been concerned with the fate of Troy.

On one side of the Tübingen debate, were the leaders of an archeological team directed by Tübingen Prof. Manfred Korfmann, who have been making new discov-

eries at the site of Troy (near today's Hisarlik, Turkey) for more than a decade. In 2001 they coordinated an exhibition, "Troy: Dream and Reality," which has been wildly popular, drawing hundreds of thousands to museums in several German cities for six months. They gradually unearthed a grander, richer, and militarily tougher ancient city than had been found there before, one that comports with Homer's Troy of the many gates and broad streets; moreover, not a small Greek town, but a great maritime city allied with the Hittite Empire. Where the famous Heinrich Schliemann, in the Nineteenth century, showed that Homer truly pinpointed the *location* of Troy, and of some of the long-vanished cities whose ships had sailed to attack it, Korfmann's team has added evidence which tends to show that the bard also truly gave us the city's *character and qualities*.

On the other side, were European archeologists who, for the most part, have not excavated at Troy, but who have taken up public opposition to the Tübingen group's findings, and to its exhibition. They have been determinedly fighting to cut the Troy of Korfmann and his team 'down to size,' and above all, to keep Homer out of it! As in the many scholarly battles over Troy for hun-

Right: *Troy in the Third Millennium B.C.*
This computer reconstruction of Troy II, the layer excavated by Heinrich Schliemann, was prepared by the University of Tübingen team that has been excavating the site since 1988.

The drawing shows the pattern of a trading metropolis, with an upper city, or citadel, and a lower city which, at the later time of Homer's *Iliad*, had some 7,000 inhabitants, its own surrounding wall, and a moat.



Troy Project, Tübingen



EIRNS/Dean Andromidas

Left: *The famous palace ramp of Troy II as it appears today. At the upper end, Schliemann found what he called "Priam's Treasure," referring to the Trojan War era. Ramp and treasure were subsequently dated to the earlier Troy II period.*

Dr. Manfred Korfmann



ERNS/Dean Andromidas



www.bundesaustellungen.de

The exhibition, "Troy: Dream and Reality," which presents the discoveries of the archeological team headed by Tübingen University's Dr. Manfred Korfmann, has drawn over a million visitors to German museums this year.

dreds of years, the immortal works of the great poet are always at the center of the controversy.

Homer's Epics Speak to Us Still

Scholars have duelled incessantly over the Trojan Wars for more than two centuries. But their differences often featured episodes dreamed up by latter-day mediocrities, who thought thereby to acquire for themselves something of Homer's glory, by lying outright about the poet and his works. Homer sang of the first Trojan War. The "second" broke out in 1795 when, out of the blue, one Friedrich August Wolf suddenly claimed that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were just cut-and-paste jobs of a number of different songs—poetic inventions, not histories—by not one, but several different poets. Thus was the historical Troy disposed of; as for Homer, *dixit* Wolf, he had simply never existed. Lo and behold, during the Nineteenth century, Wolf's brainstorm came to dominate scholarly opinion.

When, in 1871, Schliemann began to dig on the hill at Hisarlik, to which he had come using the *Iliad* literally as his guide, the "third" Trojan War promptly broke out: A sizable chunk of the scientific community could not tolerate the idea of someone digging up out of the mists of history, a Troy they had labelled deader than the dodo.

Since 1988, under the leadership of Professor Korfmann, fresh excavations have been under way. His team of 75 scientists from around the world, with widely varying expertise, has made discoveries that have come to revolutionize our notion of Troy. Through his work, it has become manifest that Troy could not have been a Greek city, as dozens of generations have assumed, but rather belonged to the broader cultural area of Anatolia. From that vantage point, earlier finds have been given their proper significance, and many disputed points cleared up.

Among the most significant recent finds have been: a defensive trench completely around the city; an extensive tunnel system which collected and distributed potable water; and a large "lower city," surrounding the hill where Schliemann excavated. All these discoveries have placed Homer squarely in the center of the debate—yet again!

