

Homer + the Mycenaeans: Facts and Fictions



BBC Radio 4 – *In Our Time* episode on *Iliad*



The screenshot shows the BBC Radio 4 website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the BBC logo, a 'Sign in' button, and links for News, Sport, Reel, Worklife, Travel, Future, and More. A search bar is also present. Below this, the 'IN OUR TIME' logo is prominently displayed. To the right of the logo, there's a 'LIVE' indicator and a 'Six O'Clock News' link, along with a 'Schedule' button. A secondary navigation bar includes links for Home, Episodes, Archive, Podcasts, Features, FAQs, and Contact Us. The main content area features a large image of a classical statue's head (Achilles) with a glowing sword or spear passing through it. Below the image, the title 'The Iliad' is displayed, followed by a description: 'Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss the story of a crucial 40 days in the 10-year battle for Troy, framed by Achilles' anger first at his leader Agamenmon and then at his enemy Hector.' To the right of the description, it says 'Available now' and '48 minutes'. There are buttons for 'Listen now' (with a speaker icon) and 'Download'. On the right side of the page, there's a 'Last on' section showing the date 'Thu 13 Sep 2018' at '21:30' on 'BBC RADIO 4'. Below this is a 'More episodes' section with 'PREVIOUS William Morris' and 'NEXT Automata', each with a speaker icon. At the bottom of this section, it says 'See all episodes from In Our Time'.

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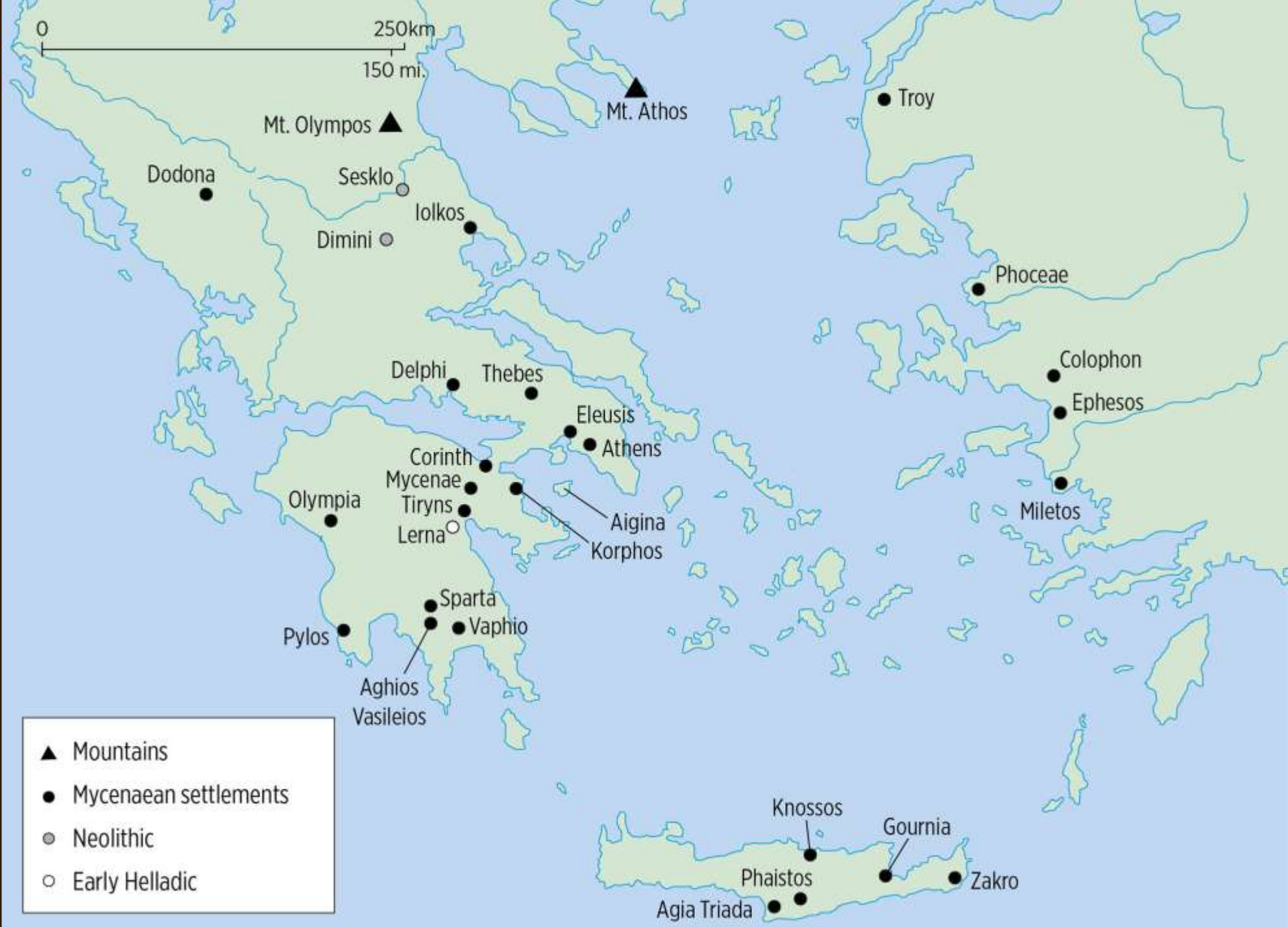
The *Iliad*: Some Information

