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Univ. of Bamberg, Germany



**Pre-Greek Place Names: New Insights
into an Old Problem**

ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΝΕΟΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΩΝ ΣΠΟΥΔΩΝ

[Ίδρυμα Μανόλη Τριανταφυλλίδη]

ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΕΙΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗΣ

1^o

ΔΙΕΘΝΕΣ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟ | INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

“Επαναπροσεγγίζοντας
τους βασικούς σταθμούς στην ιστορία
της ελληνικής”

“Revisiting the key milestones
in the history of Greek”

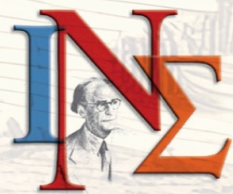
1st

6–8 Νοεμβρίου 2025

Τελλόγλειο Ίδρυμα Τεχνών,
Α.Π.Θ. και διαδικτυακά
Αγ. Δημητρίου 159Α, Θεσσαλονίκη

November 6–8 2025

Teloglion Fine Arts Found.,
A.U.Th. and via Internet
Ag. Dimitriou 159A, Thessaloniki



INSTITUTE OF MODERN GREEK STUDIES

[Manolis Triandaphyllidis Foundation]

ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

▼ ΠΡΟΕΔΡΟΣ | CHAIR: ΙΩ ΜΑΝΩΛΕΣΣΟΥ

12.00–12.30 ΓΕΩΡΓΙΑ ΦΡΑΓΚΑΚΗ & ΔΙΟΝΥΣΗΣ ΓΟΥΤΣΟΣ (online)

Σταθμοί στα ελληνικά του 20ού αιώνα: μια προσέγγιση στην πρόσφατη γλωσσική αλλαγή βασισμένη σε σώματα κειμένων

12.30–13.00 ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΟΣ ΤΣΑΓΓΑΛΙΔΗΣ

Σταθμοί στην ιστορία της γλωσσικής εκπαίδευσης: μικρές και μεγάλες μεταρρυθμίσεις της σχολικής γραμματικής

13.00–13.30 ΔΗΜΗΤΡΑ ΔΕΛΜΗ (online)

Λογοδοσία και διαφάνεια στη δημόσια διοίκηση της Μεσσηνίας: γλωσσική ανάλυση των IG V1 1432–1433 και 1390

13.30–16.00 ΔΙΑΛΕΙΜΜΑ | LUNCH BREAK

ΕΤΥΜΟΛΟΓΙΑ | ETYMOLOGY

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΕΤΥΜΟΛΟΓΙΑ | GREEK ETYMOLOGY

▼ ΠΡΟΕΔΡΟΣ | CHAIR: ANNE THOMPSON

16.00–16.30 CORINNA LESCHBER (online)

Experiments with the past: Greek etymology

16.30–17.00 ΑΣΗΜΑΚΗΣ ΦΛΙΑΤΟΥΡΑΣ & ΑΝΝΑ ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΑΔΗ-ΣΥΜΕΩΝΙΔΗ

Ετυμολογία και συγχρονική μορφολογική ανάλυση: σχέση μίσους ή αγάπης;

17.00–17.30 ΧΡΗΣΤΟΣ ΠΑΠΑΝΑΓΙΩΤΟΥ (online)

Ετυμολογία και νεολογισμοί: μορφολογικά και σημασιολογικά ζητήματα

17.30–18.00 ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΒΟΓΙΑΤΖΙΣ

Linguistic and etymological insights into the Thassian pastoral lexicon

18.00–18.30 ΔΙΑΛΕΙΜΜΑ | COFFEE BREAK

ΠΡΟΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΕΤΥΜΟΛΟΓΙΑ | PRE-GREEK ETYMOLOGY

