



Retracing the history of a doubtful centipede record (Chilopoda: Scolopendridae) stored in the collection of the National Museum of the Czech Republic

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Abstract: Natural history museums play a crucial role because their collections provide essential biological data for scientists, educators and the public. Greek centipedes in the natural history collection of the National Museum of the Czech Republic in Prague (NMPC) were mainly collected during expeditions before World War II. The specimen under revision, *Scolopendra cingulata* Latreille, 1829, was collected by Otakar Štěpánek and Josef Mařan in Greece, and the record was published by Luděk J. Dobroruka in 1977. Originally, Dobroruka incorrectly reported the specimen as being from Crete, but through the review of scientific, historical and film records, we confirmed its correct locality in mainland Greece and excluded *S. cingulata* from the checklist of Crete.

Keywords: Chilopoda, Crete, Dobroruka, Greece, National Museum of the Czech Republic, *Scolopendra cingulata*

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Introduction

The first bibliographic records on the centipede fauna of Greece, which include two geophilomorphs identified as “*Cryptops gabrielis* Fabr.” and “*Cryptops laevigatus* Br.”, as well as one scolopendromorph quoted under *S. morsitans* Linné, 1758, date back to the first half of the 19th century. These records stem from the report by the French naturalist Gaspard Auguste Brullé (1832) on the myriapods collected during the historical “Expedition scientifique de Morée”, organized by the French government in the Peloponnese between 1829 and 1831. This scientific expedition is considered the starting point of faunistic research in Greece. By

the end of the 19th century, faunistic explorations and collections had become more frequent in mainland and insular Greece with numerous reports published by C.L. Koch (1835–1844, 1863), G. Newport (1844, 1845, 1856), P. Gervais (1847), L. Koch (1862, 1867), H.P. Lucas (1853), F. Karsch (1888), G. Cecconi (1895) and F. Silvestri (1896).

During the 20th century, various zoological excursions took place in Greece focusing on the study of vertebrates and invertebrates (including centipedes and millipedes). Some of the expedition's findings significantly contributed to the knowledge of the centipede biodiversity of Greece (Verhoeff 1901, 1934, 1943, Attems 1902, 1929, Silvestri 1907, 1933, Ghigi 1928, 1929, Chamberlin 1956, Kanellis 1959, Dobroruka 1965, 1977, Matic 1970, 1976, 1980, Zapparoli 1984, 1993, 1994, Matic et Stavropoulos 1988, 1990, 1993). The numerous zoological excursions in Greece throughout the 20th century significantly enhanced the understanding of its vertebrate and invertebrate biodiversity, particularly centipedes and millipedes.

Museums worldwide play a crucial scientific role by preserving materials for future generations and publishing catalogues of their collections. These collections possess not only faunistic and biogeographic significance, but also allow for comparisons with current data, facilitating the assessment of changes over time. Established in 1818, the National Museum of the Czech Republic in Prague (NMPC), one of Europe's oldest museums with a focus on natural history collections, nature protection, and conservation, has already published catalogues of various non-type zoological material (e.g. Dolejš 2016, 2023, Dolejš et Vaňousová 2015, Jiroušková et al. 2011, Mlíkovský et al. 2013, Subchev et al. 2017, Zamani et al. 2017, 2022). Some of the NMPC's earliest collections originate from zoological expeditions in Greece organized by the museum before World War II (Štěpánek 1934, 1936, 1944, Štěpánek et al. 2016). During that period, arthropods of various taxa were collected by the herpetologist Otakar Štěpánek (1903–1995), the entomologist Josef Mařan (1905–1978), and a volunteer, and later curator of invertebrates, Karel Táborský (1906–1988).

Otakar Štěpánek played a particularly crucial role in collecting chilopods in Greece, housed in the NMPC now. He travelled to Crete and central Greece (only in Attica) in the years 1934, 1935, 1936 and 1938, as well as in Peloponnese in 1935. Similarly, Josef Mařan joined Štěpánek's expeditions to Greece, exploring Crete in 1934 and the Peloponnese in 1935. Lastly, Karel Táborský engaged in collecting activities in northern Greece during 1937, as well as in Crete in 1938 (for further details see Dolejš 2023).