- a poem of 15,693 lines concerning events that take place at Ilium (a name for Troy)
- Principal action sparked by the quarrel between Greeks named Achilles and Agamemnon
- Also focuses on Hector (Trojan hero) and his wife Andromache as well as Hector's father Priam
- Covers roughly fifty to fifty-five days of action in a ten-year war
- Ends with ransoming of Hector's body by King Priam from Achilles
- Also: Read the introductions in each edition to the ancient texts if you are confused!

Basic Structure of *Iliad*

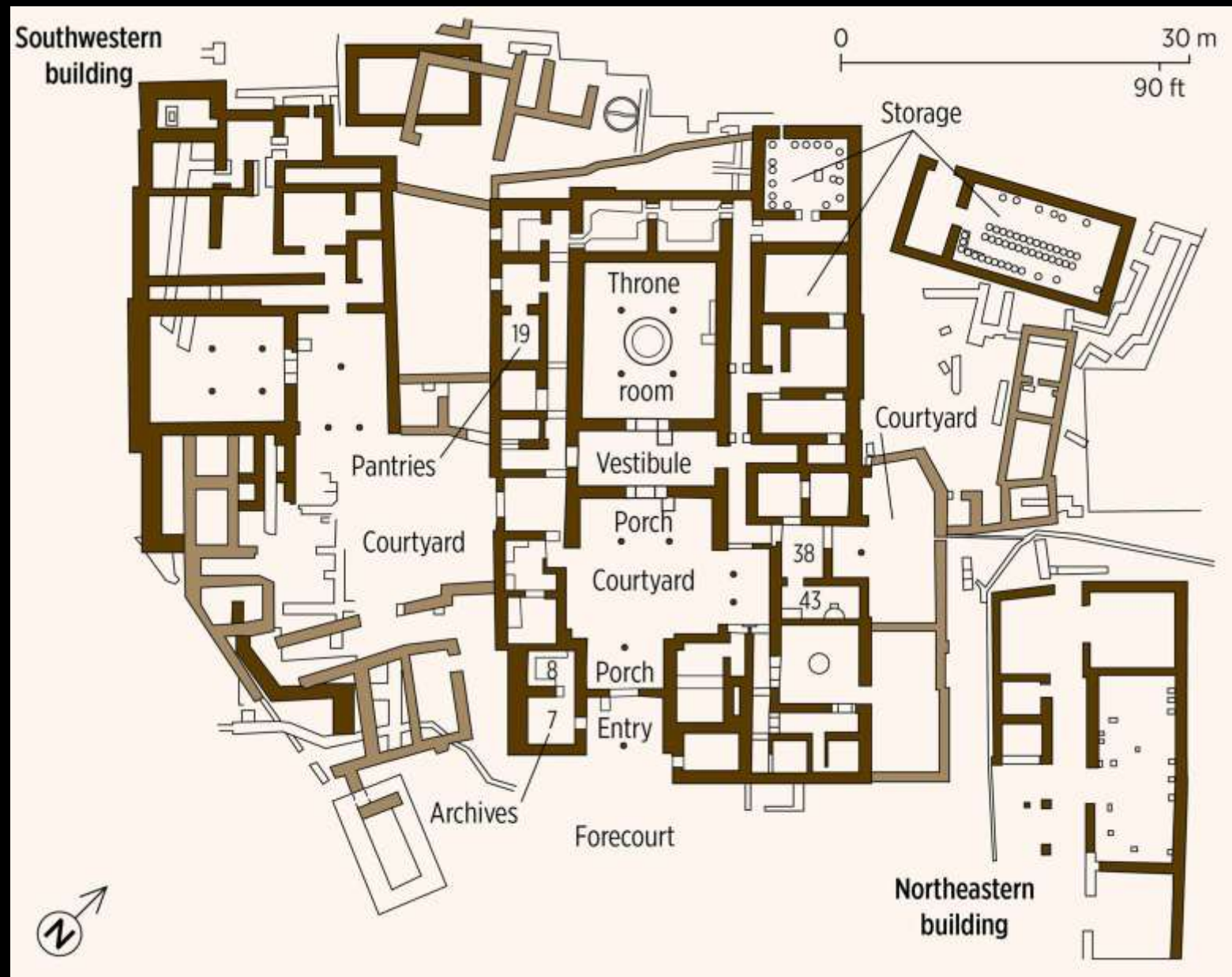
- Chryses, priest of Apollo, offers Agamemnon gifts “beyond count” as ransom for Chryses’ daughter, Chryseis
- Agamemnon: “The girl I will not give back; sooner will old age come upon her in my own house ... far from her own land” (1.29-30)
- Agamemnon demands Achilles’ “prize” if Agamemnon must give his up → Achilles’ withdrawal from the war
- Death of Patroclus; Achilles’ Return
- Death of Hector → Successful ransom of Hector

Pylos and Troy



The “Palace” at Pylos





3.13 Plan of the Palace of Nestor, Pylos

Homer, *Odyssey* (ca. 8th C BCE)

They came to Pylos, Nestor's **strong-founded citadel**, where the people **on the shore** of the sea were making sacrifice of bulls who were all black to the dark-haired **Earth-shaker**. **There were nine settlements** of them, and in each five hundred holdings, and from each of these nine bulls were provided. (*Od.* 3.4-8, trans. Lattimore)



3.29 Ring depicting women before a shrine, Tomb of the Griffin Warrior, Iklaina, c. 1450 BC. Gold, L: c. 3 cm (1 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.)

Homer, *Odyssey* (8th C BCE)

“But after they had reached the glorious dwelling of the king [Nestor], they took their places in order on chairs and along the benches, and as they came in the old man mixed the wine bowl for them with wine sweet to drink, which the housekeeper had opened in its eleventh year and loosed the sealing upon it. The old man mixed the wine in the bowl [*krater*] and prayed much, pouring a libation out to Athena daughter of Zeus of the aegis” (*Od.* 3.388-94, trans. Lattimore)



Reconstruction
of the Megaron
of the “Palace
of Nestor.”
Pylos.
Watercolor





3.22 Cup, Grave Circle A, Mycenae, c. 1500 BC. Gold, H: 14.5 cm (5¾ in.)

Conclusions about “Homeric” Pylos?

