

portions of skeletons from still another place.

His method could not have been better designed to arouse the scorn of timorous academics: his "law of correlation," on the basis of which he built bridges from one solid fact to another, was a law that he had formulated himself, and his reconstructed skeleton was meant to confirm both the general law and the particular case of the paleotherium. But his boldness was vindicated after his death, when several complete paleotherium skeletons were found.

I have tried to reconstruct the remote past in which the Hebrew Tradition originated. Since my data are as fragmentary as those that Cuvier had at his disposal for his paleotherium, I felt it would be more honest for me to call my attempt a "novel." Not everyone can be a Cuvier, and the bridges I have built to connect my data are not necessarily as solid as his.

The hypothesis that forms the structure of this book is founded on portions of the Bible, read as Schliemann read Homer.

Heinrich Schliemann (1822-1890), son of a poor German preacher, started out in life as a grocer's clerk in Fürstenberg, where he made friends with an eccentric young man named Niederhoffer who was fascinated by ancient Greek and recited Homer in the original. They both saved money from their salaries to pursue their studies. Schliemann learned foreign languages, which eventually led him to St. Petersburg as the representative of an industrial firm. In Russia, he made a fortune and developed what was to be a lifelong obsession with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which at that time were regarded as fanciful, poetic stories, like fairy tales. Schliemann became convinced that they were historical narratives. Everyone laughed in his face. In 1856 he began seriously studying ancient Greek. When he was finally able to read Homer in the original, his fixed idea was strengthened still more.

From 1858 on, he devoted himself entirely to that idea. He traveled and made useful connections. In 1863 he came to Paris to study archaeology and its methods. In 1871 he

obtained a permit to excavate at Hissarlik, Turkey. After reading and rereading Homer, he had come to believe that this was where Hector's Troy had been. He was almost the only man in the world who thought it had ever really existed.

And he succeeded. He uncovered the ruins of Troy, proving that for two thousand years the most reputable Hellenists had been propagating false ideas because they refused to see anything but groundless legends in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

What Schliemann did for Homer was exactly what I have tried to do for the Biblical narrative that concerns me.

Reading the Bible as Schliemann read Homer means ignoring all the exegeses that have accumulated around it for the past two thousand years. Their avowed purpose is to seek proof of the existence of God in the Bible. To someone who reads the Bible "à la Schliemann," on the assumption that the text is to be taken in its most concrete sense, God is as far outside the subject as the religious beliefs of the Greeks and Trojans were to Schliemann.

When we read the Bible in that way, we must first note that the Hebrew word *Elohim*, usually translated as "God," is a plural. If we read "Those who came from the sky," or "the Celestials," each time the plural *Elohim* occurs, we find ourselves reading a narrative that needs no exegesis, no helpful prodding, no religious conviction, in order to be thoroughly coherent.

Voltaire knew that a Hebrew word meaning "gods" had been translated as "God," but people who now claim intellectual kinship with Voltaire have forgotten it.

Read in this way, *Genesis* appears as an account of the arrival of perfectly concrete Celestials, physically in our image, who behaved on earth as we can imagine our own astronauts behaving on another planet in a future that is still far off but no longer belongs to the realm of science fiction.

If the meaning of the story is so clear, why was Voltaire unaware of it, and why does it still have to be demonstrated today?