▼ ΠΡΟΕΔΡΟΣ | CHAIR: ΔΩΡΗΣ ΚΥΡΙΑΖΗΣ

18.30–19.00 SORIN PALIGA

Symbolism as pre-writing system

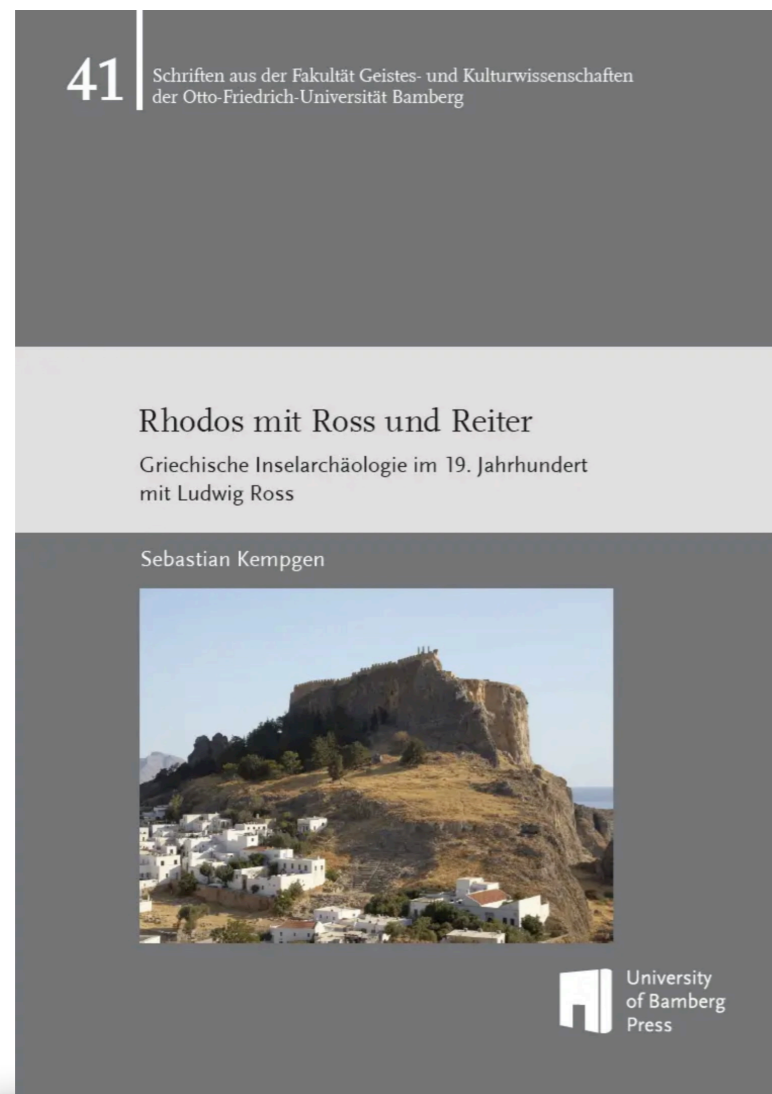
19.00–19.30 SEBASTIAN KEMPGEN

Pre-Greek place-names: new insights into an old question

19.30–20.00 ΛΗΞΗ ΤΟΥ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟΥ | END OF CONFERENCE

Personal background

- Education in Slavic Philology and General Linguistics
 - Chair for Slavic Linguistics, University of Bamberg 1991–2018
 - Special Interest: Balkans. Extensive travels in Greece.
-
- First book on Greece 2022



Rhodos with Ludwig Ross.

The archaeology of a Greek island in the 19th c.

Bamberg 2022. Open Access.

54

Schriften aus der Fakultät Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften
der Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg

Ägäische Etymologien
Sprache • Geschichte • Archäologie

Sebastian Kempgen



University
of Bamberg
Press

Aegean Etymologies. Language • History • Archaeology. 2025.

*Athens, Amnissos, Dodoni,
Eleusis, Erymanthos, Hellas,
Ilion, Kerkyra, Korinth,
Larissa, Lemnos, Mykene,
Mykonos, Olympos, Odessos,
Olynthos, Parnassos,
Salamis, Samos, Tanagra,
Tiryns, Tylissos, Zominthos
... and many more*

*500 pp., hundreds of
photos and maps*

**> Comparative historical
linguistics**



Place names

(linguistic) layers upon
layers

attrition, assimilation ...
reinterpretation
folk etymologies

Pre-Greek (Arini = 'spring')

Slavic (rodina = 'hometown')

Greek

Kakovatos, Peloponnes

Research

120 years ago

A. Fick: Greek place names as sources for the prehistory of Greece. 1905 (in German). *great collection of linguistic material, but no explanations!*

100 years ago

P. Kretschmer: many articles 1920–1940s on proto-ie. strata in Greece

75 years ago

A.J. Van Windekens: Le Pélasgique etc. 1952–1960

recent:

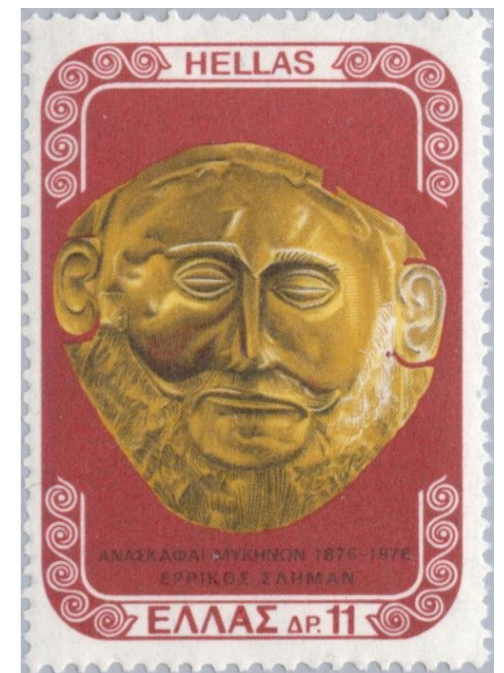
R. Beekes

Discovery of Hittite; decipherment of Hittite, recognition of its ie. character

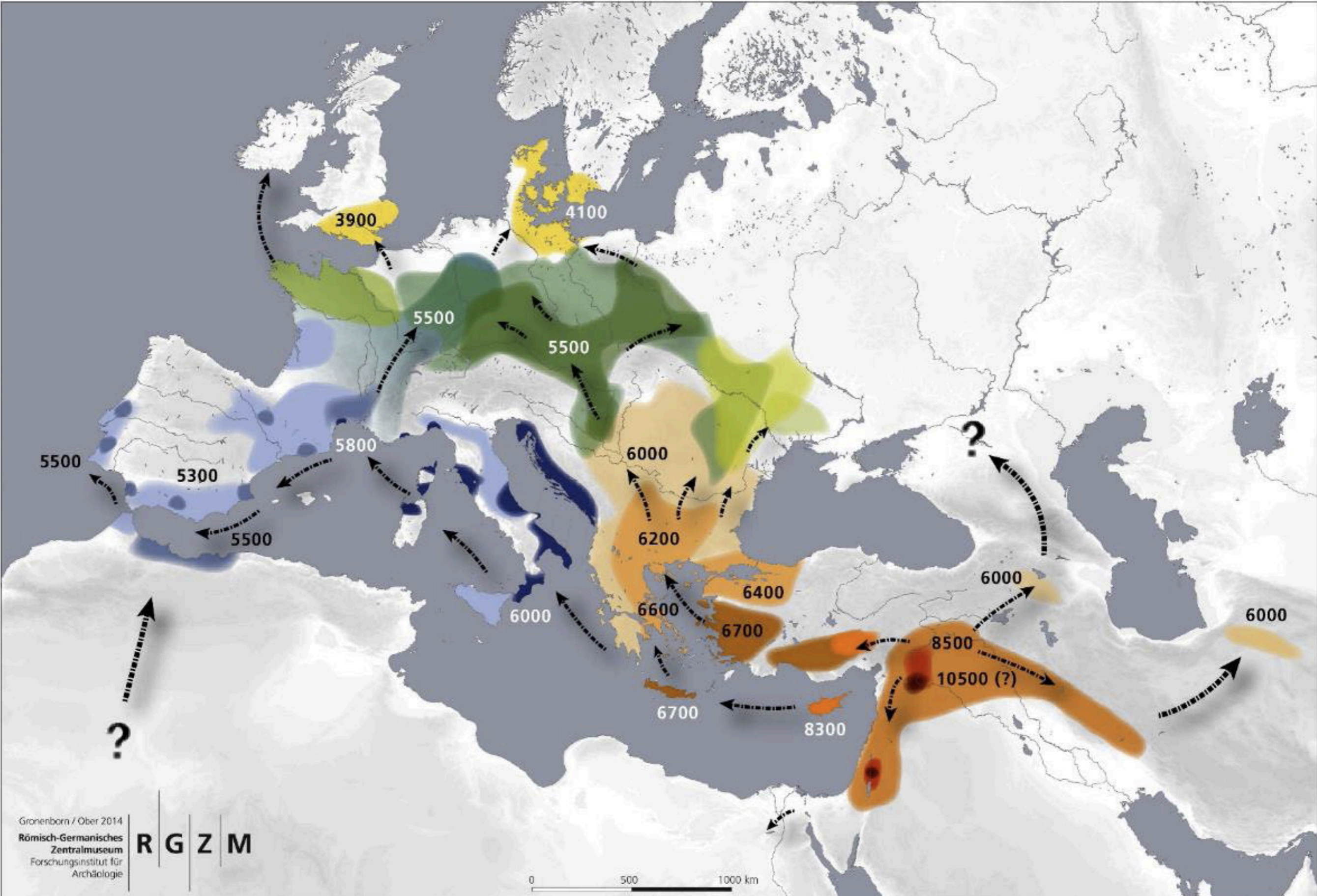
Older belief: Luwian, Carian, Anatolian linguistic influence on Greek mainland

Pre-Greek, "Pelasgian"

- Language of the ie. immigrants in the 3rd millenium BC (parallel to Proto-Anatolians)
- Superstratum for lang. of neolithic farmers in Greece
- Substratum for Mycenaean Greek (from 2.000 BC)
- Bilingualism; 1000+ loan-words
- Semantic Categories:
 Toponyms, hydronyms, Mediterranean fauna et flora ...
- Def. Pre-Greek: No Greek etymology



Neolithic farmers and farming



Sources

PAULYS RE: *Paulys Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Neue Bearbeitung. Hrsg. v. G. Wissowa, W. Kroll, K. Mittelhaus, K. Ziegler, H. Gärtner. Stuttgart 1893–1980.

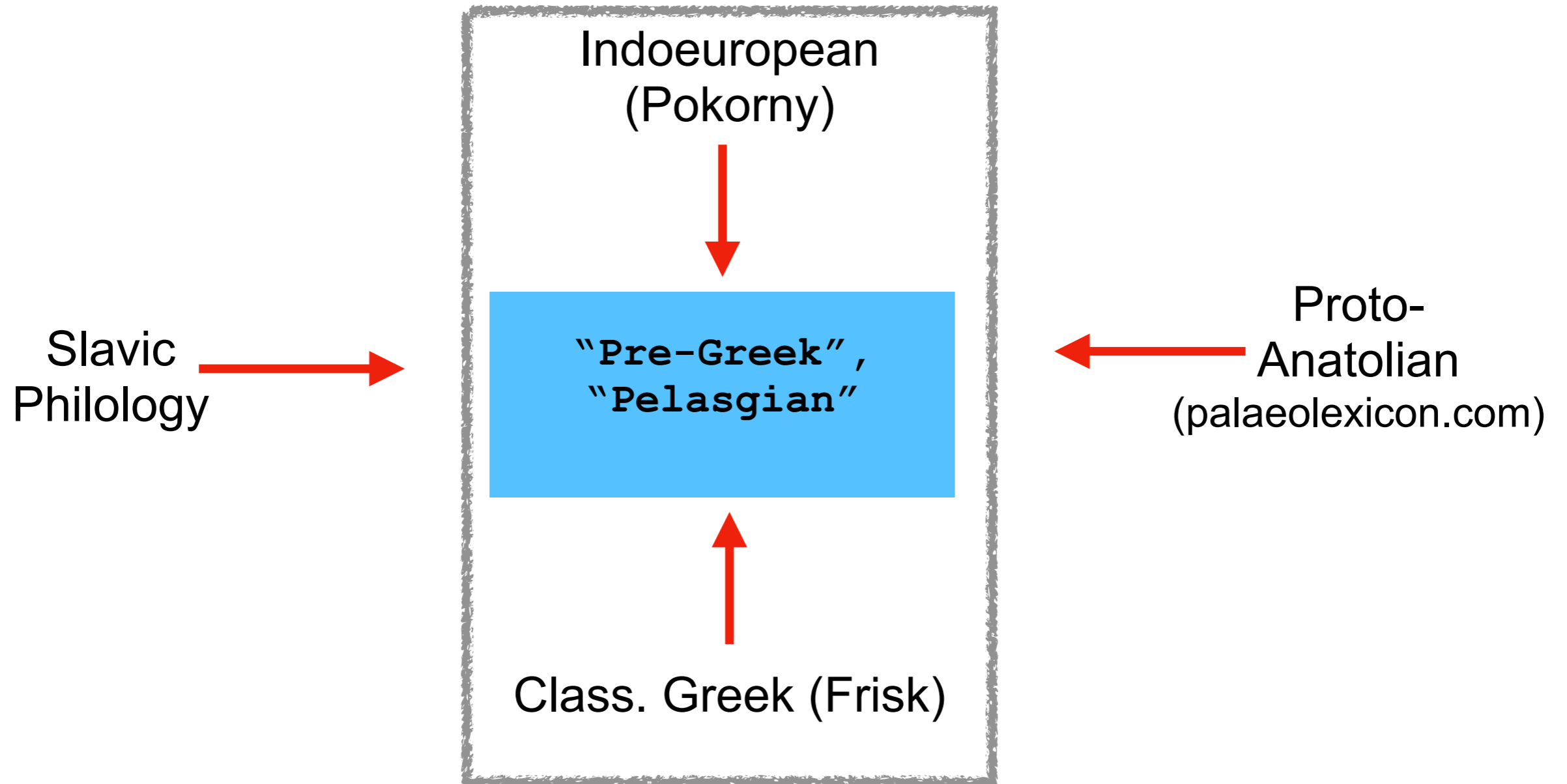
HJ. FRISK: *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Bd. I–III. Heidelberg 1954–1972. (Bd. 1: 1960, Bd. 2: 1970, Bd. 3: 1972) 3., unveränderte Auflage 2017. (<http://ieed.ullet.net/friskL.html>)

