

LUCIEN VAN BEEK, LUK HUITINK

# Ancient Greek

Introduction – Part 1: The external history of Greek and its sources



Universiteit  
Leiden



# Roadmap

- External history of Greek
- Periodization
- Main Sources

## When and Where?

- Independent branch of the Indo-European language family
- Early 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC: first speakers arrive in the Balkan Peninsula
- 15th-12th Centuries BC: Mycenaean period
- c. 850–320 BC: Archaic and Classical Greece
- 323 BC: Death of Alexander the Great: Hellenistic Greek, κοινή
- Spoken today by over 13,2 million people in Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Albania, Turkey, and the Greek diaspora, making it the IE language with the longest documented history



# Greek within the IE Languages

## ■ Pre-Greek Substrate:

- place names: Ἀθῆναι, Μυκῆναι, Παρνασσός
- plants: ὑάκινθος 'hyacinth', δάφνη 'laurel'
- artefacts: πλίνθος 'brick', ξίφος 'sword'

## ■ Early Borrowings, e.g.:

- Myc. *ki-to*, χιτών 'tunic'
- Myc. *ku-ru-so*, χρυσός 'gold'
- Myc. *e-re-pa*, ἐλέφα(ν)ς 'ivory'

## Greek within the IE Languages

### ■ Some characteristic Greek innovations:

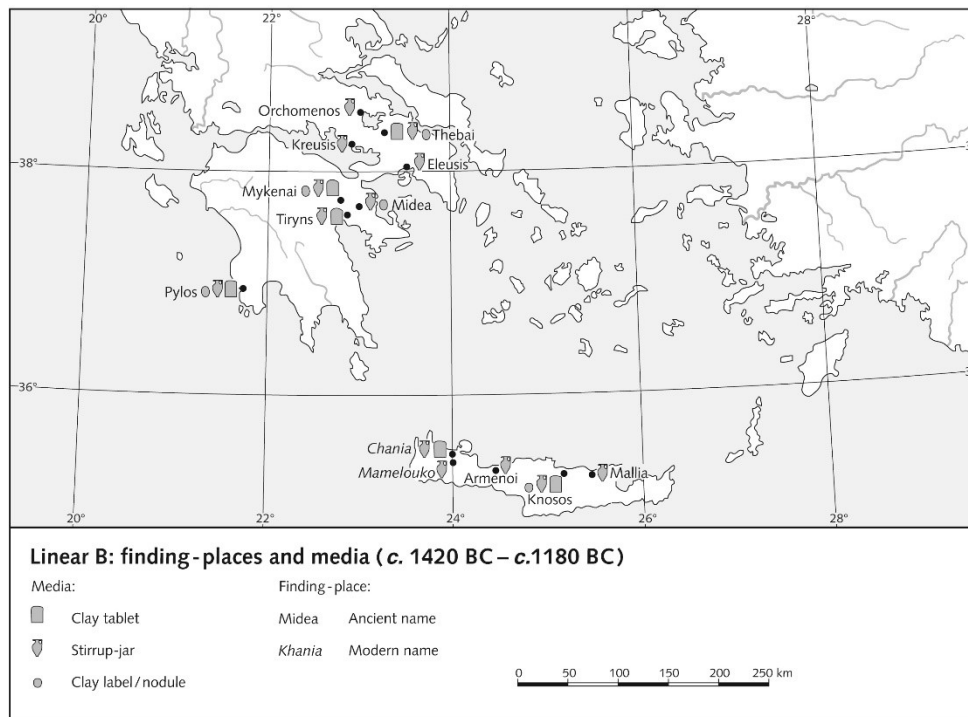
- Final plosives are lost (only *n*, *r*, *s* allowed): e.g. τι ‘something’ (cf. Latin *quid*)
- Initial prevocalic *\*s-* and intervocalic *\*-s-* > *h*; medial *h* is subsequently lost: e.g. ἐπτά (cf. Lat. *septem*), γένους < *\*genehos* < *\*ǵenh<sub>1</sub>-es-os* (cf. Lat. *generis*). NB: intervocalic *-s-* is often restored due to analogy: e.g. dat. pl. ἰσχύσι (cf. φύλαξι)
- Medial intervocalic *\*-y-* was lost: e.g. τρεῖς (< τρέες < τρέγες)
- Initial prevocalic *\*y-* > *\*dy-* > ζ-: cf. ζυγόν ‘yoke’ with Lat. *iugum*)
- Free PIE accent confined to one of the final three syllables
- Case syncretism (but Myc. still has an instr., and perhaps abl.):
  - Abl., gen. > Cl. Gr. gen.                      dat., loc., instr. > Cl. Gr. dat.

