

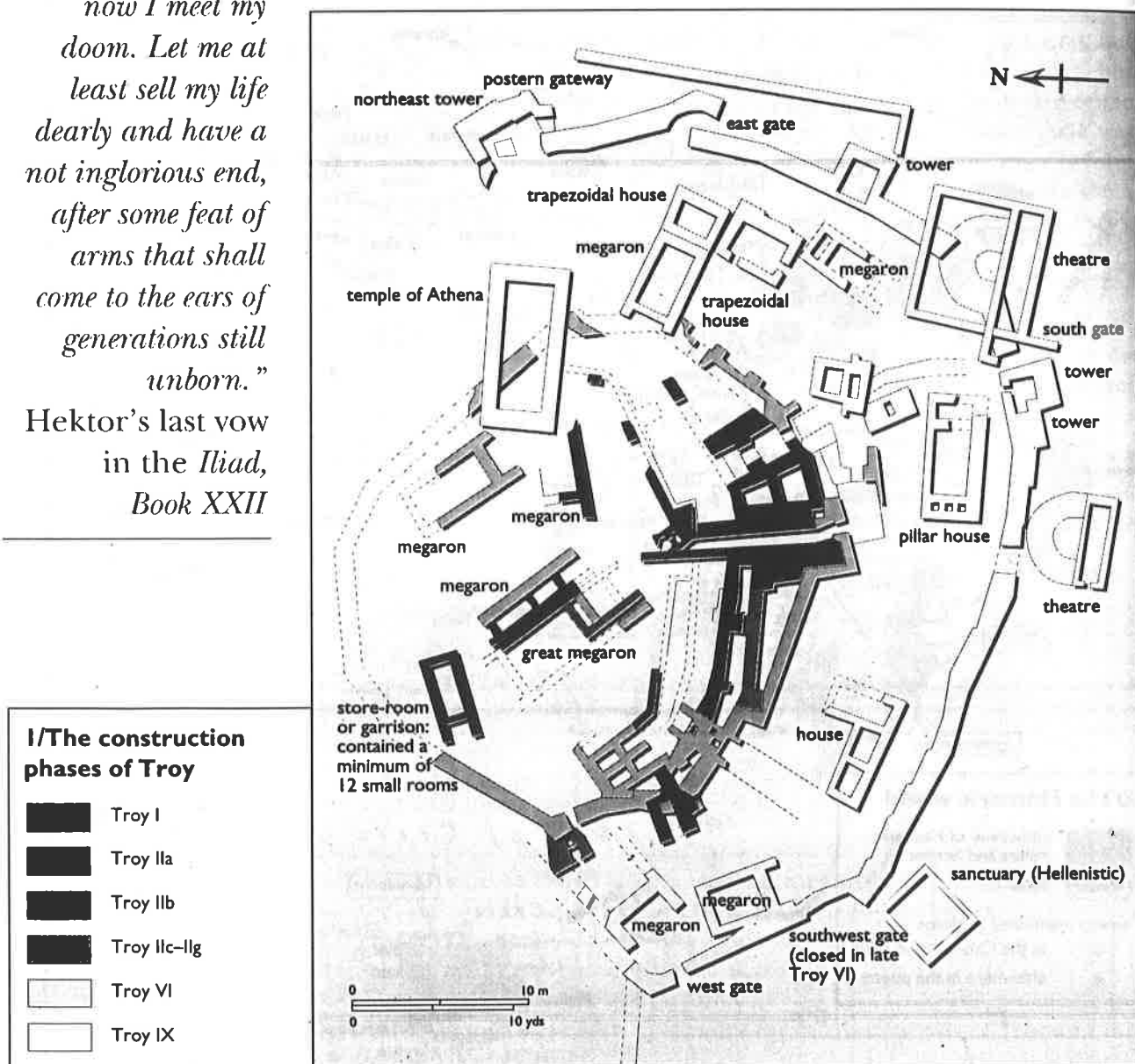
The Trojan Wars

*"Alas! So the gods
did beckon me to my
death! ... Athene
has fooled me.
Death is no longer
far away; he is
staring me in the
face and there is no
escaping him ... So
now I meet my
doom. Let me at
least sell my life
dearly and have a
not inglorious end,
after some feat of
arms that shall
come to the ears of
generations still
unborn."*
Hektor's last vow
in the *Iliad*,
Book XXII

For thousands of years the works of Homer have been a source of inspiration to writers, artists and craftsmen and the doubts over their authorship and historical accuracy do not diminish their real worth.

Since ancient times, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have attracted speculation. More recently the question has been, was Homer a real person, or were the poems a collection of oral epics only woven together at a later date? Even the Greeks and Romans had doubts about Homer's existence. It seems possible that the poems are the work of one person, developing traditional material, and a date in the 8th century is now favoured for the composition, although they were first written down in the 6th.

Beginning with Herodotos many writers attempted to calculate the date of the Trojan war, with widely differing results. In our terms they ranged between 1346 and 1127 BC, the most favoured being 1184. As the Bible provided the stimulus for archaeology in the Near East, so the Homeric poems fired the early excavators such as Heinrich Schliemann. But increased



Of the nine major archaeological layers discovered at Troy it is the layer known as Troy VII which has been most closely identified with Homer's Troy. Primarily this identification is based upon the discovery of Mycenaean pottery and on the fact that this city was destroyed by fire.



knowledge from archaeology has only confused the issue further. Many details of the epics (such as the boar's tusk helmets) would seem to place the events in the Late Bronze Age, but other features do not fit. So it is assumed that the world of the Mycenaean period was ornamented, and to some extent garbled, with the contemporary (ie 8th century) details. The evidence from Troy itself has been confusing. Schliemann correctly identified the mound of Hissarlik with the ancient city, and of its many city levels two, Troy VI and Troy VII, offer the most likely equation with the city of Priam. Troy VI with its massive city walls seems to be that most closely resembling Homer's description, but its destruction, around 1300 BC, was both too early for the peak of Mycenaean power, and apparently caused by an earthquake. The succeeding Troy VII, however, was a very much poorer city.

Despite the numerous aspects of the epics which might be seen as illustrative of life and warfare in the Bronze Age, or the Dark Age, it would be folly to use them as such. The Homeric poems (whether by "Homer" or not) should be read as one of the greatest epic cycles in world literature, which has been a constant source of inspiration to playwrights, artists and musicians, and not as a reliable historical text.

