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ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMENTS TO THE INDO-EUROPEAN PROBLEM

Jiří NEUSTUPNÝ - Prague

It is generally known that the vast expanses of Asia and Europe—from India to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean were inhabited, at the beginning of written history, by peoples speaking Indo-European languages. From early written sources we learn of the existence on European territory of Greeks, Italic peoples, Celts, Teutons (Germanic peoples), Illyrians, Thracians, Scythians, Sarmatians, Balts and Slavs. Apart from the disappearance of the Scythians, Sarmatians and Thracians, and a substantial decrease of Illyrian and Celtic territories, there did not occur as far as we know from written sources—any greater shifts of populations speaking Indo-European languages, except for a temporary expansion of the Celts, the spread of Greeks and Romans to new colonies, and the later movements of the Teutonic and Slavic peoples.

The relations, development and origins of the Indo-European languages have been the concern for a long time now of linguistics and linguists have arrived at very important and generally valid conclusions¹.

Of course, linguistics alone cannot resolve all the abovementioned problems, although it occupies a leading position in research: without taking into consideration its conclusions, no progress can be made. Theoretically speaking it is, of course, possible to reconstruct a language situation for a period preceding the age from which the first sources of the Indo-European languages derive. But no precise data can be offered for the theoretically elaborated phases of languages, even though glottochronology attempts to do so.

There are, however, disciplines that can assist linguists and among them in first place is prehistory (archaeology), which is able to divide

¹ G. DEVOTO, *Origini indoeuropee*, Firenze 1962; V. I. GEORGIEV, *Introduzione alla storia delle lingue indoeuropee*, Roma 1966.

the period prior to the existence of written records into phases that, through a variety of methods, can be dated. Prehistory of course does not deal with and cannot deal with Indo-European languages but is interested in those who spoke these languages and their culture. For such research, prehistory has at its disposal source material which the populations of preliterate times left behind - settlements and burials of primeval peoples and their products (tools, weapons, ornaments, a.s.o.).

European archaeologists turned their attention to the Indo-European problem very early, at the end of the last century. At that time, naturally, prehistory as a discipline was in its initial stages, it did not have sufficient archaeological finds, its working methods had flaws and so it is not strange that not very much was resolved in regard to these questions. Apart from researchers attempting to contribute to a real understanding there also were those who tried, to prove the superiority of one nation over another, in prehistory, in the course of history and in modern times as well. The archaeological roots of racism and nazi ideology spring from similar theories.² Although the great majority of archaeologists kept their distance or at least were very circumspect with regard to these theories, very few had the courage to publicly denounce these racist explanations of prehistory and guide the Indo-European problem into a correct orientation, i. e. the desire to extend our knowledge about the prehistoric ethnology of Europe³.

After the war, when the above-mentioned tendency toward racism was abandoned, the pendulum moved to the other extreme and European archaeologists turned their backs nearly completely on the ethnical explanation of archaeological cultures, devoting themselves almost exclusively to the classification of archaeological finds, their dating, technologies, etc.

This was not a good situation in European archaeology because we must not forget that prehistory is but the most ancient history and that its final goal is not the classification of archaeological finds.

² For instance: G. WILKE, *Kulturbeziehungen zwischen Indien, Orient und Europa*, Mannus-Bibliothek, No. 10, Würzburg 1913; IDEM, *Die Religion der Indogermanen in archäologischer Betrachtung*, Mannus-Bibliothek, Nr. 31, Leipzig 1923.

³ V. G. CHILDE, *The Aryans, A Study of Indo-European Origins*, London 1926; E. WAHLE, *Zur ethnischen Deutung frühgeschichtlicher Kulturprovinzen-Grenzen der frühgeschichtlichen Erkenntnis*, Akademie der Wissenschaften, Heidelberg 1941.