- There are some apparent correspondences between Homer’s description of such things as “Nestor’s Palace” and the court-complex at Pylos:
 - Earth-shaker (in Homeric poems and in Linear B tablets)
 - Capacity for long-term storage (vintage of wine)
 - Cups made of gold
 - Many benches and chairs (for which a large room was needed)
- Equally, however, the descriptions (including the above) can be dismissed as vague/general: ex. “strong-founded,” “glorious”

Ithaka: A World Familiar and Unfamiliar

Then the thoughtful Telemachos said to him in answer:

“It is not bad to be a king (*basileus*). Speedily the king’s house grows prosperous, and he himself has rank beyond others. But in fact there are many other Achaian princes (*basileis*), young and old, in sea-girt Ithaka, any of whom might hold this position, now that the great Odysseus has perished. **But I will be the absolute lord (*wanax*) over my own household** and my servants (*dmôôn*), whom the great Odysseus won by force for me.”

(Odyssey 1.388-398, trans. Lattimore)

Penelope Weaves and Waits.

acrylic on wood

Marian Maguire
2017



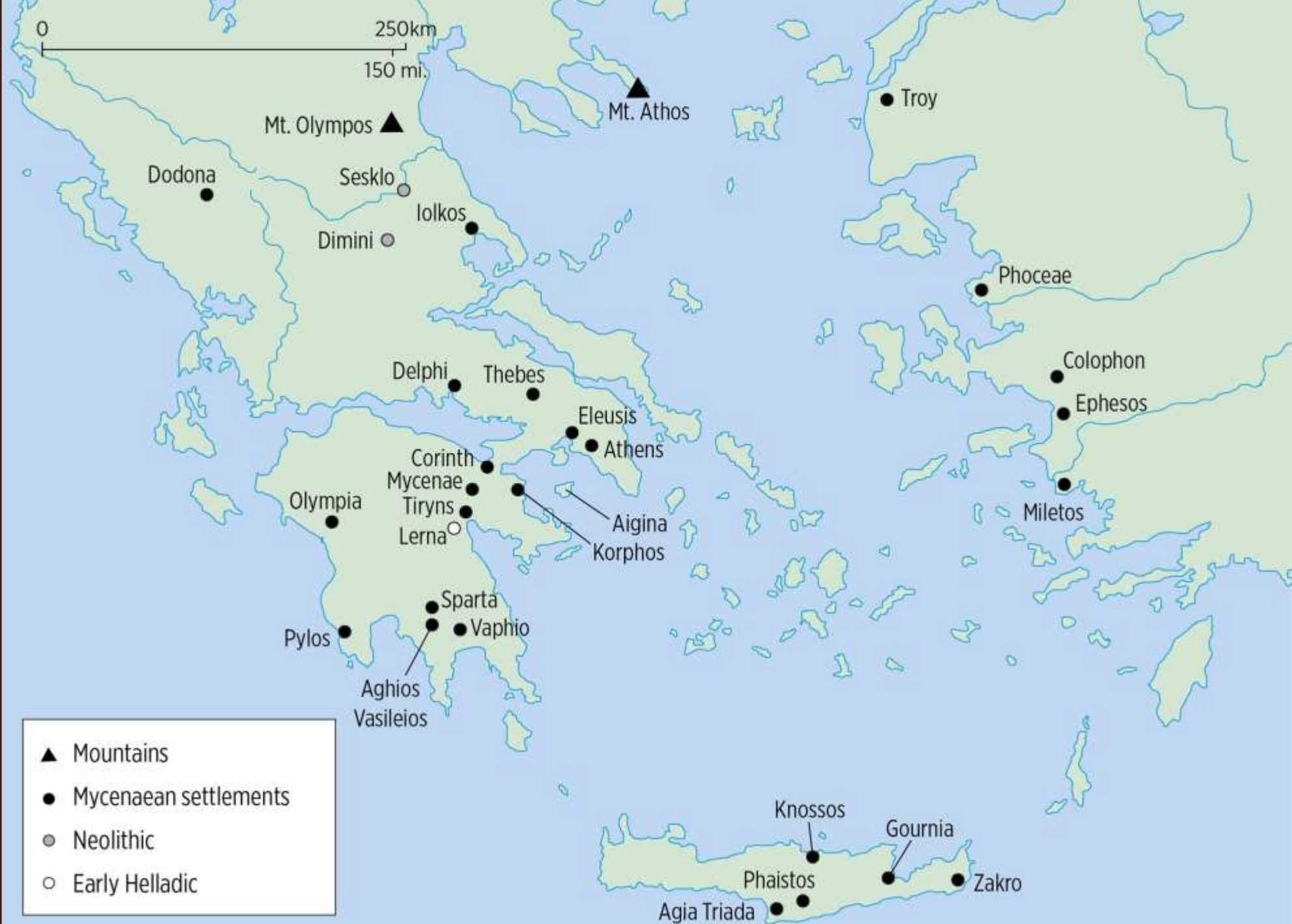
Penelope (at *Odyssey* 18.265 and following)

