

REVIEW OF *THE ORIGIN AND AREA OF SETTLEMENT OF THE FINNO-UGRIAN PEOPLES* BY RICHARD INDREKO, HEIDELBERG, 1948

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Abstract. In this paper, written in 1948, Richard Indreko reports archaeological evidence that is inconsistent with the received knowledge about the origin of the Finnic people. His paper is worth re-examination now because the linguistic community is beginning to re-consider its basic assumption that these people originated in the area of the Ural Mountains and slowly migrated westward to reach their present-day territories. Indreko's evidence clearly contradicts this. For example, according to Indreko, technology – arrowheads, ice picks and comb ceramic technology – originated in Europe and spread over the area, in a direction generally from the south-west to the north-east. He concludes that, "the origin of the Finno-Ugrians could have their roots in ... the European Palaeolithicum" (1948:13).

Introduction

Indreko's most relevant thesis from the perspective of the Uralic theory is that there appears to be no evidence of migrations from the area of the Ural Mountains, the traditional Uralic homeland, towards the West. On the contrary, it appears to Indreko that populations moved in the opposite direction, basically northwards, in concomitance with the receding ice-sheets. In particular, the first post-Ice Age inhabitants in the area extending from the Baltic Sea up to the Urals were "Finno-Ugrian" populations of the Europoid type, who moved there from southern and western Europe. These results have been basically confirmed by later research, for example, by Nuñez (1987), who claims that there is not "any concrete evidence for a major immigration of potential carriers of Finnish language ... No settlement interruption can be detected; and culture appears to have evolved smoothly, each phase always inheriting a number of traits from preceding ones" (compare also Niskanen 1997).

Indreko and the Uralic theory

Before continuing with this review, I have to alert the reader to my personal convictions that must inevitably colour it. I am a linguist. Alongside the widely prevailing, official position, there has always been a debate among scholars as to whether there is really a privileged connection between the Finnic, the Ugric and the Samoyed peoples, and therefore whether there was a Proto-Uralic language and community, especially if interpreted in the traditional, Darwinian sense of the term. This debate has intensified in recent years (see for example Tauli 1966; Künnap 1997 & 1998; Sutrop 2000; Wiik 1995 & 1999; Taagepera 2000; Suhonen 1999:248). The generally accepted view, and the one which is reported in most encyclopaedias and textbooks (Hajdú 1975; Hajdú and Domokos 1978; Abondolo (ed.) 1998; Laakso 1999, to quote just some recent publications), is that there was such a language / community, and it originated in the area of the Ural Mountains. However, my personal convictions differ from this (Marcantonio 2000 & 2001). I belong to that minority of scholars who argue that there is not enough linguistic evidence to establish a privileged relationship between the Finnic, the Ugric and the Samoyed languages. The supporters of the Uralic family who also acknowledge this fact justify it by assuming that the origin of the family dates so far back in time that most traces of the original common language (Janhunen 2000) – as well as of common culture, physical features and genes (Laakso 1999: 48–49) – have been lost. In order to make sense of the small amount of ambiguous data at their disposal, linguists had to analyse them on the assumption of a powerful model, and the prevailing accepted model was that of an original Uralic community living in the area of the Ural Mountains 8,000 to 6,000 years ago.

In reading Indreko's paper, the most striking thing for me is that he was so much out of tune with his time, in challenging one of the basic tenets of the Uralic theory. Had he been a linguist, he would have needed to be brave to submit a paper that was so much at odds with the received knowledge of the time, and lucky or influential enough for it to pass peer review and to be published. Indreko reports his data accurately and impartially, and separately he discusses the relationship between his data and the received linguistic models of the time. It is easy, reading his paper, to see the distinction between the archaeological data and the interpretations. This is in stark contrast to the prevailing style of other archaeologists (and linguists) at the time who put forward many fanciful theories in order to square the archaeological data with the received model. For example, at some point from the 19th century onward it was assumed that the Finnic area was populated, and then emptied of people during the pre-Roman period (between 500 BC and early Christian times), perhaps because of worsening weather conditions, and then re-populated by immigrants from the Ural Mountains (the so-called '*autioitumisteoria*').

The only claim made by Indreko that I personally cannot accept, is that there was a Finno-Ugric community and a Finno-Ugric Proto-language. It is often recognised nowadays, even among the supporters of the Uralic theory, that it is

difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct not only the Ugric node, but also the Finno-Ugric node (Hajdú 1987:310). It is also widely recognised that Hungarian and the Lappic languages are ‘isolates’ within the family (supposing for a moment that there is a Uralic family; see for example Abondolo 1987; Austerlitz 1987). This, of course, was not common knowledge at the time, so that Indreko’s wrong assumption is fully justified.

Indreko and modern genetic research

There is another interesting aspect to highlight in Indreko’s paper: his results have recently been confirmed by genetic research. Indreko claims that the “Finno-Ugrians” are a Europoid type of people, whilst the Samoyeds, “with their Mongoloid characteristics, completely differ from the Finno-Ugrians” (1948:13). The author also remarks that: “Almost the same can be said of the Lapplanders, whose language is also tied to the linguistic root of the Finno-Ugrians”(1948:13). This is basically what has recently emerged from modern genetics. In fact, genetic studies show a gradation from mainly Mongoloid character in the Eastern areas near the Ural Mountains (Samoyed, Ob-Ugric people), to mainly Europoid character in the Western areas and Finland. The Lapps are classified as mainly European, but they differ from the other populations (and also from the nearby Finns) by having an admixture of oriental and Caucasoid alleles (Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi and Piazza 1994:510–512; Cavalli-Sforza 1996:173–177; compare also Sammallahti 1995, who points out the contradictions between the genetic evidence and some of the tenets of the Uralic paradigm).

Within this context, there is another aspect of Indreko’s viewpoint that has struck me as a linguist. On page 13 Indreko remarks: “The Samoyed ... settled near the Finno-Ugrians ever since the Mesolithic Period. Intermixture took place very slowly and there were but extremely few points of contacts so that the linguistic ties were very weak, yet strong enough to be ascertained by philologists.” And, just a few lines above, before the remarks about the racial difference between the Samoyeds and the Finno-Ugric peoples (as reported above), the author states: “This linguistic relationship [between Samoyed and Finno-Ugric] alleged by philologists chiefly existed in mutual loan words.” It is as if Indreko did not believe in that other basic tenet of the standard Uralic theory, according to which the Samoyed branch and the Finno-Ugric branch in turn both derived from a higher level node, of which they form the oldest members: the Uralic node. He seems to believe instead that the “weak” linguistic correlations between these two branches are the result of borrowings. Again, more recent linguistic studies (Janhunen 1981 & 1998) have demonstrated that the conventional Uralic node itself is hard to reconstruct, and that the observed correlations between the two constitutive branches are rather loose. In contrast, old as well as more recent studies (Collinder 1940 & 1965; Sauvageot 1964 & 1969) have pointed out, for instance, that Samoyed is closer to Yukaghir than to any other Finnic or Ugric language, even though the Samoyed / Yukaghir correla-

tions are often interpreted as the result of borrowing (Rédei 1999). Indeed, Samoyed and Yukaghir are part of those populations and culture which – perhaps following Indreko (1948:15)? – are often referred to as the ”Arctic zone”.

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