There was, among the many examples, the discovery in 1997 and 1998 of reservoirs and a subterranean supply well outside the lower city's wall to the west. Homer described this in Book XXII of the *Iliad*, when Hector, being pursued by Achilles around the city wall, reached

. . . where those two mother springs
Of deep Scamander poured abroad their silver
murmurings—
One warm and casts out fumes as fire, the other, cold as snow
Or hail dissolved. And when the Sun made ardent summer
glow,
There water's concrete crystal shined, near which were
cisternes made
All paved and clear, where Trojan wives and their fair
daughters had
Laundry for their fine linen weeds, in times of cleanly Peace
Before the Grecians brought their siege.
(XXII, 129-136, translated by George Chapman)

Evidence from the aforesaid finds has been collected in a touring exhibition that has, over the past year, been at Stuttgart, Braunschweig, and now Bonn, Germany, drawing almost 1 million visitors. The press has reflected that keen interest—hundreds of articles have appeared, and dozens of new books on Troy, while the *Iliad* itself has gained pride of place in Germany's bookshops. Works of a scientific bent on Troy and Homer have been selling well, and conferences on this topic have pulled in a flood of participants.

As little as ten years ago, interest in this ancient world was virtually extinct outside a narrow circle of experts.

Things have certainly changed! Korfmann's excavations, and his exhibition, have unleashed in Germany, what one may fairly call a renaissance of interest in the ancient world in this period when the great war broke out across the Aegean Sea. And they have triggered, predictably, a conflict along well-known factional lines.

The 'Fourth' Trojan War

Since the summer of 2001, the "fourth" Trojan War has been raging, provoked by a Tübingen professor of ancient history, Frank Kolb. In an article in the daily *Berliner Morgenpost*, Professor Kolb declared war on his colleague Manfred Korfmann. Just as one might think a daily newspaper something of an inappropriate forum for such a debate, so was Professor Kolb's language something less than choice. He alleged that Dr. Korfmann has been leading the public down the garden path, that he had falsified his excavations and over-interpreted his findings; in a word, that Korfmann was twisting historical truth, in order to gain fame as a Great Popularizer.

With throngs flocking to the "Dream and Reality" exhibition, Kolb's remarks against it were trumpeted far and wide by the mass media; then, interviews and scholarly declarations began to rain down from all sides. The

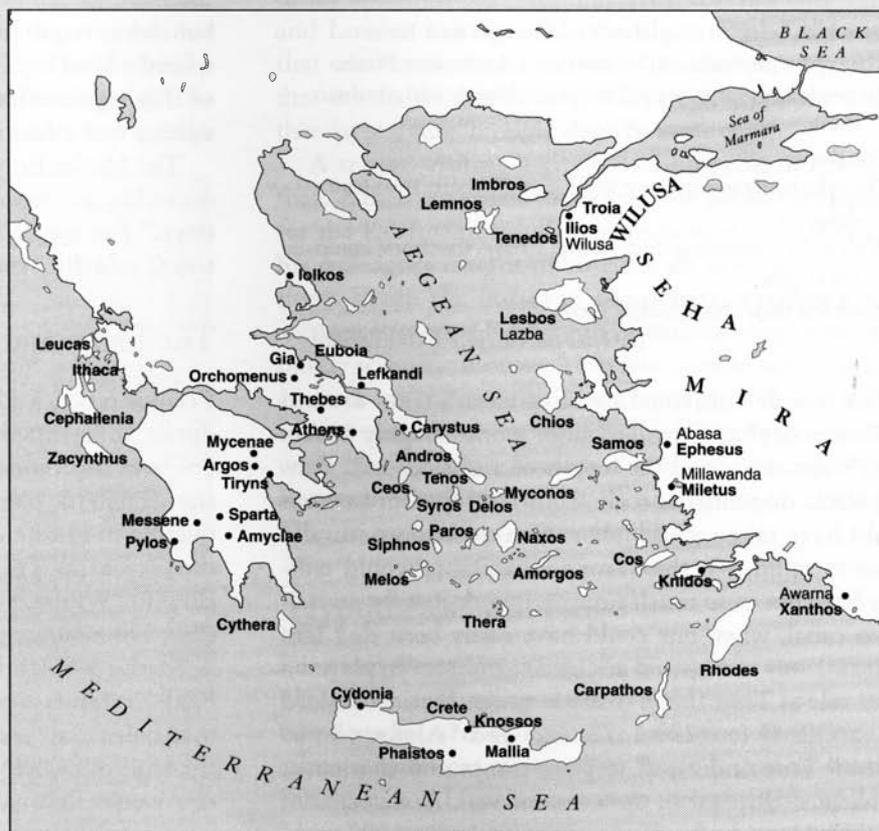
February symposium, which became a packed and widely watched debate under the title, "The Significance of Troy in the Later Bronze Age," was held, ostensibly to clear the air. In attendance were the two protagonists, along with 11 scientists from the relevant disciplines, from all over the world: archeologists, experts on ancient history and on the ancient Orient, philologists, Hittite scholars, and experts on Homer.