1. (Odysseus speaking to Penelope): “I do not know if the god will spare me, or if I must be lost there in Troy; **here let everything be in your charge.**”
2. Penelope: “The behavior of these suitors is not as it was in time past when suitors desired to pay their court to a noble woman and daughter of a rich man, and rival each other. Such men themselves bring in their own cattle and fat sheep, to feast the family of the bride, and offer glorious presents. **They do not eat up another’s livelihood, without payment.**”
3. “She spoke, and much enduring great Odysseus was happy because she beguiled gifts out of the suitors, and enchanted their spirits with blandishing words, while her own mind had other intentions.”

Point?

- To the conclusions about Pylos we can add the fact that:
 - terminology for palace rule is inconsistent or vague in Homer (who's in charge, the *wanax*, the *basileus*?)
 - And we can complicate *that* point if we can throw in the representation of Penelope's strong role in maintaining the economic situation at Ithaka: she is neither a *wanax* nor a *basileus*!

Troy!



Myth & History



Thucydides on the Trojan War and Greek Unity

I think Greece's past weakness is demonstrated especially by the fact that, prior to the Trojan war, Greece probably did not unite in any common venture ... Homer provides the best evidence: despite living much later than the Trojan War, he has nonetheless never so named as one group either the Hellenes or any others except ... the Danaans or Argives or Achaeans. Homer has not used the name "barbarians" for non-Greeks yet either because, in my opinion, the Greeks had not yet been distinguished in opposition to them under a single name. Taken as individuals, then, the Greeks, either in the sense of different cities which spoke the same language or all those later so named, because of their powerlessness and lack of communication did nothing as a group before the Trojan War. (Thucydides 1.3)