Such a classification is needed but represents only the basis, the starting point from which it must proceed and then try to contribute to a picture of the socio-economic development of prehistoric society. We cannot accept the spread of agnosticism which postpone the solution of any economic and social problems — as well as ethnical ones — with the justification that we are unable to contribute at the present time to these questions because we do not have at our disposal enough archaeological records or because archaeology is not entitled to discuss such problems at all. In our opinion, the search for prehistoric peoples belong to the sphere of interest of prehistory as the most ancient history. It is, of course, not its sole aim but nevertheless one of importance for a knowledge of the historical evolution of mankind. We are obliged to investigate the ethnical problems in prehistory even at the price that our conclusions correspond to the time in which we are formulating them. But this was true of our predecessors' interpretations and will be true of the judgements of our successors, and not only from the theoretical, economic, social and ethnical aspect but also insofar as it concerns the so-called «pure archaeology», that is to say, basic archaeological classification. Therefore, we are not entering a dangerous field by trying to investigate prehistoric ethnology. But we must avoid pursuing any subsidiary goals, particularly those of national-chauvinist character.

We must be very happy to be able to say that in the post-war years some works appeared dealing with the ethnological problems of prehistoric Europe based on archaeological foundations. They are synthecized works, written without any underhand intentions, works trying to arrive at a scientific understanding of the ethnical composition of prehistoric Europe. In first place there are the works by A. Ya. Bryusov and H. Hencken⁴.

In recent years the greatest attention to an archaeological review of the Indo-European question was paid by Pedro Bosch-Gimpera to whose memory, on the basis of a long-standing friendship, I dedicate this paper⁵.

⁴ A. YA. BRJUSOV, *Arkheologicheskiye kultury i etnicheskiye obshchestvennosti* (Archaeological cultures and ethnical societies), Sovetskaya arkhologiya, XXVI, pp. 5-27, Moskva 1956; IDEM, *K voprosu ob indo-evropeyskoy probleme*, Sovetskaya arkhologiya, XXVIII, pp. 18 sq., Moskva 1958; H. HENCKEN, *Indo-European Languages and Archaeology*, American Anthropological Association, Vol. 57, No. 6, Part 3, Memoir No. 84, December 1955.

⁵ P. BOSCH-GIMPERA, *El neolítico europeo y sus pueblos: El problema indoeuropeo*, Zephyrus, IX-2, pp. 141-162, Salamanca 1958; IDEM, *El problema*

Prehistoric Indo-Europeans lived on the level of primeval society and therefore one can scarcely think of any « campaigns » in larger social units. Their spread to other places can most likely be imagined as shifts to peripherally free, as yet unsettled or only slightly settled areas. Of course, according to a traditional understanding of Indo-European and other ethnological questions, anyone can object by saying that the Indo-Europeans had to come at some time to those settlements that later became known. Did they have to or did they not? We are unable confidently to rely today to this question put in this form from the viewpoint of any discipline that has tried to resolve the Indo-European problem.

As for archaeology, we can however attempt to provide some help in this problem testifying for and against the continuity of settlements on a given territory which at the beginning of history, explained already in written records, was settled by peoples speaking Indo-European languages. The point is basically to study in the course of prehistoric settlement certain phenomena following which the archaeological culture, population and — maybe — also the language could change. The point is to ascertain whether in archaeological development there occurred on a given territory such interruptions that the prehistorian is justified in thinking there could have been a change in population. It is natural that such research is extremely difficult and has many obstacles that can divert a research scholar from his main path; but it is a matter of further research to correct the errors and to offer other, better motivated solutions.

What is the case today as regards continuity of settlement on the territory of Central Europe?

As regards the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods, we do not yet have sufficient archaeological documents to speak unhesitatingly on the possibility of an absolute continuity of settlement. For the Palaeolithic period, beginning there about 600,000 years ago, we are not able to establish sufficiently strong developmental links among civilizations that succeeded one another. From the general historical viewpoint however, continuity on naturally favourable territory was possible and in certain periods very likely—this applies mainly to the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods, when there gradually came

indoeuropeo, México 1960; IDEM, *Les Indo-Européens*, Bibliothèque historique, Paris 1961; IDEM, *Die Indoeuropäer. Schlussfolgerungen*, Die Urheimat der Indogermanen, p. 510 sq., Darmstadt 1968.

about larger and larger settlements and a more intensive manner of hunting and collecting⁶.