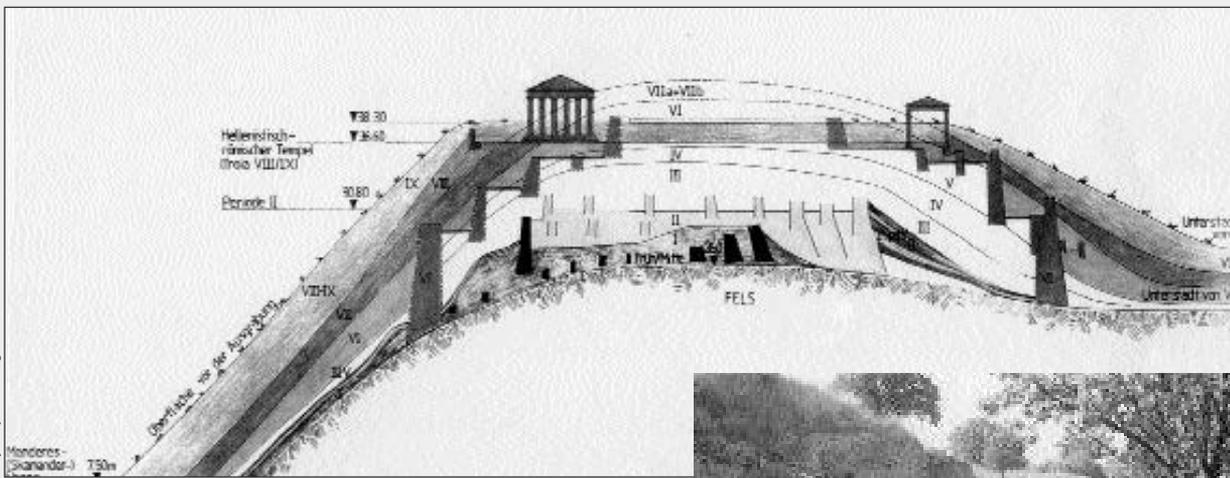
The battle got going over a wooden model of Troy, shown at the exhibition, which included the citadel and a well-built, extensive "lower city." Professor Kolb decried it as "public trickery," on the grounds that each little house shown in the wooden model did not correspond to a particular find at the Hisarlik excavation. Kolb had previously protested—and he brought this up several times during the symposium—that in Homer's days (the Eighth century B.C.) Troy had been "but a smallish settlement with scrubby little dwellings." As for the trench excavated by Korfmann's team, which they believe to be a defensive trench against the most dangerous form of weaponry of that age—war chariots—Professor Kolb begged to differ. In his view, the trench must have been for drainage purposes.

In the *Iliad*, Homer precisely described such a trench as Troy's defensive barrier against war chariots:

GREECE AND ANATOLIA IN THE MYCENAEAN PERIOD (13th century B.C.), the approximate era of the Trojan War. The maritime city of Troy and its surrounding area (Hittite "Wilusa," Homer's "Ilios") commanded the strategic sea-trade passage from the Aegean Sea into the Black Sea to the north, through the Hellespont (Dardanelles) and Propontis (Marmara Sea).

Heinrich Schliemann's 19th-century excavation of Troy at this site, proved that Homer's Iliad established the location of Troy precisely, as well as the cities from which it was attacked—shocking scholars, who had dismissed Homer's epic as "just poetry." The post-1988 excavations have again shocked the scholars, by proving that Homer also precisely described the city's large size, splendor, and fortifications. Some of the Mycenaean Greek cities which sailed against Troy had long disappeared when Homer's epic named and located them 500-600 years later.