A few decades later, the Czech educationalist and myriapodologists Luděk Jindřich Dobroruka (1933–2004) published a paper, with the title "Chilopoden aus Griechenland und Kreta in der Sammlung des Nationalmuseum Prag [Chilopods from Greece and Crete in the collection of the National Museum, Prague]", on the centipedes collected in Mount Olympus and Crete by the zoologists of the NMPC (Dobroruka 1977). At the end of this paper (Dobroruka 1977, p. 164), the presence of *S. cingulata* is reported for the first time from Crete (name of locality: "Oïon", collected by Otakar Štěpánek and Josef Mařan in "May 1935"). From that moment, one of the most inexplicable mysteries in the history of the Greek centipede fauna arose. The validity of this record became a subject of constant question in the subsequent years (see Zapparoli 1994, 2002, Simaiakis et al. 2004, 2005, Lewis 2010).

Despite the fact that the presence of *Scolopendra cingulata* in Crete is debatable, the status of the knowledge of the five *Scolopendra* species found in Greece (East Mediterranean) has been thoroughly reviewed (Simaiakis et Mylonas 2008, Kaltsas et Simaiakis 2012). Drawing from the information available so far, (a) *S. cretica* Lucas, 1853 occurs in Crete and its satellite islets, being the only narrow endemic in the Mediterranean region, (b) *S. canidens* Newport, 1844 is known to occur in a few islands and islets of the Cyclades (e.g. Milos, Sifnos and Serifos) and the Dodecanese (e.g. Rodos, Symi and Kastelorizo), (c) *S. clavipes* C.L. Koch, 1847, is an east Mediterranean species found in a few southeastern Aegean islands and islets (e.g. Karpathos, Kastelorizo, Rodos, Symi), (d) *S. dalmatica* C.L. Koch, 1847 occurs in the Balkan peninsula extending south to the northwestern parts of the Peloponnese and the Ionian islands (e.g. Corfu, Kefalonia), and, (e) *S. cingulata* Latreille, 1829 is found all over

the Mediterranean region (including the Aegean and Ionian Islands), but it is absent from Crete, Corsica, Sardinia and the Balearic Islands (Simaiakis et Mylonas 2008).

Our goal is to evaluate the accuracy of data published by Dobroruka (1977), specifically addressing the presence of *S. cingulata* in Crete, by investigating a set of questions.

- (a) Has the taxonomic status of the specimen in the Zoological Section of the NMPC, identified by Dobroruka, been verified?
- (b) Are there any documented records of animals collected at the locality "Oïon" by zoologists affiliated with the NMPC?
- (c) Where is the geographical location of "Oïon" in Greece? Is there an alternative name currently associated with this location, and what is its historical background?

Material and Methods

We re-examined the specimen mentioned by Dobroruka (1977) as *S. cingulata*. This specimen, collected by Otakar Štěpánek and Josef Mařan from the locality "Oïon", is kept in the National Museum of the Czech Republic and preserved in 80% ethanol. Photographs of the specimen were made using an Olympus SZX-12 stereomicroscope equipped with an Olympus E-510 camera. We also investigated geographical, historical, and archaeological sources pertaining to ancient and modern Greece, with a specific focus on Attica and references to "Oïon". We went through literature records authored by Otakar Štěpánek to authenticate the existence of the locality "Oïon" in Greece (Štěpánek 1934, 1936, 1944). Furthermore, our research involved the examination of two old Greek film documents that provided valuable insights into the exact geographical location of this specific area.

Results and discussion

Table 1 presents a detailed list of the localities surveyed by Otakar Štěpánek in mainland Greece and Crete (based on Štěpánek 1934, 1936, 1944, Dolejš 2023). These surveys were conducted over a five-year period, from 1934 to 1938, as part of consecutive field trips organized by the Department of Zoology of the National Museum.

A substantial number of centipedes were discovered during these field excursions. All species collected between 1934 and 1938 (for further details see Dobroruka 1977) underwent thorough validation (see also Zapparoli 1993, 1994, 2002, Simaiakis et al. 2004, 2005), and a concise list with revised data is provided:

ORDER SCUTIGEROMORPHA

1. *Scutigera asiaeminoris* Verhoeff, 1905

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Kreta, Askypho, May 13th, 1938, Táborský legit, 1 ex., NMPC: P6E 1217.