We are on firmer ground in our statements starting the 6th millennium B.C., in the Neolithic period, when the agricultural form of economy compelled people to adopt a more settled life. Liberated from the basic worries as to providing the means of subsistence, mankind then began to accelerate the development of its civilization and made permanent communities of its life. Although, of course, one must bear in mind the expansion of settled territory toward the peripheral areas and shifts of social units within their common settled area, it can be said that the evolution of the Neolithic civilization of Central Europe occurred without interruption, that archaeological cultures developed through inner impulses, without outside interference: this means the sphere of the Linear Pottery, the oldest known Neolithic culture of Central Europe. The local, domestic development not just of culture but also of populations can be well understood if we realize that this was an agricultural population, not only tied to the land but to social bonds, such as those that prevailed in gentile society of primeval epoch.

Even at the beginning of the Eneolithic period there were shifts from territory on which the changes from the Neolithic to the Eneolithic occurred, it means from Central Europe, to peripheral territory either as yet unsettled or only slightly settled. A great historical role in this was played by the shift of the Funnel Beaker Culture (TRB Culture) from Central Europe to the southern parts of northern Europe.: thus northern Europe (Scandinavia) came within the sphere of agricultural life for the first time and entered the rapidly developing agricultural community.

In the Late Eneolithic Period there were spread over large areas of Central Europe, as well as Eastern Europe and in Scandinavia, local groups of the Corded Ware Culture (Battle-Axe Culture). In Poland this culture is the result of local development deriving from the Funnel Beaker Culture⁷, elsewhere the search for its domestic

⁶ EVŽEN e Jiří NEUSTUPNÝ, *La Cecoslovacchia prima degli Slavi*, pp. 27-40, Uomo e Mito, volume 34, Il Saggiatore, Milano 1963; Jiří NEUSTUPNÝ, *Some problems of the settlement of Czechoslovak territory in prehistory, IV: The continuous settlement of the Czechoslovak territory in prehistory*, Acta Musei Nationalis Pragae, XXII-1968, pp. 84-92 (in Czech), 115-116 (in English).

⁷ EVŽEN F. NEUSTUPNÝ, *Contributions to the Eneolithic Period in Poland, L'Europe à la fin de l'âge de la pierre*, Actes du Symposium consacré aux problèmes du Néolithique européen, 1959, pp. 441-457, Praha 1961.

roots is only in its infancy, such as for instance in Bohemia and in Thuringia⁸. And elsewhere it can be assumed that it arrived there through peripheral shifts of its bearers. It is a culture which was and sometimes still is regarded as that of undivided Indo-Europeans and its appearance was and sometimes is explained as their spread through Europe⁹. We can perhaps state here that we do not concur in this view, because we put the emergence of Indo-Europeans in Europe, in conformity with the views of many linguists and archaeologists, at a much earlier date. At the same time we agree, of course, that the Corded Ware Cultures belong to several branches of already divided Indo-Europeans.

This brings us to the very end of the Eneolithic period, to the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C. when the Bell Beaker Culture spread over vast areas of Central, Western and Southwestern Europe. The most widespread theory is that of its emergence on the Pyrenean peninsula, from whence it spread to the rest of Europe. But there are other links involved here. For instance, in Central Europe it followed the Vučedol Culture, whose decorations are very close to typical Bell Beakers, just as several ceramic shapes seem to be taken over from the Vučedol Culture. It must be stressed, too, that the number of finds in Western Hungary and in Western Czechoslovakia are far more than those discovered in Western Europe. In other words, the Bell Beakers are a culture that cannot be without relation to a previous Eneolithic development on the soil of Central Europe¹⁰.

A straight development line leads from the Bell Beaker Culture to the Únětice Culture (Aunjetitz in former German literature) of the Early Bronze Age through its later phase (the Věteřov Type and

⁸ EVŽEN F. NEUSTUPNY, *The grave of Tušimice and some problems of the Corded Ware Cultures*, *Památky archeologické*, LVI, pp. 392-452 (in Czech), 453-6 (in English), Praha 1965.

⁹ M. GIMBUTAS, *The Indo-Europeans: Archeological Problems*, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 65, No. 4, pp. 815-36, August 1963; EADEM, *Proto-Indo-European Culture: The Kurgan Culture during the Fifth, Fourth and Third Millennia B.C.*, Indo-European and Indo-Europeans, pp. 155-97, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1970; E. SERENI, *La circolazione etnica e culturale nella steppa eurasiatica. Le tecniche e la nomenclatura del cavallo*, *Studi storici*, VIII-3, pp. 456-533, Istituto Gramsci, Roma 1967.

