The Treasure of Priam   by P.Y. Forsyth

In 1873, the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann was excavating a mound called Hissarlik in northwest Turkey. Many years earlier Schliemann had set out to prove that the Troy written about by the Greek epic poet Homer was no myth, but a real city, besieged and sacked by a Greek army around 1250 BC. His first visit to Hissarlik was made in 1868, and by 1870 he was ready to begin his excavations. However, Schliemann was not fully aware of the complexity of the task awaiting him: in the mound lay not just one city, but several, each built on top of the other, like a layer cake. In his eagerness to reach "Homer's Troy" (which he believed was to be found deep in the mound), Schliemann dug massive trenches through the site, destroying the later cities which, ironically, included the city we now believe to be Homer's Troy. Instead, Schliemann ended up at "Troy II", a settlement that had existed centuries before the Trojan War.

Schliemann, however, was convinced he had indeed found the Troy of Homer, and one spectacular find seemed to confirm his belief: in the spring of 1873 he discovered the so-called "Treasure of Priam" (named after the legendary king of Troy). This is how he described what happened:

> *I came upon a large copper article of the most remarkable form, which attracted my attention all the more, and I thought I saw gold behind it ... I cut out the treasure with a large knife, which it was impossible to do without the very greatest exertion ... but the sight of so many objects, every one of which is of inestimable value to archaeology, made me foolhardy ... It would, however, have been impossible for me to have removed the treasure without the help of my dear wife, who stood by me ready to pack the things which I cut out in her shawl and to carry them away.*

The actual treasure included magnificent gold jewelry: several thousand small gold beads, gold bracelets and earrings, and, most splendid of all, a large diadem made of more than 16,000 tiny pieces of gold threaded on gold wire. Without permission, Schliemann smuggled this hoard out of Turkey to Germany, where it found a home in Berlin's Museum of Early History. There it stayed until World War II broke out, at which time it was packed in crates and taken to the safety of an air raid shelter. What happened next is not clearly known, but the treasure disappeared approximately when the Russian army entered Berlin in July, 1945. Most archaeologists came to the reluctant conclusion that the Treasure of Priam had been melted down and was lost for all time.

Just recently, however, "glasnost" has led to some potentially good news: it was reported last March that the treasure still exists, probably locked in the vaults of the Soviet State Bank. The senior curator of the Berlin Museum, Klaus Goldmann, made a trip to the Soviet Union after a report was published in the journal Smena last October, in which a Soviet archaeologist reported that the treasure had been seen in the 1960s by the then director of the Hermitage Museum. An American journal, Artnews, has also reported, on independent evidence, that the treasure is in the Soviet Union. As a result, Goldmann is optimistic that this long-running mystery is about to be solved (and probably hoping that the treasure will be returned to Berlin!). One can only wait and see, but, for the first time in 50 years, there is a chance that Schliemann's treasure will once again see the light of day.