It was misidentified by Dobroruka (1977) and revised by Zapparoli (2002) as *Scutigera coleoptrata* (Linnaeus, 1758).

Type locality: "Hispania" (= Spain) (Bonato et al. 2016, also available online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/791, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

ORDER GEOPHILOMORPHA

2. *Bothriogaster signata graeca* Verhoeff, 1901

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Gavdos, May 17th, 1938, Táborský legit, 1 ex., NMPC: P6E 1216.

It was synonymized with *Bothriogaster signata* (Kessler, 1874) by Zapparoli (1994, 2002).

Type locality: "Samarqand" (= Samarqand, Uzbekistan) (Bonato et al. 2016, also available

online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/4069, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

3. *Bothriogaster signata thesei* Attems, 1902

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Kreta, Ida, 1934, Mařan and Štěpánek legit, 3 ex., NMPC: P6E 1220.

It was synonymized with *Bothriogaster signata* (Kessler, 1874) by Zapparoli (1994, 2002).

Type locality: "Samarkand" (= Samarqand, Uzbekistan) (Bonato et al. 2016, also available online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/4069, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

4. *Clinopodes escherichii* (Verhoeff, 1898)

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Kreta, Ida, 1934, Mařan and Štěpánek legit, 3 ex., NMPC: P6E 1219.

It was misidentified by Dobroruka (1977) and revised by Zapparoli (2002) as *Clinopodes flavidus* C.L. Koch, 1847.

Type locality: "Oravitza im Banate" (= Oraviřa, Romania) (Bonato et al. 2016, also available online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/3367, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

5. *Strigamia olympica* Dobroruka, 1977

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Olympus, June 5th, 1935, Táborský legit, 1 ex. (holotype), NMPC: P6E 1352.

Type locality: "Olympus" (= Mount Olympus, Greece) (Dolejš 2015, Bonato et al. 2016, also available online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/3818, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

ORDER LITHOBIOMORPHA

6. *Eupolybothrus litoralis graecus* (Verhoeff, 1899)

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Kreta, Ida, 1934, Mařan and Štěpánek legit, 3 ex., NMPC: P6E 1221.

It was synonymized with *Eupolybothrus litoralis* L. Koch, 1867 by Zapparoli (2002).

Type locality: "Tinos" (= Tinos Island, Aegean Archipelago) (Bonato et al. 2016, also available online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/2063, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

7. *Lithobius creticus* Dobroruka, 1977

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Kreta, Ida, 1934, Mařan and Štěpánek legit, 1 ♀ (holotype), NMPC: P6E 1350, 1 ♂ (paratype), NMPC: P6E 1351.

Type locality: "Ida" (= Mount Psiloreitis or Mt Idi, Crete) (Dolejš 2015, Bonato et al. 2016, also available online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/1693, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

8. *Lithobius peregrinus* Latzel, 1880

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Gavdos, May 15th, 1938, Táborský legit, 1 ex., NMPC: P6E 1215. Kreta, Ida, 1934, Mařan and Štěpánek legit, 6 ex., NMPC: P6E 1222.

It was misidentified by Dobroruka (1977) and revised by Zapparoli (2002) as *Lithobius nigripalpis* L. Koch, 1867.

Type locality: "Dalmatien" (= Dalmatia, Croatia) (Bonato et al. 2016, also available online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/2349, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

ORDER SCOLOPENDROMORPHA

9. *Scolopendra canidens cretica* Attems, 1902

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Kreta, Askypho, May 12th, 1938, Táborský legit, 1 ex., NMPC: P6E 1213. Gavdos, May 16th–17th, 1938, Táborský legit, 39 ex., NMPC: P6E 1214.

It was synonymized with *Scolopendra cretica* Lucas, 1853 by Zapparoli (2002).

Type locality: “Chanea” (= Chania), “Daphnaes” (= Dafnes), “Visari” (= Vizari), “Galos” (= Gallos), “Homalos” (= Omalos Plateau), “Askiphu” (= Askyfou) (Bonato et al. 2016, also available online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/28, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

10. *Scolopendra canidens* Newport, 1844

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Kreta, Ida, 1934, Mařan and Štěpánek legit, 12 ex., NMPC: P6E 1218; Kreta, Agios Nikólaos, 1934, Štěpánek legit, 1 ex., NMPC: P6E 1348.