¹⁰ EVŽEN F. NEUSTUPNY, *Die westlichen Kulturen im böhmischen Aeneolithikum*, *L'Europe à la fin de l'âge de la pierre*, p. 318, Praha 1961; IDEM, *Das jüngere Aeneolithikum in Mitteleuropa*, *Musaica-Zborník filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského*, XXIII, pp. 91-120, Bratislava 1972; JIŘÍ NEUSTUPNY, *The Bell Beaker Culture in Bohemia and Moravia*, *A Pedro Bosch-Gimpera en el septuagésimo aniversario de su nacimiento*, p. 331 sq. México 1963.

related Madarovec Culture) to the Tumuli Culture. So we come from the Early Bronze Age, about 2300 B.C.¹¹, to shortly before the middle of the 2nd millennium B.C. The Tumuli sphere was already differentiated from within into local groups which contained within themselves the prerequisites for subsequent cultural and historical development of significance for Central and Western Europe. Sometime around 1300 B.C., in the frame of the Tumuli sphere, there was a bipartition. In the northern part of Central Europe the Urnfields of Lusatian Type broke away, whereas in the southern part there was a spread of the Upper Danubian Cremation Cemeteries (« Süddeutsche Urnenfelder »), which we also find in Western Europe and on the British Isles. From the Upper Danubian Cremation Cemeteries through the Early Iron Period, the uninterrupted line leads to the La Tène Culture, which is unquestionably Celtic¹². In the North, in the meantime, in the sphere of the Lusatian Urnfields, development moved toward a sphere which in further, complicated development (La Tène Period, Roman Period) would embrace and on the historical scene successively put the Teutonic, Baltic and Slavonic peoples. It is not excluded that we do not know all the Indo-European peoples covered by the Lusatian Urnfields.

We are in a difficult situation if we have to make a judgement today as to when the first Indo-Europeans in Central, and in the whole of Europe appeared. Where did they come from? And did they have to come at all — could they not have developed on a certain European (and Asian) territory and spread out peripherically from there? In all these considerations, archaeologists usually forget the Asian Indo-European branch and centre their attention only on the European branch. We must realize that the original Indo-European settlement of Europe must be sought where it might have had a direct bearing on Asian Indo-European settlement, since they cannot be divorced from one another.

¹¹ EVŽEN F. NEUSTUPNY *Absolute chronology of the Neolithic and Aeneolithic periods in Central and South-Eastern Europe I*: Slovenská archeológia, XVI, pp. 19-56, Bratislava 18967; II: Archeologické rozhledy, XXI, pp. 783-809, Praha 1969; IDEM, *Radiocarbon chronology of Central Europe from c. 6450 B.P. to c. 3750 B.P.*, Nobel Symposium, 12: *Radiocarbon Variations and Absolute Chronology*, Stockholm 1970; IDEM, *Absolute chronology of the Bronze Age in Central Europe*, Istraživanja, 5, pp. 111-6, Novi Sad 1976.

¹² Jiří NEUSTUPNY, *From Indo-Europeans to Prehistoric Celts in Central Europe*, Revista da Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa, III série, no. 10, pp. 3-32, Lisboa 1966.

If we review, from the archaeological viewpoint, the development of the settlement of Central Europe from the beginning of the Neolithic to the Middle Bronze Age, to the Tumuli sphere, then we really cannot point to any archaeological entity that would represent the arrival of such a huge community, such as a Central European or a European Indo-European community would have represented. It is also difficult to imagine that such a primitive society, as were the bearers of the Neolithic, the Eneolithic and the Early Bronze Age, would have been capable of carrying out the movement of such a huge mass of people. We have already mentioned that the great majority of more or less certain shifts in the above-mentioned periods were peripheral, slow shifts on territory that was only sparsely settled and that these shifts must have corresponded to the laws of primeval society — the battles among certain entities are, of course, not excluded. Given such an explanation of the development of settlement, we cannot but conclude that the Central European Indo-Europeans, at the beginning of the Neolithic Age in Southeastern and Central Europe, in connection with the development in Asia, appeared as farmers who tilled the soil¹³. The general kinship of the Neolithic cultures in Southeastern Europe and the Near East supports the idea of original existence of Indo-European peoples on there¹⁴.

