



Summary :

Ioannis Valavanis was one of the pioneers in the collection and study of linguistic material in the Pontus. He was awarded a prize in 1880 by the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople for his study on the Pontic language.

Date and Place of Birth

1830, Kerasounta (Giresun)

Date and Place of Death

1899, Kerasounta (Giresun)

Main Role

Scholar

1. Family – Education

Ioannis Valavanis was born in Kerasounta (Giresun) in 1830. As regards his family, it is known that his father was an empirical doctor. According to a letter he sent to [Epameinondas Kyriakidis](#),¹ his mother's father, Nikolaos Kazantsoglou, had seen to the construction of the school of [Kerasounta](#). Young Ioannis originally studied in the school of his birthplace, but continued at the '[Frontistirion](#)' of [Trebizond](#). After he taught in Kerasounta for some time, he was offered a post at the Frontistirion in 1861. In December of the same year, he went to Athens to complete his high school studies. Four years later, he returned to Kerasounta as a teacher, but stayed there for only two years, since in 1867 he went again to Athens as a student at the Philosophical School of the University. During his studies, he worked as an employee at the Ministry of Education and, later, at the Ministry of Finance. In this way, he managed to support his big family that had remained in Kerasounta. After his doctoral exams in 1880, he returned to the [Pontus](#), where he was successively appointed professor at the [American College of Merzifon](#), the school of [Samsun](#) (Amisos) and at the school of Kerasounta again.² However, he returned once again to Greece as director of the school of Megara in 1892-1893. His final return to Kerasounta was in 1896, three years before he died.

2. Collection of Linguistic Material - Works

'He was a tireless researcher who travelled around cities and villages, and visited all kinds of craftsmen as well as their houses and workshops'.³ As evidenced by his numerous works, Ioannis Valavanis devoted a great part of his life to collecting linguistic material and studying the language and, to a lesser extent, the ethnography of Pontus.⁴ The largest part of his published or unpublished work includes [collections of linguistic material](#), where he excelled: his records are famous for their phonetic accuracy as well as the interpretation of the words.⁵ Characteristically, he described himself as a 'glossographer and teacher of Greek',⁶ which underlines the importance he attached to recording. Parts of his collections were published in journals of [Constantinople](#) (*Επτάλοφος*, the journal of the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople), [Trebizond](#) (*Εύξεινος Πόντος, Αστήρ του Πόντου*) and Athens (*Pandora*). However, Valavanis dealt not only with collecting material, but also with the study of the [Pontic language](#); in 1880, he participated in the linguistic competition of the prestigious [Greek Philological Association of Constantinople](#) with his study *Living Monuments of the Dialect of the Pontus*, which was awarded the first prize. It is a massive work, although only a limited part (209 pages including the words starting from 'A') was published in 1892. The rest of the work (grammar, phonetics, etc.) remains unpublished in the Archives of the Historical Dictionary of the Greek Language of the Academy of Athens along with other works by him, among which the *Domestic Life, Descriptions, Manners and Customs of Trebizond*.

1. Κυριακίδης, Ε., *Βιογραφία των εκ Τραπεζούντος και της περί αυτήν χώρας [...] λογίων* (Athens 1985), pp. 187-188.






2. The exact dates when Valavanis taught in the various schools remain unknown. However, according to a letter he sent to Epameinondas Kyriakidis,



which was published in the *Βιογραφία των εκ Τραπεζούντος και της περί αυτήν χώρας [...] λογίων* (Athens 1985), pp. 187-188, Valavanis was in Kerasounta 'for the third time until 1882 and for the fourth time in 1884'.

3. Παπαδόπουλος, Α., 'Ιωάννης Βαλαβάνης', *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 3(1931), p. 231.
4. For a complete list of Valavanis' works, see Μυρίδης, Χ., 'Συμβολή εις την βιβλιογραφίαν του Πόντου', *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 10 (1940), pp. 19-21.
5. In the introduction of the work *Modern Greek Folktales* (Oxford 1953), p. XXXVI, R.M. Dawkins mentions Valavanis as an example of a recorder who does not work through dictation, but who knows the local language quite well and is thus able to record the fairytales after he has heard them several times. Dawkins believes that these renderings are very close to the actual narrative. He also uses some of them in his book.
6. This is how he signs the only published volume of the *Living Monuments* (Athens, Perris Printing House, 1892).

Bibliography :

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	Παπαδόπουλος Α. , "Ιωάννης Βαλαβάνης", <i>Αρχαίον Πόντου</i> , 3, 1931, 230-232