It was misidentified by Dobroruka (1977) and revised by Zapparoli (2002) as *Scolopendra cretica* Lucas, 1853.

Type locality: “Chanea” (= Chania), “Daphnaes” (= Dafnes), “Visari” (= Vizari), “Galos” (= Gallos), “Homalos” (= Omalos Plateau), “Askiphu” (= Askyfou) (Bonato et al. 2016, also available online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/28, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

11. *Scolopendra cingulata* Latreille, 1829

Material mentioned in Dobroruka (1977). Attica, Oïon, May 1934, Mařan and Štěpánek legit, 1 ex., NMPC: P6E 1347.

Type locality: unknown as reference is unavailable (Bonato et al. 2016, also available online: https://chilobase.biologia.unipd.it/searches/result_species/735, accessed on April 24th, 2024).

The only specimen identified by Dobroruka (1977) as *S. cingulata* is re-examined here (Figs. 1–4). Photographic evidence confirmed the identification of the specimen as *S. cingulata*, based on key characteristics such as the terminal segments and prefemur of the ultimate leg, as described by Attems (1930), and the genital segments of the male, as presented by Iorio (2003). However, the information written on the label (Fig. 5) does not seem to agree with the data published by Dobroruka (1977), nor with the dates of the field trips surveyed by Otakar Štěpánek in Crete between 1934 and 1938 (Table 1).

Unfortunately, the original label from the 1930s is missing from the vial, while the new one (Fig. 5) was typed by Dobroruka in the 1970s. Based on the new label, the specimen from “Kreta, Oïon” has an inventory number (I.č. 1347) and an accession number (P.č. 4746/1934), indicating that it could hardly be collected one year later in Crete, in 1935 (as written by Dobroruka in 1977), since no research expedition was carried out in Crete in 1935 (Table 1). According to our research, it is more probable that Luděk J. Dobroruka incorrectly wrote the year 1935, instead of 1934, in his publication (Dobroruka 1977).

Based on the Canadian Academic John S. Traill, “Oïon” (correctly written as Oion or Oion Dekeleikon, in ancient Greek: *Óïon to Dekeleikón*), was an ancient municipality of Attica located near Bogiati (i.e. today’s Agios Stefanos). Agios Stefanos is located in the northeastern part of the Attica, at an elevation of about 350 m. It lies east of Mount Parnitha, northwest of Mount Penteliko, and 4 km southwest of Marathon Reservoir. Agios Stefanos railway station (38°08’25.4”N, 23°51’33.9”E) is located at an altitude of 350 meters along the railway axis between Athens and Thessaloniki, and it was inaugurated on March 8th, 1904, originally known as Bogiati but renamed at an unknown date to “Oion” and received its current name on August 1st, 1981 (Figs. 6, 8).

It seems that Otakar Štěpánek, one of the founding fathers of Greek herpetology (Annousis et al. 2021), probably made brief stops at Oion, in 1934 and 1935, on his way to Peloponnese,