J. POKORNY: *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 2 Bde. Bern–München 1959–1969.

W.H. ROSCHER (ed.): *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*. Bd. 1–6. Bd. 1–1: Leipzig 1884–1890. Bd. 1-2: 1886–1890. Bd. 2-1: 1890–1897. Bd. 2-2: 1894–1897. Bd. 3-1: 1897–1902. Bd. 3-2: 1902–1909. Bd. 4: 1909–1915. Bd. 5: 1916–1924. Bd. 6: 1924–1937. (online)



Methodology



Special focus: natural motivation



Korinthos = 'Rock-City'



you have to look the right way to see it!

Athēnai Ἀθῆναι

Athens, Athēnai, Atana

popular belief: city named after goddess

Linear B: Atana

Ionic Ἀθήνη *Athēnē*, Attic Ἀθηνᾶ *Athēnā*

Doric Ἀθάνα *Athána*



Athēnai Ἀθῆναι

Athens, Athēnai, Atana

Pre-Greek analysis:

segmentation At-ana, Muk-ana

< *ie.* ***ati/ato** ‘over, above’ (Pokorny...)

> **Atana** = ‘high place’



Athēnai Ἀθῆναι

Atana 'high place' = Pre-Greek for 'Akropolis'!

same motivation, natural motivation:

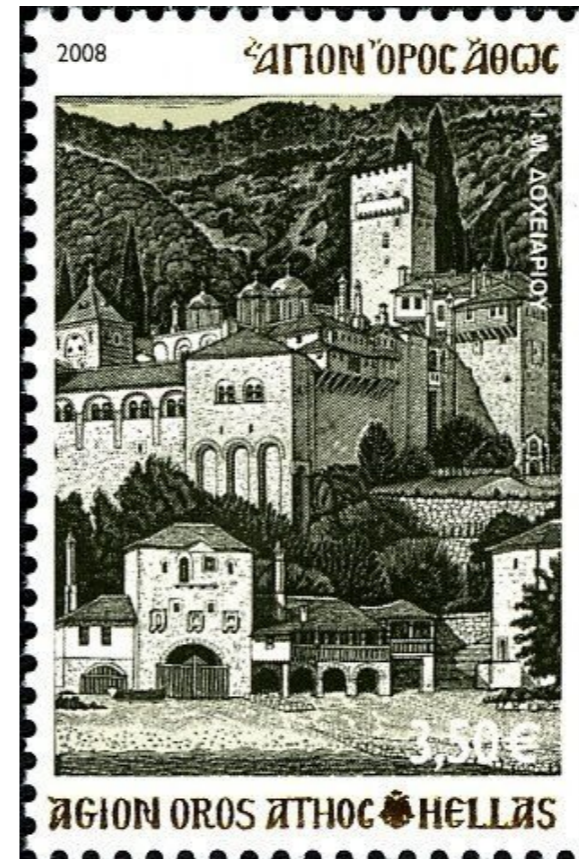
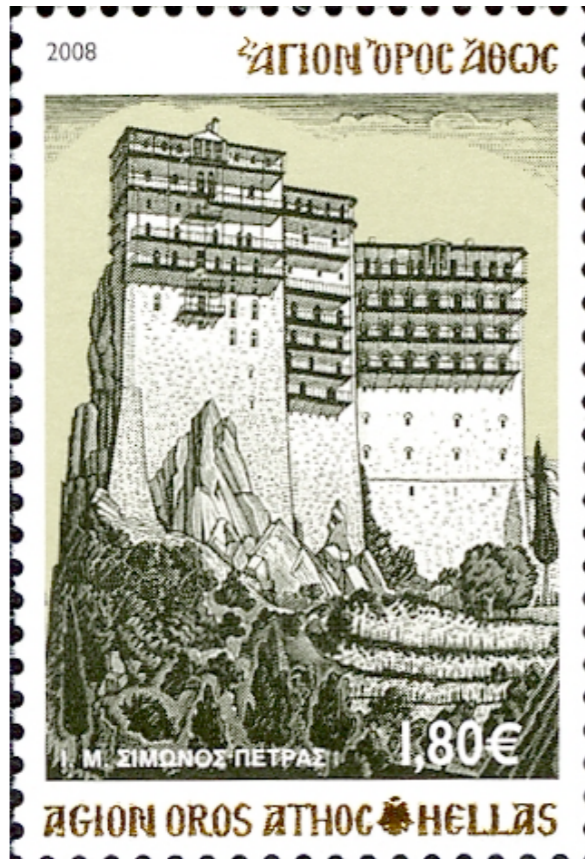


Methodology

Etymologies must explain all related items

> what about

Athos (Ἄθως), Athamánes (Ἀθαμάνες) ...?