Above: Cross-section of the different strata of settlement on the mound of Troy, where the citadel was first discovered by Schliemann. The lowest (earliest) level, Troy I, from perhaps 3000 B.C., sits on the bedrock ("Fels"). Schliemann excavated the first important cultural period, Troy II. Troy III-V is the so-called "maritime" period, 2600-2400 B.C. Troy VI-VII, the high culture about which Homer sang, with its huge walls and much greater extension, ended about 1200 B.C. Above these strata are the remains of Hellenistic and Roman settlements and temples. **Right:** Today's excavation site, labelled for the strata of Troy II, III, and IV.



... which being so deep, they could not get their horse
To venture on, but trample, snore and, on the very brink,
To neigh with spirit, yet still stand off. Nor would a human
think

The passage safe . . .

The dike being everywhere so deep and (where 'twas least
deep) set

With stakes exceeding thick, sharp, strong, that horse could
never pass,

Much less their chariots after them.

(XII, 62-68, Chapman translation)

The trench unearthed by Korfmann's team around the "lower city" of Troy is a major work: roughly 10 feet wide, 5 feet deep, and the length of a quarter-mile running track, dug into the rock. Constructing such a trench would have taken great labor. The question naturally comes to mind, whether Troy's inhabitants would willingly have put in so much time and work just for an irrigation canal, when one could have easily been dug into the loam, very close by. War chariots, moreover, played a major role at Troy. In the treaty between Hittite overlord Muwattalli II (c. 1290-1272 B.C.) and "Alaksandu of Wilusa," Troy undertook to place troops and chariots at the Hittites' disposal in the event of war. A war chariot was a highly complex piece of equipment, which could not have been hammered up by some village blacksmith,

but rather required both properly trained craftsmen, and specially bred horses, whose training took three years. All of this represented a major investment, and required upkeep and infrastructure.

The Hittite Empire would not likely have placed such demands, nor signed such a treaty, with a "scrubby little town." But was Wilusa, with which the Hittites had that treaty, actually Troy? That is the second sticking point.

The Language of *The Iliad*

Frank Starke, a Hittite specialist from Tübingen, said during the symposium that, "Troy's geographical position has been ascertained with certainty." His own work has shown that the place-name "Wilusa," which crops up frequently in Hittite documents, is the same city known to the Greeks as Troy. Homer often calls it "Ilios"—very close to "Wilusa," since the Greeks of Homer's time had ceased pronouncing "w."

Starke was straightaway contradicted by Mrs. Heinhöhl-Krahmer, a Salzburg Hittite expert, who objected to the idea that "comparison might be sustained, solely on the basis of coincidental assonances." She contended that one would first have to find written evidence with that name at the very site, if one were to be absolutely sure that the excavated hill was indeed Troy. Heinhöhl-Krah-

mer essentially demanded that Korfmann dig up a 3,000-year-old street sign, before calling Troy, Troy.

And now to disagreement among the philologists, the scholars of language and meaning. This would seem, at first, astonishing, since research on Homer's epic poems has been greatly stimulated by Korfmann's excavations.

Troy was utterly destroyed some time around the year 1200 B.C., the point at which High Mycenaean culture (1600-1200 B.C.) collapsed, and Greece sank into a 400-year dark age. Homer sang of the disaster in his *Iliad*, composed about 500 years after that dark age. Joachim Latacz from Basel, Switzerland, and Wolfdietrich Niemeier from Athens, pointed to indications in the *Iliad* that the entire original Troy story (not Homer's epic) stems from the Mycenaean period, and was handed down accurately for centuries by bards, to Homer in the Eighth century. It is particularly remarkable that the *Iliad* contains a great many words and poetic epigrams which were no longer used in Homer's day, and that his descriptions of armor, weaponry, battle formations, and even architecture, were Mycenaean.

At the debate, Wolfgang Kullmann of Freiburg University saw it otherwise. He argued that, the "Troy story was [first] told after the dark age was past"; in other words, in Homer's lifetime. Although Dr. Latacz showed that the "catalogue of the ships" given by Homer at the end of Book II of the *Iliad*, follows a list dating from the Mycenaean era, Kullmann insisted that the original was "a list of participants in the upcoming Olympic Games."

