

Robert Walker
University of Vermont
M.A. candidate 2010
rawalker@uvm.edu

Toward Anatolian Origins of Greek Political Expression

keywords:
Ancient Greek, Hittite, Anatolian, political economy

abstract:

In recent years scholars have drawn attention to the many parallels in economic and political structure that exist between the Hittite and Mycenaean Greek civilizations, from the style and layout of their palaces, to the tablet-based systems used to meticulously record the movement of goods to and from palace-centers. The aim of my work is to highlight the possibility that the tribute-based economy of the Mycenaeans was deeply influenced by their Anatolian contemporaries.

Ancient Greek *arkhê* is typically translated as “empire” or “rule”, and was applied to various political structures, perhaps most famously the fifth-century Athenian imperial state. Despite the word’s historical and political significance for the Western world, its precise nuances remain elusive, since no satisfactory etymology has yet been proposed. In this paper I shall argue for a linguistic relationship between Grk. *arkhê* and Hittite *arkamma-*, *argama-* (= “tribute”), which is found in treaties, annals, and religious documents. The semantic connection to Grk. *arkhê* is best illustrated by the related form *argma-(ta)* (= “first-fruits”, “tribute”). If the Hittite and Greek forms are indeed cognate, they must either be inherited independently from Proto Indo-European, or borrowed from one language into the other. Linguistic arguments support the latter conclusion: no convincing common ancestor for the Greek and Hittite words has been proposed, nor any cognates identified in the other daughter languages.

There is solid linguistic evidence in support of the theory that Grk. *argma-(ta)* was the original loan-word from which the morpheme, *arkh-*, was a posterior development. In addition, the semantic reconstruction that must follow from this argument is in perfect harmony with the contextual use of all of the various words composed from that stem (e.g. *arkhê*, *arkhō*, etc.). This would be a significant addition to the growing body of words borrowed from Anatolians by Greeks.