Athos, "Ἄθως"

< *ie. ati/ato 'over, above'*

Athos = 'high one [mountain]'

Athamanes = people living high in the mountains, 'hillbillies'

> *corroborates etymology of Athenai*

as seen from Lemnos

Athēnai Ἀθῆναι and surroundings

Cluster of Pre-Greek names

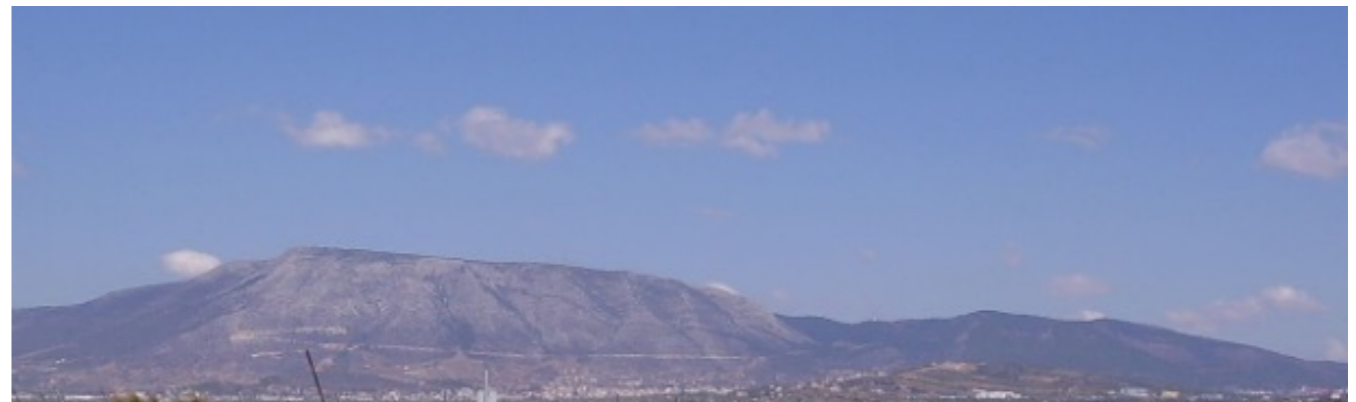
Ilissós Ἴλισός/Ἴλισσός = ‘muddy waters’ (< ie. ‘dirt’, gr. ilys ἰλύς)

Hymēttós Ὑμηττός = ‘shoulder’ (< ie. *om(e)so-s)

Ardettos, Eridanos, Lykabettos, Attika...



Ilissos



Hymettos

Mykenai, Μυκῆνη, Μυκῆνα, Μυκῆναι

Folk etymology: mykēs μύκης
'mushroom' (since antiquity)

any etymology must fit Mykéne,
Mýkonos, and Mykalessós, too

Mykenai, Μυκῆνη, Μυκῆνα, Μυκῆναι

Structure: *muk-ana* (like *At-ana...*)

Solution: «Also, Μύκονος is related to μύκων · σωρός, θημῶν (Hesych.)»
(Fick 1905, 57)

‘heap, stack’



Mykenai, Μυκῆνη, Μυκῆνα, Μυκῆναι

> ie. root **muk-* “‘stack’ characteristics”
(Pokorny, Idg. Etym. WB 2, 752)

Gallic **mukina* ‘heap of stones’

Ger. *mu-werf* ‘mole’ = ‘heap-thrower’

Germ. *Mauke* ‘lump at the horse’s hoof’

OE. *mūga* ‘heap’

OIsl. *mūgi*, *mūgr* ‘heap, quantity’

Norw. *mukka* ‘heap’ etc.

Muk-ana ‘Stonehill’