Questioning the Myth

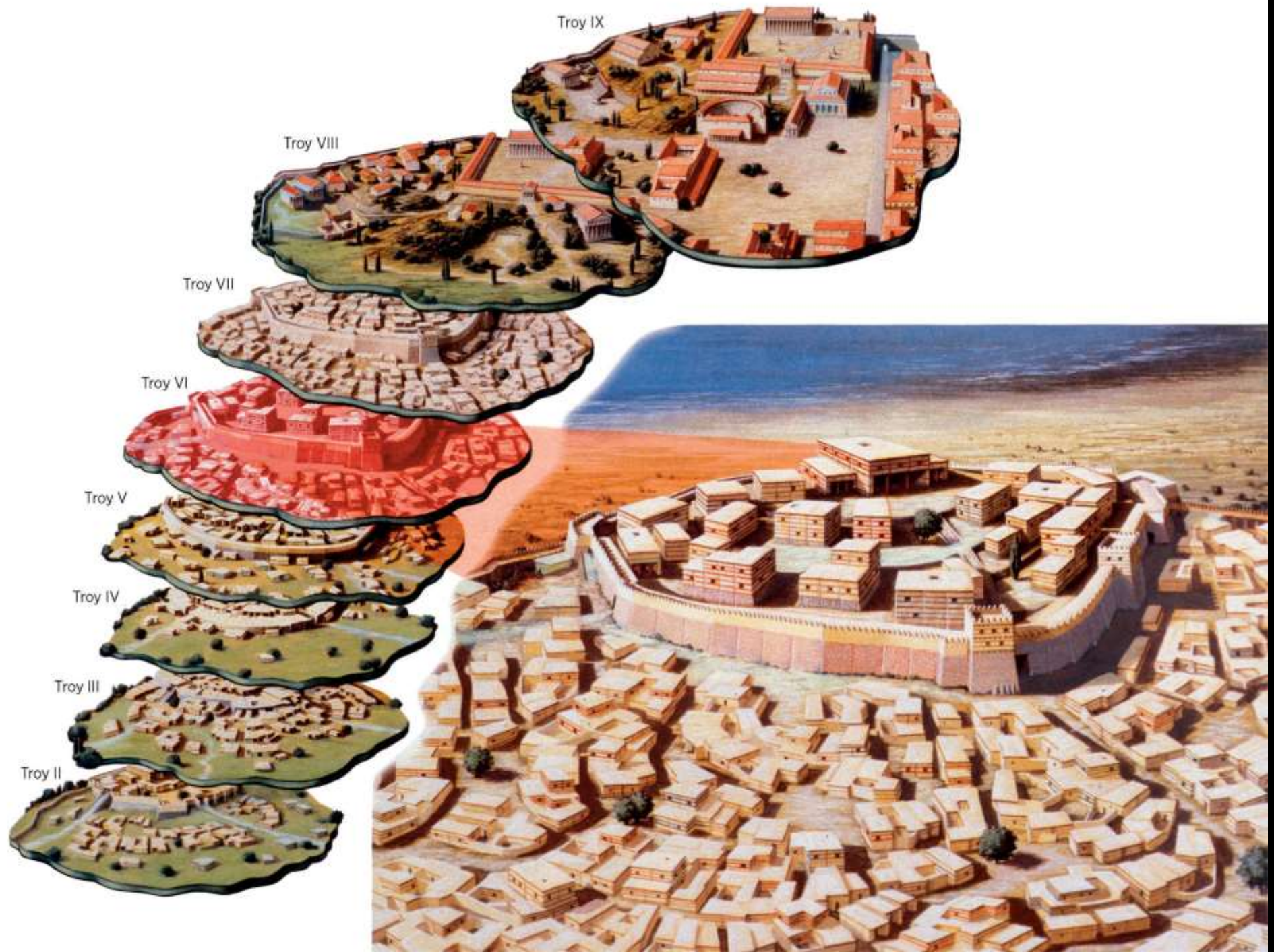
“Agamemnon collected his expedition not so much as the leader of suitors constrained by oaths to Tyndareus [father of Helen], in my opinion, but as the preeminently powerful man in Greece at that time ...

“Agamemnon, in my opinion, having inherited all this and with a navy more powerful than others besides, relied not on goodwill to assemble the expedition, but fear.”

(Thucydides 1.9.1, 1.9.3)