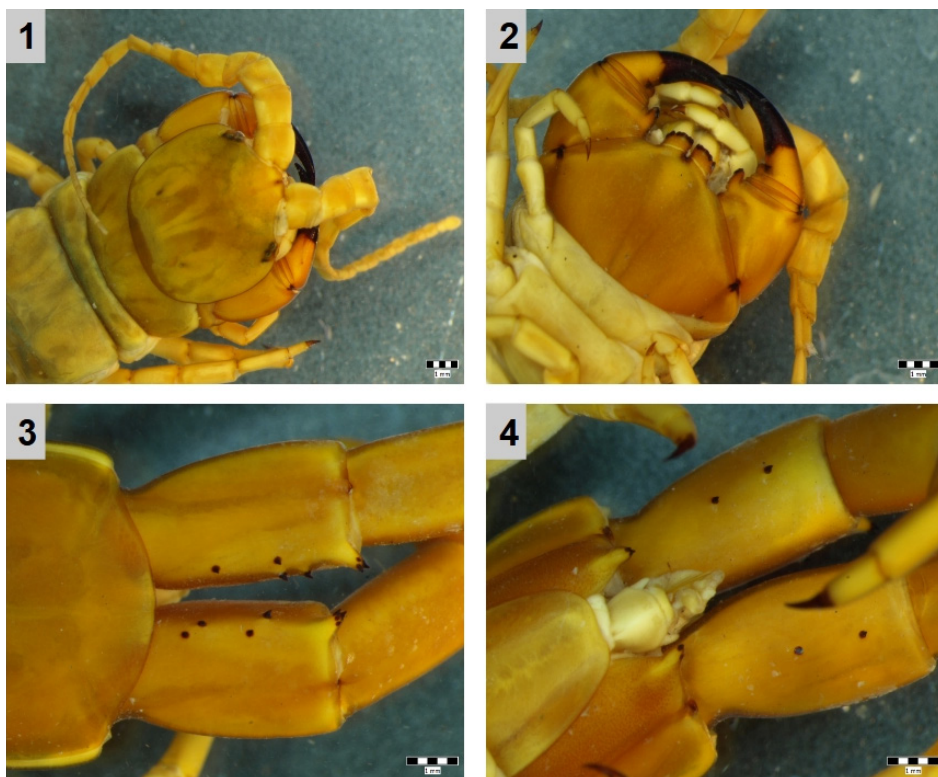


Fig. 1–4. *Scolopendra cingulata* Latreille, 1829, P6E 1347, P.č. 4746/34 (NMPC). 1. Cephalic plate + LBS 1–3, dorsally. 2. Head + LBS 1 and 2, ventrally. 3. LBS 21 + prefemur of ultimate legs, dorsally. 4. LBS 21 + prefemur of ultimate legs, ventrally. Scale bar: 1 mm.

Stereia Ellada and Crete, using the railway connection between mainland Greece and central Europe. His efforts reflected in numerous reports on the herpetofauna of Attica in a faunistic way (i.e. Štěpánek 1944). More specifically, Štěpánek wrote in one of his herpetological papers that he collected at “Oïon, Gr. mer.” three vertebrate species (see Štěpánek 1944, pages 127, 137 and 138):

- (a) *Rana ridiburula ridibunda* (PALLAS, 1771),
- (b) *Lacerta trilineata trilineata* BEDRIAGA, 1886, and,
- (c) *Lacerta viridis viridis* (LAURENTI, 1768).

This evidence strongly confirms our thought that the locality named Oion is not located in Crete but in mainland Greece, in particular in the northern suburbs of Athens.

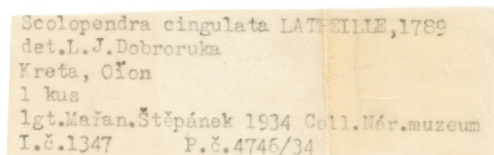


Fig. 5. The label found in the vial with the specimen of *Scolopendra cingulata* (typed by Luděk J. Dobroruka). Inventory number (I.č. 1347) and accession number (P.č. 4746/1934).

Our research on the history of Oion has further been validated with the help of the Greek film archive. In Greece, the first efforts to develop Greek cinema began in the 1940s, while the great development of the Greek cinema took place in the 1950s and 1960s, spearheaded by Filopimin Finos (Pelekis 2020). In the 1955 film “No Harm’s Done” (original Greek title “Ούτε γάτα ούτε ζημιά”),

starring Vasilis Logothetidis, Iliá Livykou and Mimis Fotopoulos, Oion railway station and the surrounding area was the setting for filming (Fig. 6). Furthermore, our findings were very useful when watching the 1967 film “Help its Vengos visible agent 000” (original Greek title: “Βοήθεια ο Βέγγος, φανερός πράκτορας 000”), starring Thanasis Vengos (leading actor and director), Zannino and Dimitris Nikolaidis. In an exterior shot of the film, in a place close to Oion railway station, there was a sign by the side of a crossroad clearly showing the following localities (both in English and Greek) (Fig. 7):

1. Top of the sign: ION (BOGIATI) 2 km (direction right), in Greek OION (ΜΠΟΓΙΑΤΙ).
2. Middle of the sign: LAKE MARATHONOS 10 km (direction right), in Greek ΛΙΜΝΗ ΜΑΡΑΘΩΝΟΣ.
3. Bottom of the sign: KRIONERION BAFI 14 (direction left), in Greek ΚΡΥΟΝΕΡΙΟΝ ΜΠΑΦΙ.