young students in Mykines



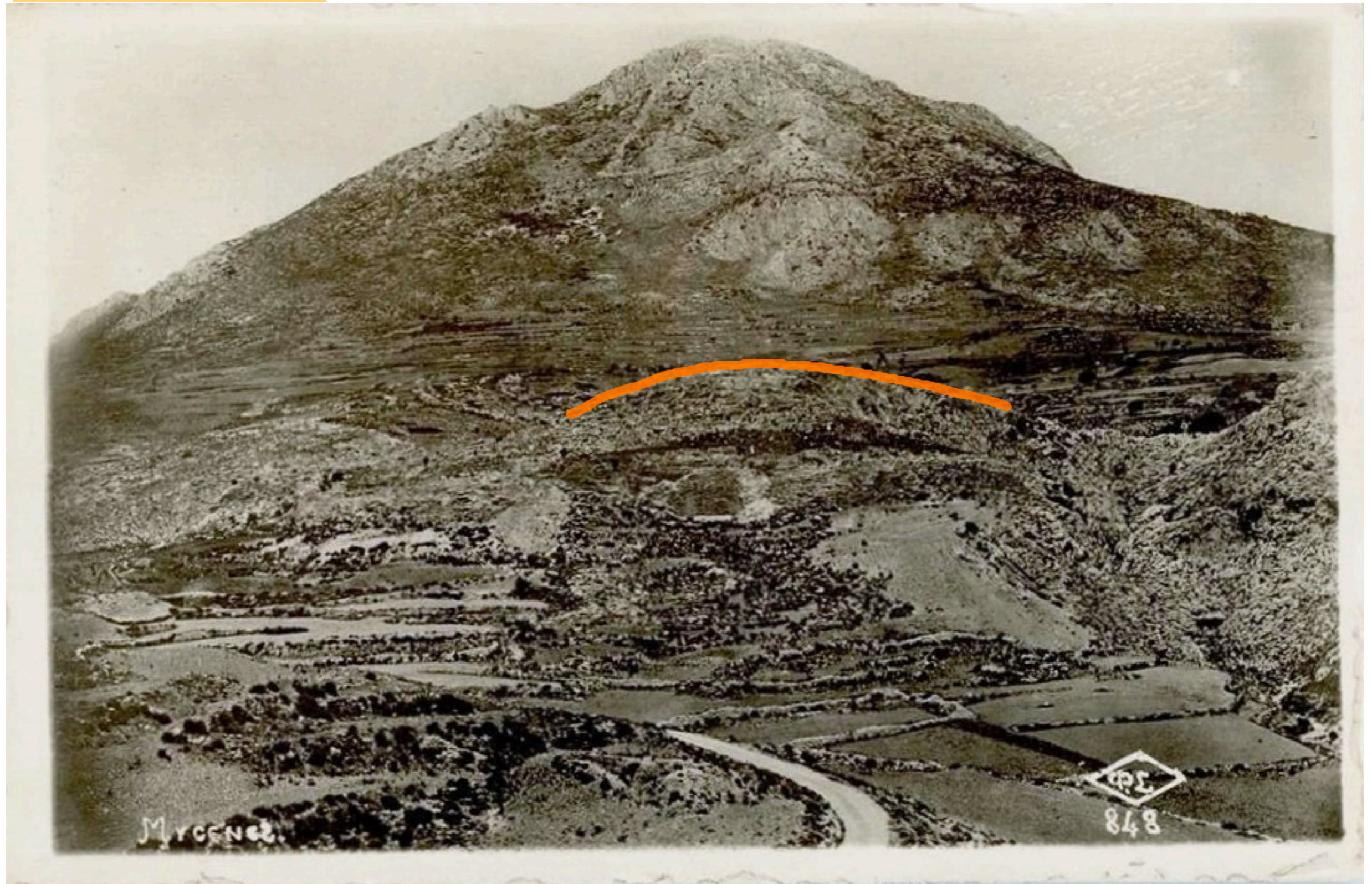
Mykenai, Μυκῆνη, Μυκῆνα, Μυκῆναι

"Stonehill"



Mykenai, Μυκῆνη, Μυκῆνα, Μυκῆναι

"Stonehill"



Mykenai, Μυκῆνη, Μυκῆνα, Μυκῆναι

etymology =
"Stonehill"



ie. root lar-

„**leading root**“ of the Pre-Greek substratum

(Th. Lindner: Griechische (incl. mykenische) Ortsnamen. In: E. Eichler et al. (eds.), Namenforschung. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Onomastik. 1. Teilband. Berlin—New York 1995, 690–705.)

supposedly: ‘fortress’, because of Larissa above Pyrgos, Argolida.

city *Lóryma Λόρυμα or Λώρυμα*

river *Lárisos Λάρισσος, creek Laris*

objects *lárkos λάρκος* ‘basket’, *larnax λάρναξ* ‘basket’, *lárynx λάρυγξ* ‘maw’, *láros λάρος* ‘sea-gull’, *larós λάρός* ‘delicious’ ...

Induction from all samples + tests for falsification

lar- = ‘lowland, trough, hollow, depression’