In this conception, which embraces the gradual expansion of Neolithic farmers, the Indo-Europeans would be the bearers of the Central European Neolithic cultures, too. The expansion of Neolithic farmers can well be imagined because it was a manner of solving overpopulation brought on by greatly improved diet and other biological and social factors. The Indo-Europeans would therefore have been the residents of Central Europe from the 6th millennium B.C.

If we concentrated our attention in the study of the settlement continuity upon the Neolithic and if we believe that the expansion of the Neolithic civilization in Europe means very probably also a spread of the Indo-Europeans, we must at the same time say that we do not want to assert that the Indo-Europeans appeared in Europe and Asia only at the beginning of the Neolithic period. This is quite

¹³ So H. HENCKEN, *Indo-European Languages*, p. 47; Jiří NEUSTUPNY, *Some problems of the settlement*, p. 95. Both the authors did it linking up with the conclusions of the linguists J. Whatmough and K. H. Menges.

¹⁴ PIA LAVIOSA-ZAMBOTTI, *Le più antiche culture agricole europee*, Milano 1943; EADEM, *Origine e diffusione della civiltà*, Milano 1947; V. G. CHILDE, *New Light on the Most Ancient East*, London 1952; IDEM, *The Dawn of European Civilization*, London 1948.

different and much more complicated problem. Some archaeologists have expressed the theory that the formation of Indo-Europeans must be sought somewhere deeper in the past, perhaps in the Mesolithic or even in the Palaeolithic¹⁵; we are inclined to share this view with them. When the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic of neighbouring regions of Europe and Asia are better known we will understand more about these problems.

In this paper, however, we will limit ourselves to the conclusion that in the course of the Neolithic and Eneolithic periods and later, too, there did not occur in Europe any great shifts that might be interpreted as the arrival of Indo-European groups. And when we say that the Neolithic civilization of Southeastern and Central Europe belonged to the Indo-Europeans we do not want to assert that these were undifferentiated Indo-Europeans. On the contrary, this Neolithic period is, in our view, characterized by divided Indo-Europeans belonging to the individual European Indo-European groups.

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¹⁵ H. KÜHN, *Herkunft und Heimat der Indogermanen*, Proceedings of the 1st Congress of Prehistoric Sciences, London 1932, p. 237, Oxford 1934; C. F. C. HAWKES, *The Prehistoric Foundations of Europe*, pp. 64, 233, London 1940; A. YA. BRYUSOV, *Sovetskaya arkheologiya*; 1958, pp. 25-6; P. BOSCH-GIMPERA, *El problema indoeuropeo*, pp. 93, 105 sq.; IDEM, *Les Indoeuropéens*, p. 122 sq.

SUMMARY

The author refuses the agnosticism putting aside the solution of ethnical problems of prehistory on the pretext that we are as yet unable to contribute to them without having more archaeological records at our disposal. The endeavour to identify prehistoric peoples rightly belongs among the main interests of prehistory conceived as the most ancient history of mankind. Prehistory should support linguistics in the investigation of the problems of the Indo-European or other language groups appearing at the beginnings of written history and supposed to have existed already in the prehistoric times.

The most ancient Indo-Europeans lived on the level of prehistoric society and therefore one can scarcely think of any migration of larger units—their spread can most likely be imagined as gradual shifts to peripheral areas. The prehistory can assist linguistics in solving the problems of the appearance of the first Indo-Europeans by testing the continuity of settlement in those territories where the first historical Indo-Europeans lived.

As regards the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods, we do not yet dispose with sufficient archaeological records to be entitled to speak about the absolute continuity of settlement although this is quite probable for the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic times at least.

Starting with the Neolithic period the settlement of Central and Southeastern Europe lasted without interruption. At the beginning of the following Eneolithic period there could have been shifts from Central to Northern Europe/Funnel Beaker Culture-TRB/. The Late Eneolithic Corded Ware Cultures arised either on the spot or spread to peripheral areas. At the end of the Eneolithic period, the Bell Beaker Culture — whose Central European roots and links with the Vučedol Culture must be taken into consideration — lead to the Unětice Culture of the Early Bronze Age and through the Věteřov-Madarovce groups to the Tumuli Culture. And from the Tumuli Culture there is a straight development to the Upper Danubian Cremation Cemeteries («Süddeutsche Urnenfelder») and further to the La Tène Culture which is unquestionably Celtic.