## The Earliest Records: Mycenaean Greek

- Minoan Civilization in Crete: 'Linear A'
- Mycenaean Civilization in Southern and Central Greece: 'Linear B', deciphered by Michael Ventris with John Chadwick in 1952, after extensive preparation by Alice Elizabeth Kober (1906-1950)

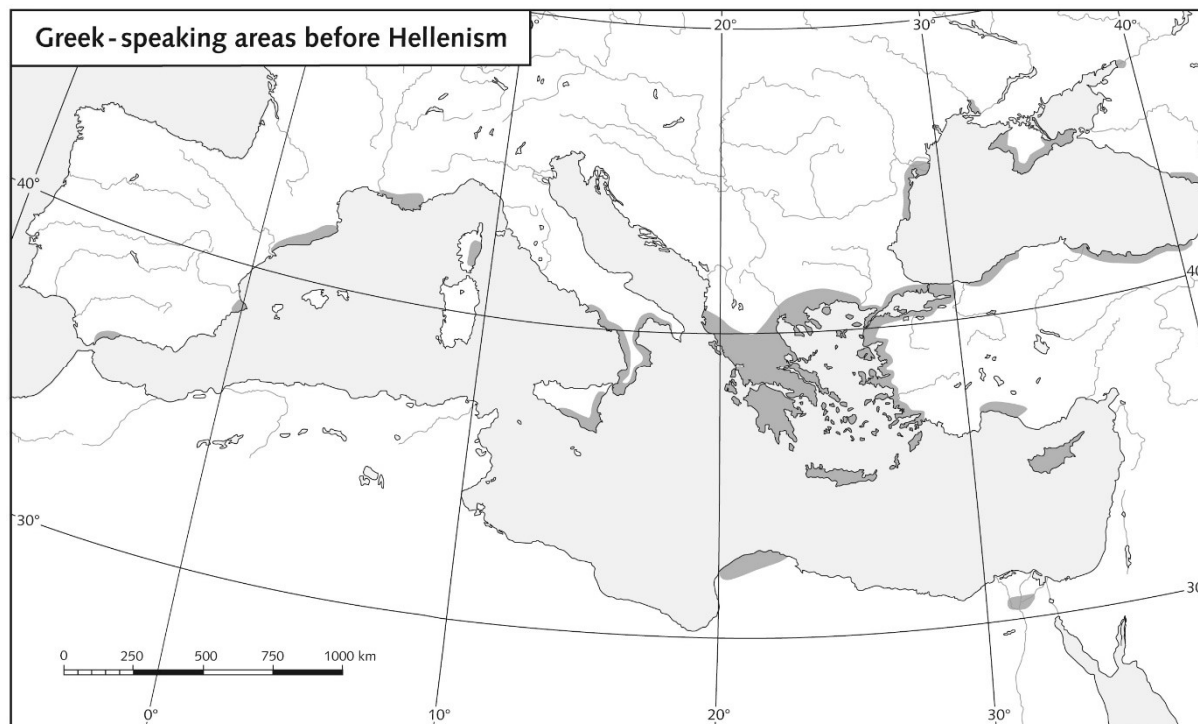


# The Earliest Records: Mycenaean Greek



*Brill's New Pauly*, s.v. 'Linear B' © Brill

## The Archaic and Classical Periods

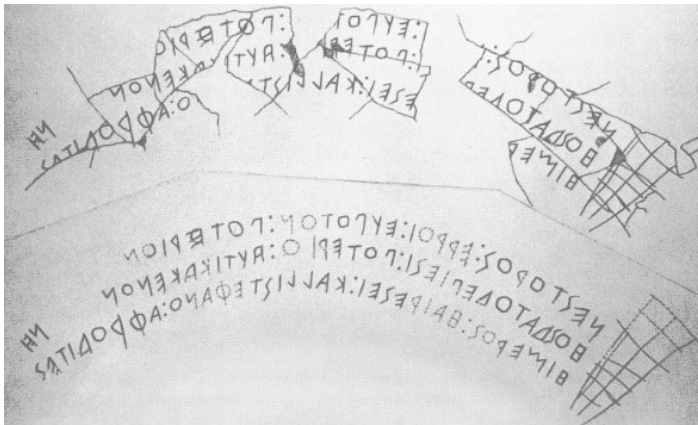


- Early 8<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC
- Alphabetic scripts
- Inscriptions and literature
- In the Greek heartland and in colonies on the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts

*Brill's New Pauly*, s.v. 'Greek' © Brill



## The Archaic and Classical Periods



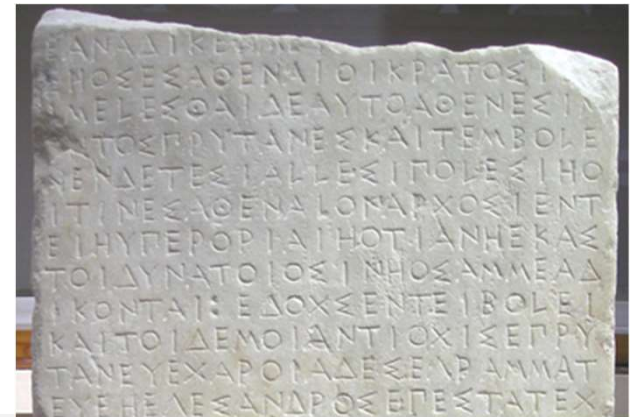
Νεστορος : ε[ ]ι : ευποτ[ον] : ποτῆριον  
 hos δ' α<ν> τῷδε πιῇσι : ποτῆρι[ο] : αυτικα κῆνον  
 ημερος ηαιρεσει : καλλιστε[φα]νῷ : Αφροδιτῆς.



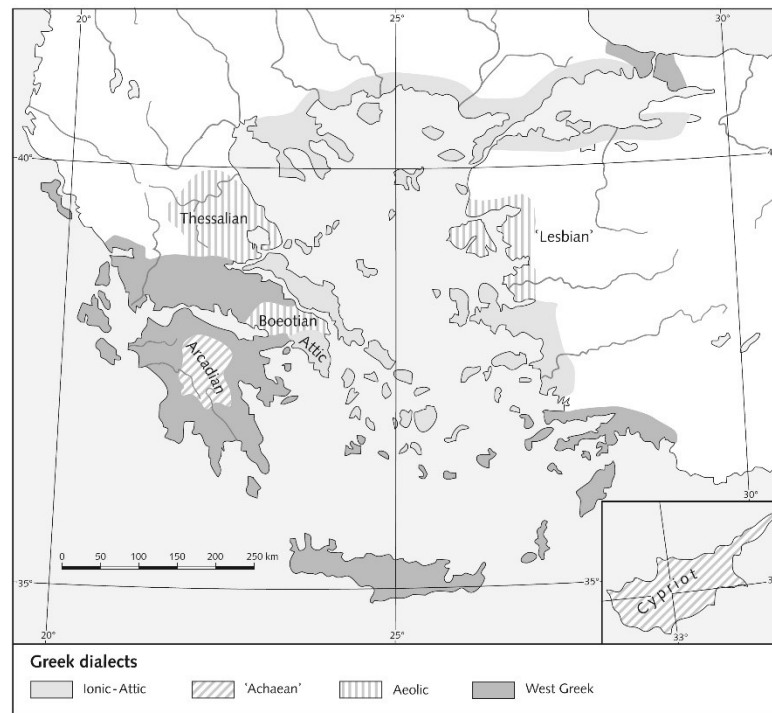
(I am?) Nestor's cup, good to drink from.  
 Whoever drinks from this cup, straightaway  
 the desire of Aphrodite of the beautiful  
 garland will seize him.

## The Archaic and Classical Periods

- **Attic-Ionic:** Attic, Ionic (Euboean, Central Ionic, Eastern Ionic)
- **Arcado-Cypriot:** Arcadian, Cypriot
- **Aeolic:** Thessalian, Boeotian, Lesbian
- **West Greek:** Doric (Saronic, Argolis, Laconia/Messenia, Insular, Cretan), Northwest Greek (Phocis, Locris, Achaea, Elis)