A third clash involved the expression "trading city." To Professor Korfmann, Troy played an important role in

trade. A member of his team observed, with some exasperation, "Had the Trojans ever imagined how acrimonious the dispute over their city was to become, they would doubtless have taken the precaution of depositing little signposts all 'round," and taken care to stash away somewhere a ship's cargo with freight from every known spot on the globe.

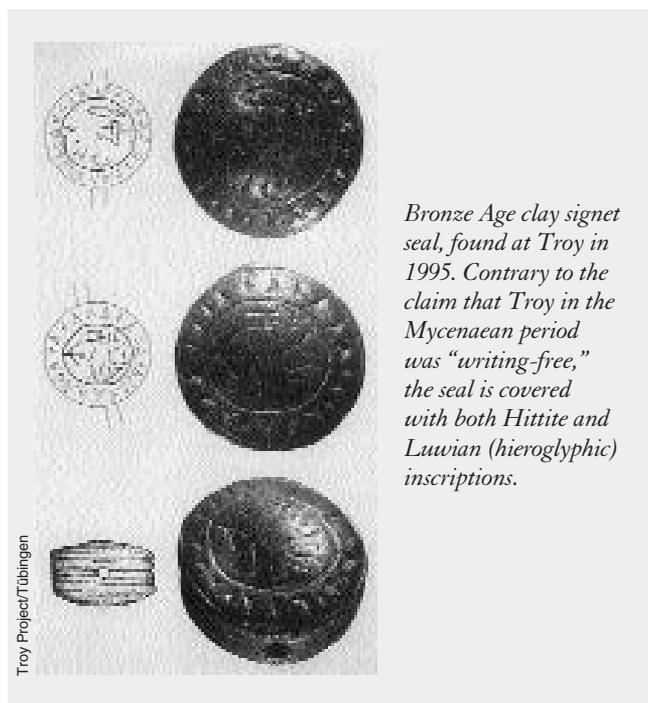
Although they didn't bury such mercantile time-capsules for us, the Trojans enjoyed an outstanding strategic position, with Troy lying precisely between the European and Asian continents, and at the head of the passage from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. But Dieter Hertel of Munich University, leading an attack on Troy's maritime status, called this position "irrelevant." Despite the fact that trade has been attested just about everywhere else in the world at that time, and although Kolb himself readily acknowledged that trade was intense throughout the Levant, Kolb and his colleagues arrayed against Korfmann, insist that in the northern Aegean and in the Black Sea, there was no trade, nothing but "exchange of royal gifts."

The same sort of reasoning was applied to writing systems. According to Bernhard Hänsel of Berlin, the entire northern Aegean was a "writing-free zone" in Mycenaean times. Although all of Troy's neighbors had been using writing systems for centuries—the Hittites, the Egyptians, the Mycenaean Greeks themselves—Hänsel claimed the Trojans were wallflowers in this regard. And, what is one to say about the seal found at Troy, covered with Hittite and Luwian inscriptions? [SEE illustration] Kolb argued that one "cannot take seriously" Korfmann's hypothesis that this shows that writing was in use, supposing instead that the seal was "brought there by some trader."

A trader, visiting a city that didn't trade? It seemed that, in their eagerness to dampen the public's enthusiasm for the Korfmann team's new picture of Troy, Kolb and his colleagues caught themselves up in some contradictions. From the outset of the debate, Professor Kolb accused Professor Korfmann of entertaining "other than purely scientific motives." Motives outside science may be at work on the accuser's side, though. What scientific motive could have impelled Kolb's associates to intervene with the German Society for the Advancement of Research, which has been co-financing the excavations at Troy, to cut off Korfmann's funding?

'Hypothesis Non Fingo'?

For Hans-Peter Urpmann, the biologist of the Tübingen University excavating team, critical issues are at stake. For decades, archeology, as a scientific discipline, had taken a back seat to so-called "pure historical studies." But now, says Urpmann, it is in the spotlight, while the "pure" historical sciences are "backed up against the wall." "Not a single drop more can be squeezed" from



the texts over which the “pure” historians have been poring for decades. Those historians want to keep the upper hand over history, he maintains, and have been defending their position by gripping with “tooth and claw,” fixed categories and concepts.