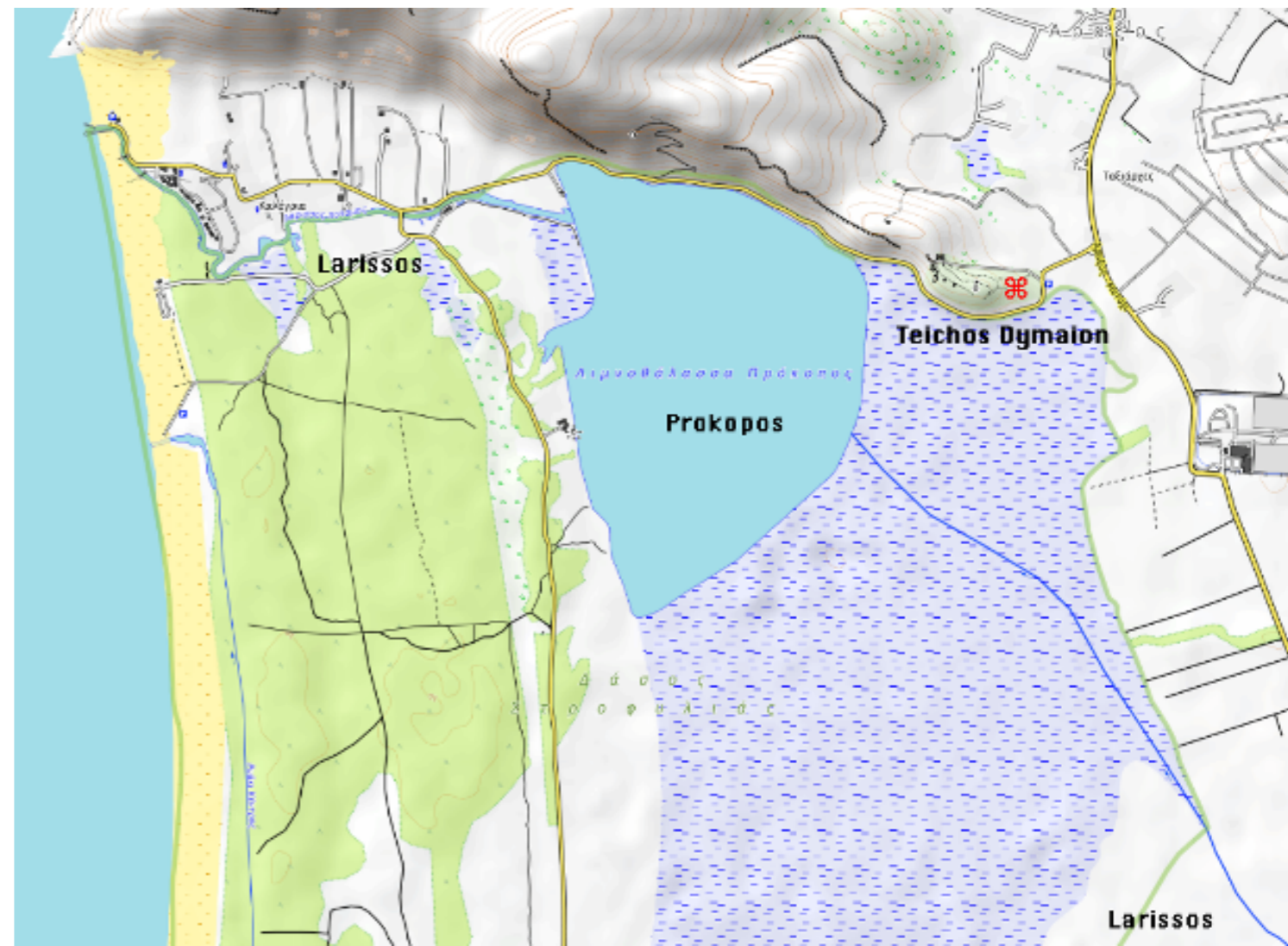
ie. root lar-

‘lowland, trough, hollow, depression’

> Larissos *Λάρισσος*



Larissos, its lagoon and marshes



lar-

‘lowland, trough, hollow, depression’



suddenly: many ie. cognates

russ. *lar* ‘basket’

engl. *lair* ‘trough’

lat. *Lares* (‘household gods’ - early burial practices: in urns below floor)

germ. *larete* ‘vulva’

nord. *lárr*, *lår* ‘basket’; *lår/laret* ‘thigh’

celtic *lār* ‘broad, flat’, air. ‘floor’ (semantics: object > trait)

germ. *Lohr* am Main, creek *Lara/Lohr*

germ. *Kevelar*, *Hangelar*, *Geislar* (suggestion so far: ‘swamp’)



Pre-greek. derivation: *lerna* ‘spring, source’



ie. words for 'sea'



ie. words for 'sea'

replacements: **thalassa, pontos, pelagos, hals**

«Mit θάλασσα muß maced. (?) δαλάγγαν ... irgendwie zusammenhängen, aber sonst fehlt eine brauchbare Anknüpfung.»

(FRISK, Griech. Etym. WB 1, 648f.)

«With θάλασσα somehow maced. (?) δαλάγγαν ... must be related, but otherwise there is no real connection.»

(FRISK, Greek Etym. Lex. 1, 648f.)



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(FRISK, Greek Etym. Lex. 1, 648f.)

Analysis: root structure d-l-Velar

Cf. russ. *dolgij*, bulg. *дълък* etc.

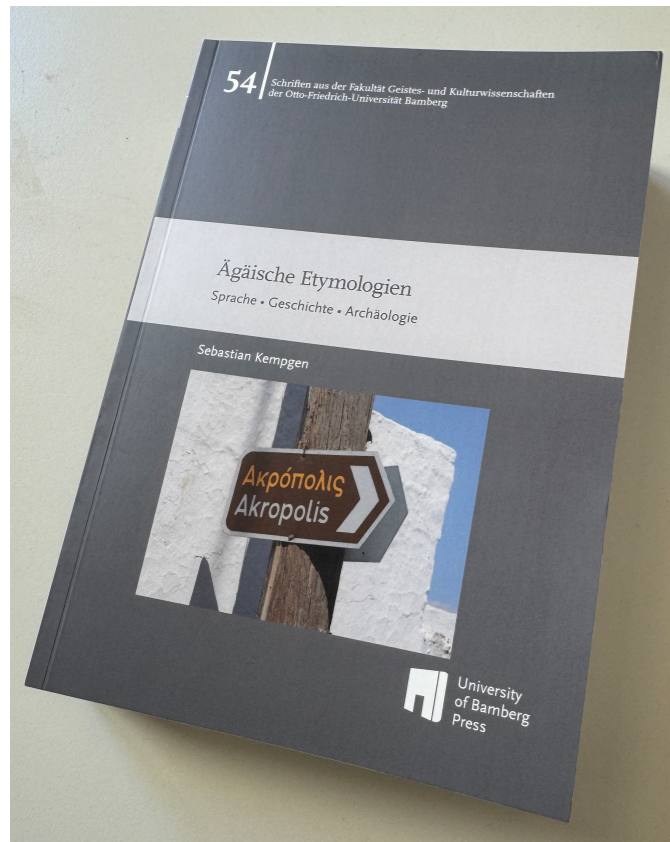
< ie. **doləgh-/*delegh-* 'long'

= **etymology thalassa**



ie. words for 'sea'





<https://doi.org/10.20378/IRB-107778>

Aegean Etymologies. Language • History • Archaeology. 2025.

Amarynthos, Amnissos, Ardettos, Argos, Arini, Arisbe, Asopos, Assessos, Athens, Amnissos, Cha, Charvati, Dodoni, Dolopia, Edessa, Eleusis, Elis, Enipeas, Eresos, Eridanos, Erymanthos, Gardiki, Gialova, Gortyn, Graikoi, Gyrtone, Halmyros, Hellas, Hellopia, Hymettos, Ialysos, Ilion, Istros, Kaystros, Kerkini, Kerkyra, Korinth, Kymissala, Labyrinthos, Ladon, Lamia, Lari, Larissa, Larymna, Lebinthos, Lemnos, Lesbos, Lerna, Mykene, Mykonos, Myrina, Ochyroma, Olympos, Odessos, Olynthos, Oropos, Parnassos, Peneios, Plemmyri, Salamis, Sami, Samos, Tanagra, Tanais, Tanos, Thalassa, Thermodon, Tiryns, Tylissos, Utana, Vrysinas, Zominthos ...