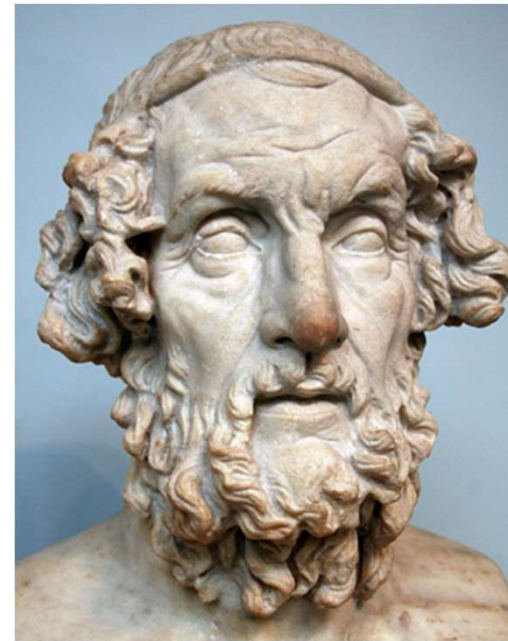
## The Archaic and Classical Periods



*Brill's New Pauly, s.v. 'Greek dialects' © Brill*

## Greek Literary Dialects (all dates BC)

- **Ionic:**
  - Epic: Homer, Hesiod (8<sup>th</sup> C)
  - Elegiac/Iambic: Archilochus, Tyrtaeus, Solon (7<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> C)
  - Historiography: Herodotus, Ctesias (5<sup>th</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> C)
  - 'Scientific' prose: Heraclitus, Hippocratic corpus (5<sup>th</sup> C)



## Greek Literary Dialects (all dates BC)

### ■ Attic:

- Tragedy: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides (5<sup>th</sup> C)
- Comedy: Aristophanes (5<sup>th</sup> C)
- Historiography: Thucydides, Xenophon (5<sup>th</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> C)
- Oratory: Lysias, Demosthenes, Isocrates (4<sup>th</sup> C)
- Philosophical dialogue: Plato, Xenophon (4<sup>th</sup> C)

### ■ Aeolic/Lesbian:

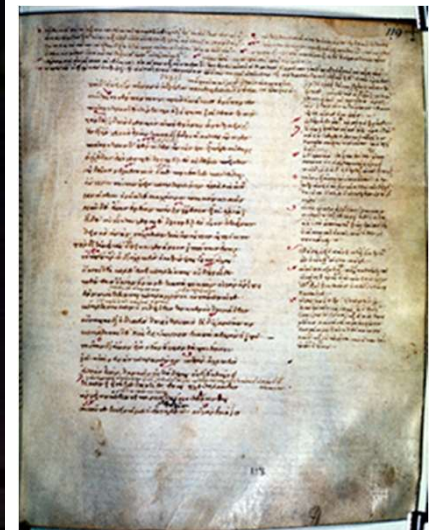
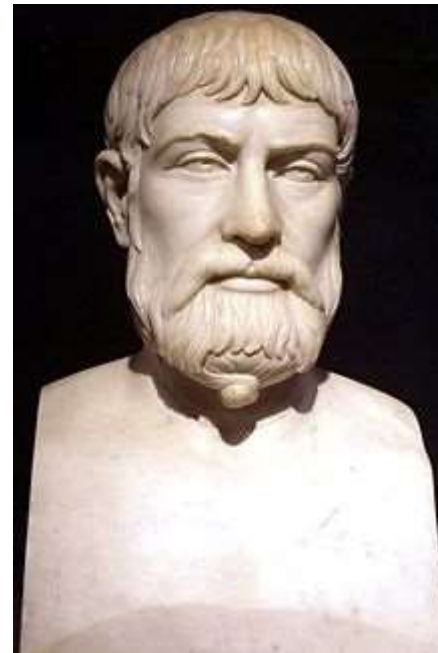
- Monodic lyric: Alcaeus, Sappho (7<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> C)





## Greek Literary Dialects (all dates BC)

- **Doric:**
  - Choral lyric: Alcman, Stesichorus, Pindar, Bacchylides (6<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> C); also choral parts of tragedy
  - Mostly in Italy: some prose (e.g. *δισσοὶ λόγοι*), comedy (Epicharmus), mime (Sophron) (6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> C)



## Greek in the Wider World: *Koine*

- ἔπειτα φωνὴν πᾶσαν ἀκούοντε ἐξελέξαντο τοῦτο μὲν ἐκ τῆς, τοῦτο δὲ ἐκ τῆς· καὶ οἱ μὲν Ἕλληνες ἰδίᾳ μᾶλλον καὶ φωνῇ καὶ διαίτῃ καὶ σχήματι χρῶνται, Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ κεκραμένη ἐξ ἀπάντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ βαρβάρων. ('Old Oligarch', *Ath. Pol.* 2.8)
- 4th C BC: convergence of Attic and Ionic: 'Great Attic' (*Grossattisch*)
- Demise of the dialects, emergence of κοινὴ
- Some literature (not least the *New Testament*)
- Papyri in Egypt, of which the Oxyrhynchus papyri (POxy) are most famous







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