Oddly enough, the hard core of the accusation which Professor Kolb and his fellow attackers have been levelling at the Korfmann group is, that the latter have dared to formulate hypotheses about the meaning of what they have found. Kolb and others insist that “one is not entitled to base one’s arguments on anything other than finds that one has actually got in hand, and certainly not on hypotheses.” Quite the opposite view was taken by Korfmann, who said, “a hypothesis may fairly be held to be valid, until such time as a fresh one come to replace it.”

That is the crux of the matter; that is why battles are being fought to this day over Troy. Was Troy a trading metropolis, as Korfmann would have it, or, in Kolb’s words, “an insignificant settlement of scrubby little houses”? Are the trenches defensive ones, as Korfmann would have it, or Kolb’s irrigation canals? Was the lower city “rather densely built-up with edifices of stone” (Peter Jablonka, Tübingen), or “a small, essentially agrarian outlying settlement” (Kolb)? Did it have “between 5,000 and 7,000 inhabitants” (Korfmann), or “something under 1,000” (Kolb)? All of these points show that we are faced here with “two quite different worlds,” as Korfmann said.

Does *science* involve nothing but collating data and facts, and then explaining them, or does it begin precisely where what one already knows, leaves off? In the German language, the word for science, “*Wissenschaft*,” means “creating new knowledge,” not merely interpreting the old in ever-more exhaustive detail.

In this controversy, as in others, those like Professor Kolb, who would reject the notion of hypotheses as something unscientific, as mere “speculation,” often turn out to cling like barnacles to their very own hypotheses. To assert that Homer never existed, or to insist as Freiburg’s Prof. Wolfgang Kullman did, that the *Iliad* is a mere “poetic construct” and not the telling of history, is, in itself, obviously, a form of hypothesis-making. How these historians dealt with their adversaries at the debate, exhibiting self-righteousness and sometimes arrogance, as if from an armed bunker, was visible to the many interested laymen in the audience, and did nothing to improve the standing of their particular branch of science in the public eye.

Who Was Homer?

Similarly, the question whether the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* possess an artistic unity that demonstrates they were composed by only one man of genius, is not just a

falling-out between scholars. The dispute pertains to different notions of the nature of man’s creativity. Those who protest—as did Friedrich August Wolf in the Eighteenth century—that Homer could never have composed such epics, take that stand because they cannot accept the notion that man might be capable of such an outburst of pure genius. Thus, the outcome of the controversy over Korfmann’s excavations, and their interpretation, will prove to be critical to the future of science.

At the Tübingen debate, Professor Kolb insisted over and again that, the “excavations at Troy must be seen as something separate and distinct from the *Iliad*. . . . Identifying Troy with Wilusa is mere hypothesis. . . . One must avoid imagining that the settlement had something to do with the *Iliad*.” But, why should one avoid imagining that? Because, perhaps, one actually finds so much evidence to suggest it? Might this be why Professor Kolb has turned down Professor Korfmann’s several invitations to visit the excavation site, and see things with his own eyes?

Kolb accused Korfmann of wanting, from the very outset, to excavate the “glorious Troy,” exactly as Heinrich Schliemann wanted to do in the Nineteenth century, when he followed Homer’s directions and found this buried city for the first time. Professor Kolb does not want to find any “glorious Troy.”

The Troy controversy of 2001 has been making such waves in the international scientific community, that a delegation of British scientists, led by the grand old man of Hittite studies, John David Hawkins, travelled to Tübingen for the symposium. Korfmann’s achievements, they said, were outstanding; he and his team had “set an example” for other archeologists. They expressed their hope that “the conflict” not have an adverse effect on Korfmann’s work.

And when, during the final debate, Korfmann affirmed that he would definitely continue excavating at Troy, his announcement was greeted with resounding applause from the entire hall.

—Rosa Tennenbaum

This article originally appeared in the March 29, 2002 issue of Executive Intelligence Review (EIR) (Vol. 29, No. 12), accompanied by an interview with Professor Manfred Korfmann. A detailed report on the German exhibition presenting the results of the Korfmann group’s recent archeological excavations, “Troy: Dream and Reality,” including on-site observations of the Troy/Hisarlik site, was prepared for the Feb. 8, 2002 issue of EIR by Andrea Andromidas (Vol. 29, No. 5).