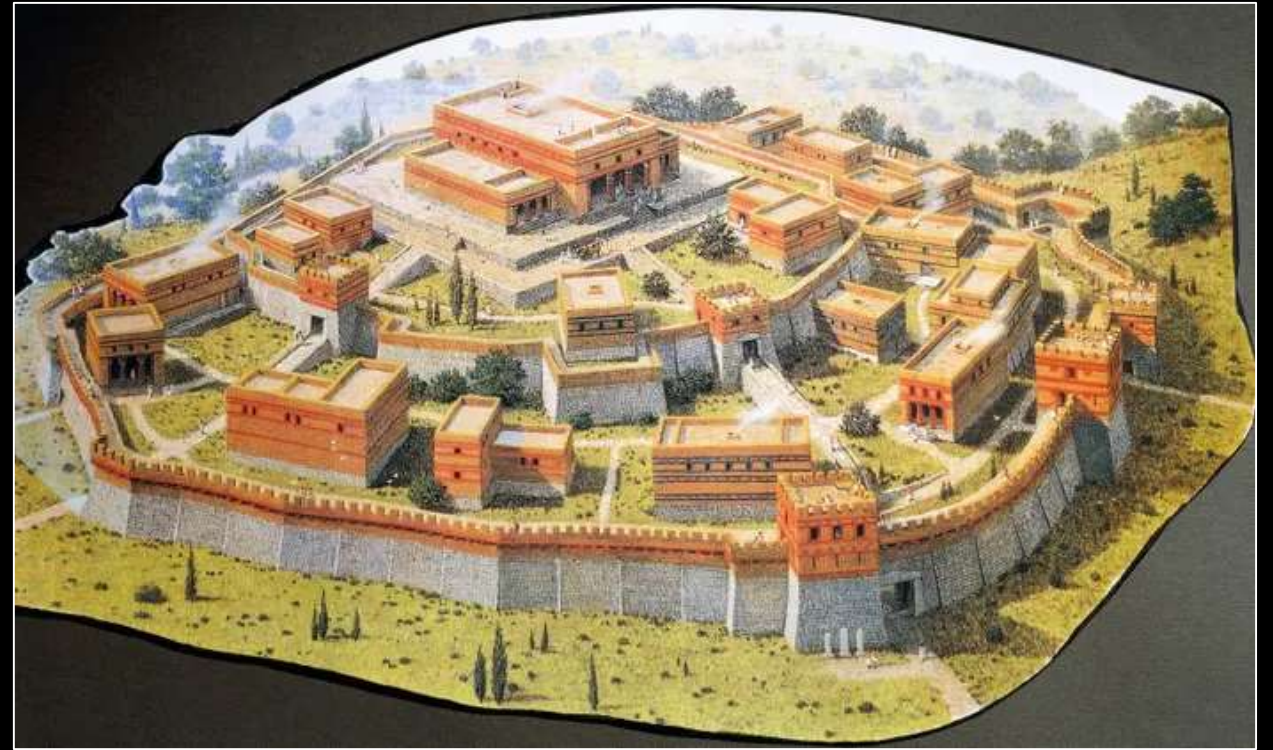
Hero Shrine of Menelaus and Helen, Therapne, Lakonia, Greece





Hittite Correspondence (ca. 1300-1200 BCE)

- Diplomatic letters mention “Wilusa” (= Ilium = Troy)
- Piyamaradu ~ Priam?
- Alaksandu ~ Alexandros = Paris?



Site(s) of Troy



Homeric Version of Events

- Not *written down* until after 750 BCE
- Oral formulaic poetry (to be explained Monday)
- Different versions of the poems based on different performances
- Potential differences between the “poet’s time” (which change over centuries) and the “poem’s time”
- Complicated by the inherent nostalgia of the poems
- Homer as hybrid: example → chariots driven into battle, followed by fighting hand-to-hand

Panoply and
boar tusk
helmet,
Dendra,
ca. 1200 BC.
Bronze and
boar tusk



The Meaning of Meat
and the Structure
of the *Odyssey*



EGBERT J. BAKKER

Homeric Facts and Fictions about the Bronze Age

Yes, Homeric poems make reference to elements of the Bronze Age world:

- riding chariots into battle
- a vague “palace” world similar to that of the Mycenaeans
- Odysseus in a boar’s tusk helmet



But!