Reviewing the development of the settlement of Central Europe from the Early Neolithic to the La Tène Culture one cannot identify any archaeological event that would represent the arrival of such a large community as the Central European or even European Indo-Europeans must have been. We cannot but conclude that the Indo-Europeans were the original prehistoric residents of Central and Southeastern Europe at least from the Early Neolithic period being bearers of the first agricultural cultures there. Their ethnic connection with the adjacent Asian countries, however, cannot be denied. When the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods in the mentioned areas are better

investigated we may be on a safer ground considering the question whether it is possible to suppose the existence of Indo-Europeans already in those remote times (in connection with the linguistic sostratic theories).

RIASSUNTO

L'Autore rifiuta l'agnosticismo che accantona la soluzione di problemi etnici della preistoria con il pretesto che siamo tuttora nell'impossibilità di fornire contributi in mancanza di ulteriori dati archeologici. Il tentativo di identificare popolazioni preistoriche fa parte dei fondamentali interessi della preistoria intesa come la più antica storia dell'uomo. La preistoria dovrebbe essere un supporto della linguistica nelle ricerche sui problemi dell'indoeuropeo o di altri gruppi di lingue che appaiono all'inizio della storia scritta e che si suppone siano già esistite in tempi preistorici.

I più antichi Indo-Europei vissero a livello di società preistoriche ed è quindi difficile pensare a migrazioni di più ampia portata; la loro diffusione può con maggiore probabilità essere intesa come graduale sostituzione in aree periferiche. La preistoria può sostenere la linguistica nel risolvere i problemi dell'apparire dei primi Indo-Europei saggiando la continuità degli insediamenti nei territori nei quali vissero i primi gruppi indoeuropei di età storica.

Per quanto riguarda i periodi Paleolitico e Mesolitico, non disponiamo ancora di sufficienti dati archeologici che giustifichino un discorso sull'assoluta continuità di un insediamento, per quanto ciò sia molto probabile per il Paleolitico superiore e mesolitico.

Iniziando con il Neolitico, il popolamento dell'Europa centrale e sud-orientale perdurò senza interruzioni; all'inizio del successivo periodo Eneolitico possono esserci state interruzioni in un'area che va dall'Europa centrale all'Europa del Nord (Funnel-beaker Culture-TRB).

Le culture « corded ware » del tardo neolitico o sorsero sul luogo o si diffusero verso aree periferiche. Alla fine del periodo eneolitico, la cultura bell-Beaker (le cui radici centro-europee e i cui legami con la cultura di Vucedol devono essere presi in considerazione) porta alla cultura di Unětice del Bronzo Antico e, attraverso i gruppi Věteřov-Madarovce alla cultura dei tumuli. Dalla cultura dei tumuli, infine, vi è uno sviluppo diretto verso le necropoli a cremazione del danubiano superiore (« Süddeutsche Urnenfelder ») e ancora, verso la cultura di La Tène che è indiscutibilmente celtica.

Riconsiderando lo sviluppo del popolamento dell'Europa centrale dal neolitico iniziale alla cultura di La Tène non è possibile individuare un evento archeologico che rappresenti l'arrivo di comunità di tale rilievo come devono essere stati gli Indo-Europei in Europa centrale o in Europa in generale.

Non ci resta che concludere che gli Indo-Europei furono gli originali abitanti preistorici dell'Europa centrale e sud-orientale almeno dal primo neolitico, dovendosi loro attribuire l'introduzione delle culture agricole. D'altra parte le loro connessioni etniche con le adiacenti regioni asiatiche non possono essere negate. Quando i periodi Paleolitico e Mesolitico nelle aree ricordate saranno meglio conosciuti ci potremo chiedere, muovendo da dati più sicuri, se sia possibile supporre la esistenza di Indoeuropei già in quei tempi remoti facendo riferimento a teorie linguistiche dei sostrati.