Preview

follow-up volume for 2026

Knossos < ie. *genu* 'Knee' (kephalá hill), i.e. "slope-town"

Phaistos < cf. gr. *paistos* 'hewn'; hill looks like a "truncated cone"

Kydonia < cf. gr. *kytos* 'curvature', from the shape of its harbour (Chania)

Da-wo (= Agia Triada) < ie. *dawa* 'settlement'

Rhadamanthys < ie. *rēdh-*, *rāda-* 'advice' + *mVn-* 'think' (μάντις) > 'lawmaker'

currently online as draft papers



Summary

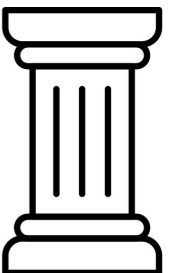
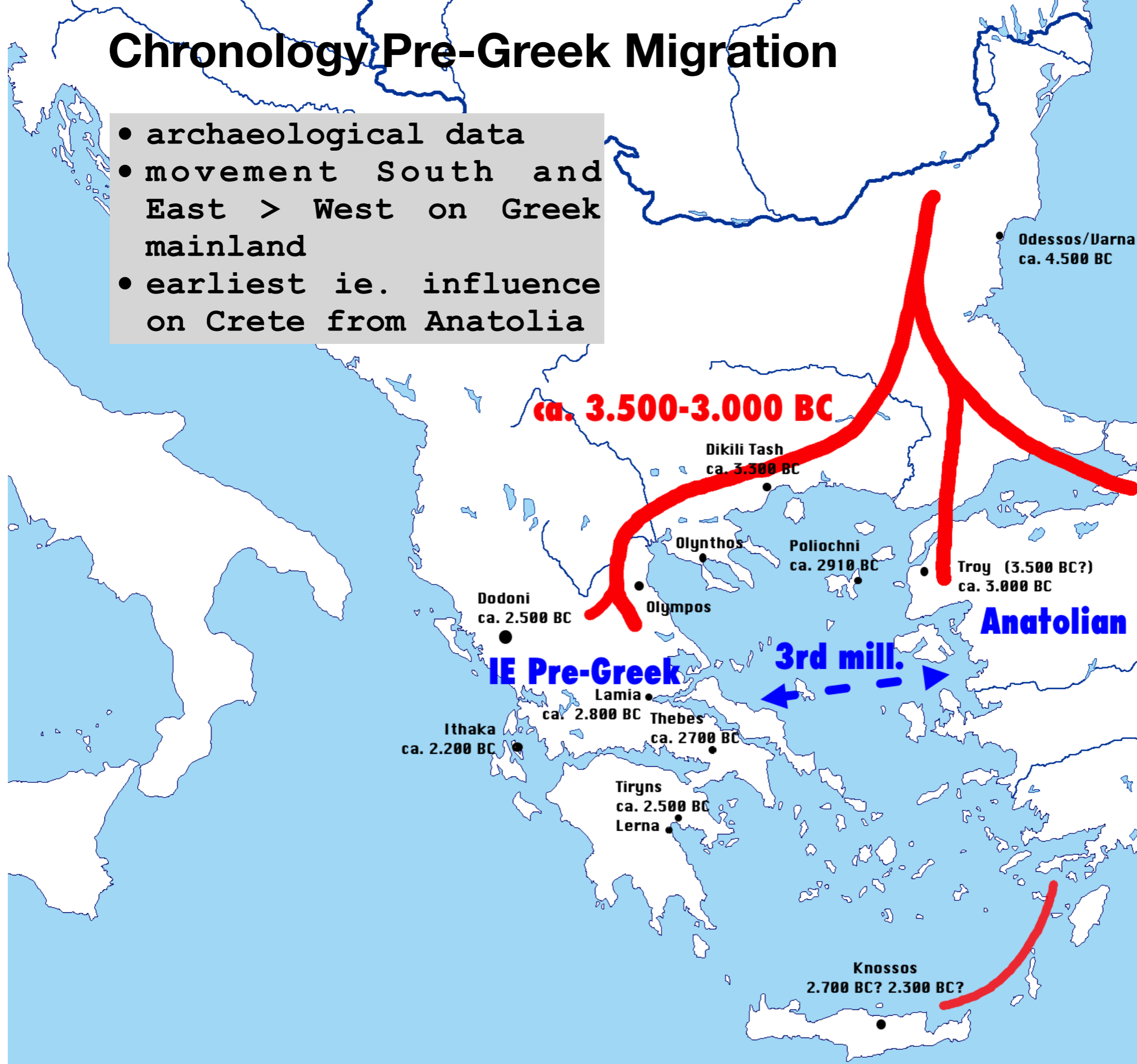
Pre-Greek toponymy and hydronymy

- simple descriptions of the natural surroundings
- rock, river, hill, plateau, river-bank, depression, swamp, pasture
- sometimes: features of the object itself, 'city' (Gortyn, Pergamon...)
- no mythical heroes, nymphs, legendary kings etc.
- motivated by geography, locally motivated
- same place name in Greece and Anatolia does not imply migration!



Chronology Pre-Greek Migration

- archaeological data
- movement South and East > West on Greek mainland
- earliest ie. influence on Crete from Anatolia



Feedback :



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This presentation was given at the «1st International Conference ‘Revisiting the key milestones in the history of Greek’» (Nov. 6–8, 2025) on Nov. 8, 2025, at the Institute of Modern Greek Studies at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

10.20378/irb-111203



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