Localities 2 & 3 still exist with the same name. However, the first locality (which is of great interest for us) is nowadays known as Agios Stefanos. This is the reason the first author could not find this old toponymy in any modern geographical archive or in Google Earth.

Conclusions

This study provides new and well-documented records, and allows revisiting an erroneous biogeographic reference of the common scolopendromorph species *Scolopendra cingulata* Latreille, 1829 housed in the in the zoological collection of the National Museum of the Czech Republic (NMPC). The target specimen was collected by Otakar Štěpánek and Josef Mařan in May 1934 in current Agios Stefanos (formerly Oion) in mainland Greece. The information published by Luděk J. Dobroruka in 1977 contained two mistakes: 1) Placing Oion to Crete.

This mistake can be explained by the fact that the material was collected during a “journey to Crete”. 2) Incorrect year – not 1935 but 1934. This mistake was clarified by checking the accession number and locating other material collected along with the centipede.

This study highlights the crucial role of revisiting and re-examining the collections housed in natural history museums, particularly when there are unresolved questions or uncertainties that need to be addressed. The research underscores the significance of taking a fresh look at these collections, as they can provide valuable insights and new information that may not have been apparent during initial examinations. By doing so, scientists and researchers can clarify ambiguities, correct previous misconceptions, and potentially make



Fig. 6–8. Oion railway station and surrounding area. 6. Oion railway station was the cinematic setting in the 1955 film “No Harm’s Done” (original Greek title, “Ούτε γάτα ούτε ζημιά”) (screenshot photo). 7. The area around the Oion railway station was the cinematic setting in the 1967 film “Help its Vengos visible agent 000” (original Greek title: “Βοήθεια ο Βέγγος, φανερός πράκτορας 000”) (screenshot photo). 8. Modern photo of Agios Stefanos railway station taken April 26th, 2024, by the first author (the station’s name was changed from Oion to Agios Stefanos on August 1st, 1981).

Locality	Locality	Date							
(in English)	(in Greek)								
Peloponnese									
Argos	Άργος	May 1935							
Diakofto	Διακοφτό	April 1936							
Isaris	Ίσαρης	May 1935	June 1935	May 1936					
Kalamata	Καλαμάτα	April 1935	May 1935	June 1935					
Kalavryta	Καλάβρυτα	April 1936	May 1936	May 1937					
Mega Spilaio	Μέγα Σπήλαιο	May 1936							
Sparta	Σπάρτη	May 1935							
Taygetos Mt.	Όρος Ταΰγετος	May 1935	June 1935						
Central Greece									
Athens	Αθήνα	April 1934							
Hymettos Mt.	Όρος Ύμηττός	April 1934	May 1935	April 1936	April 1938				
Kaisariani	Καισαριανή	April 1934	May 1934	May 1935	April 1936	May 1936	April 1938	May 1938	
Oion	Άγιος Στέφανος	April 1934	May 1934	April 1935	May 1935				
Parnitha Mt.	Όρος Πάρνηθα	May 1934	May 1935	June 1935	May 1936	April 1938			
Crete									
Agios Nikolaos	Άγιος Νικόλαος	May 1936							
Almyros	Άλμυρός	May 1934							
Anogeia	Ανώγεια	May 1934	May 1936						
Askyfou (Lefka Ori)	Ασκήφου	May 1938							
Chania	Χανιά	May 1934							
Dia Isl	Ντία (νησί)	May 1938							
Gavdos Isl	Γαύδος (νησί)	May 1938							
Gazi	Γάζι	May 1934	May 1936	May 1938					
Ierapetra	Ιεράπετρα	May 1936							
Irakleio	Ηράκλειο	May 1934	May 1936						
Knossos	Κνωσός	May 1934	April 1936	May 1936	April 1938	May 1938			
Lake Kournas	Λίμνη Κουρνά	May 1938							
Nida Plateau (Idi Mt.)	Οροπέδιο Νίδας	May 1934	May 1936						
Sfakia	Σφακιά	May 1938							

Table 1. Names of the localities surveyed by Otakar Štěpánek in central Greece, Peloponnese and Crete from 1934 to 1938 (in alphabetical order based on Štěpánek 1934, 1936, 1944, Dolejš 2023).

new discoveries that contribute to our understanding of natural history. The study emphasizes that re-examination is a vital process in advancing scientific knowledge and resolving ongoing debates or issues within the field.

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