Homer's poems represent a *tradition* that accrued over many decades and centuries. They thus also exhibit elements from a later age, such as:

- iron weapons
- funeral pyres (cremation)
- fighting as a mobile infantry

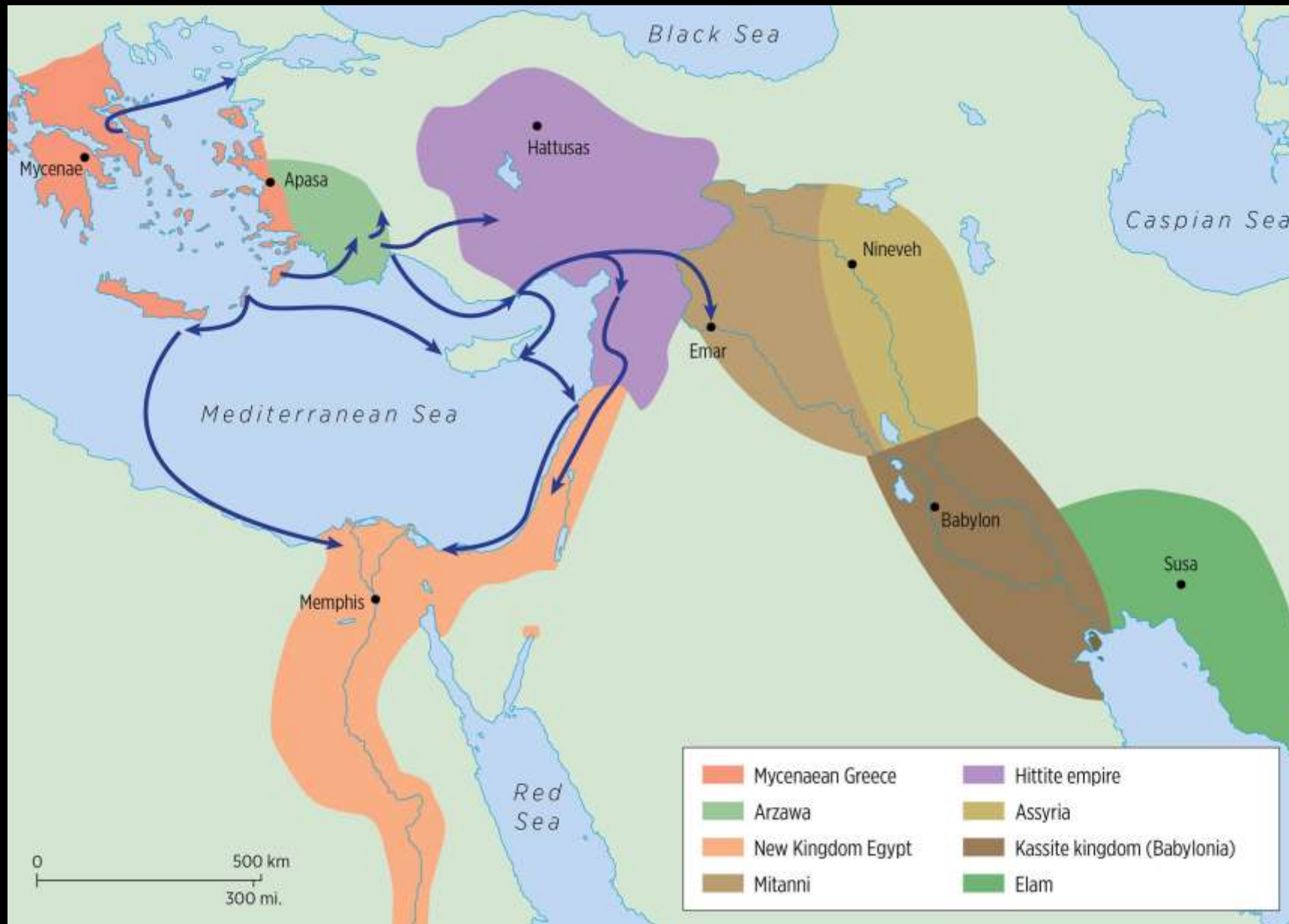


Analogy to Homeric Hybridity: Tape Deck *and* CD Player



The End of the Mycenaean World (ca. 1200 or
1100 BCE)

Why?



The Sea
People!

3.24 Regions attacked by Sea People

