

The real story behind Troy myth

◆ Archaeology professor featured in History Channel segment about Homer's "Iliad."

By Kristin Wilson
kwilson@cumberlink.com
Sentinel Reporter

As it turns out, Homer's epic poem of the Battle of Troy is actually based on fact – and Dickinson College is playing a part in proving it.

Sunday "The True Story of Troy" will air on the History Channel, tracing the story of the "The Iliad" through the archeological and historical record.

Christofilis Maggidis, a Dickinson assistant professor of archaeology, will be featured on the show sharing discoveries from the school's archaeological dig in Greece.

Maggidis says the segment promises to offer the "scientific version of what happened."

The History Channel's tale is timed to Friday's release of Warner Bros.' "Troy," starring Brad Pitt and Eric Bana. The Hollywood version also is based on "The Iliad."

"(Homer) is writing an epic poem, so he's glorifying certain things," Maggidis says.

Homer, who was born about 450 years after the Battle of Troy, gleaned the story from centuries of storytelling.

"It seems that everything that Homer describes is five times bigger," Maggidis says. For example, Homer says 100,000 Greeks charged Troy and that the war lasted 10 years.

"The (Greeks) couldn't possibly raise more than 25,000 people," he says. "Divide by five and then you

FYI

"The True Story of Troy" will run for the next five years, to an expected audience of 800 million, says Christofilis Maggidis, Dickinson College assistant professor of archaeology. It airs for the first time at 8 p.m. Sunday on the History Channel.

• See Friday's Alive entertainment section for a review of the movie "Troy" and a feature on actors Brad Pitt and Eric Bana.

have the real thing."

Over the past 10 years Maggidis has been working on excavating the ancient citadel of Mycenae.

• See Troy, A4

A4 — The Sentinel, Carlisle, Pa., Thursday, May 13, 2004

Troy

• Continued from A1

dated to "1200 B.C. – the time of the Trojan War." The Mycenae people preceded ancient Greek civilization and would have been the aggressors of the Trojan War.

The site, being excavated by Dickinson College, is the actual homeland of Homer's character King Agamemnon. Although the true name of King Agamemnon is not known, Maggidis says most likely this person did exist.

What caused the war?

"We know historically that wars ... would take place because of an abduction or rape of a queen," Maggidis says referring to the myth of Helen, the supposed cause of the 10-year Troy battle. "We cannot exclude the possibility that an abduction might have taken place."

But based on iconography and literary evidence, it seems more probable the war was over expansion and control of trade routes between the Aegean and Black Seas.

The actual war was a fairly "insignificant event" – until the Greek (Mycenae) empire began to crumble. "The Trojan War was the very last glorious event of the Mycenae around 1200 B.C. That's why it stuck in their minds," he explains. "It was the last great epoch. Everything was

translated verbally until Homer."

Today, Homer's widely recognized story is considered one of the greatest examples of ancient Greek literature. It tells of the passion, pride and glory of war, played out between mortal and god characters.

And it is providing the story line for a Hollywood blockbuster.

Troy also excavated

The story also is creating an impetus for archaeologists and historians to "dig" deeper. The ancient site of Troy, located in present-day Turkey, is undergoing excavation and study. Maggidis and his students also are continuing to search for clues about the Mycenae through Dickinson's archaeological site.

Maggidis hopes his appearance on the History Channel will generate interest in Dickinson's fledgling archaeology program.

Created only three years ago, Maggidis says the college's program is already considered among the best in the nation.

Maggidis, who has studied at the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard and Brown universities, says he has yet to find another archaeology program that provides two major excavation sites abroad. Currently, Dickinson's 25 archaeology majors can gain real-world dig site experience in Greece and Scotland.



Jason Minick/The Sentinel

Christofilis Maggidis stands beside in an archaeology study area on campus.