

Languages and their Speakers in Ancient Eurasia



*Dedicated to
Professor Aharon Dolgopolsky
on his 70th Birthday*

Edited by Vitaly Shevoroshkin and Paul Sidwell
AHL Studies in the Science and History of Language 5

**ASSOCIATION FOR THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE
MONOGRAPHS AND SERIALS**

LANGUAGES AND THEIR SPEAKERS IN ANCIENT EURASIA

MONOGRAPH SERIES 1

**AHL STUDIES IN THE
SCIENCE & HISTORY OF LANGUAGE 5**

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Volume 5

Languages and their Speakers in Ancient Eurasia

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Published in Canberra in 2002
by the Association for the History of Language

Postal address:
LPO Box A139
Australian National University
ACT, 0200, Australia

Typeset by Fabrice Cavoto and Paul Sidwell

Cataloging Data

Shevoroshkin, Vitaly & Paul Sidwell (eds.).
Languages and their Speakers in Ancient Eurasia

(Association for the History of Language, Monograph Series 1,
AHL Studies in the Science & History of Language 5)
1. Linguistics - Historical Linguistics, 2. Eurasia - Pre-History.

ISBN 0 9577251 3 2

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1st Preface

by V. Shevoroshkin

I

This volume is dedicated to Aharon (Aron Borisovich) Dolgopolsky, an outstanding historical linguist, in connection with his 70th birthday.

A.D. graduated from the prestigious Moscow Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages, and soon defended a PhD thesis on Latin inscriptions. I first met him in 1962, in the Sector (=Department) of Structural Linguistics of the Russian Language Institute (USSR Academy of Sciences) where I had just got a job; Aron was already working there for some time (later he joined the African Languages Sector in the Institute of Linguistics where he worked until his emigration to Haifa in 1977).

Aron immediately started to outline for me his results in comparing several, distantly related, language families, namely, IE, Kartvelian, Hamito-Semitic (=Afroasiatic), Uralic, Altaic, Chukchee-Kamchatkan, which he called Boreic or Borealic (later he switched to Pedersen's term Nostratic which was also used by V. Illich-Svitych; this latter didn't analyze Chukchee-Kamchatkan but he used Dravidian in his comparison). For me, this was very interesting because my own list of IE roots contained many references to possible non-IE cognates.

Since then we frequently discussed Nostratic matters, first in Russia, and later abroad, when visiting each other or meeting at linguistic conferences. I agreed with A.D. in principle but objected to his treatment of IE laryngeals: I couldn't accept the concept that pre-IE sound combinations of the type *Ha*, *aH*, - or *Ho*, *oH*, - would first turn into *(h)e*, *e(h)* in IE (without any indication that *e* ever existed in such combinations), and then mysteriously regain their original vocalism *(h)a*, *a(h)* [i.e., *ha-*, *-ahh-* in Hittite; *a-*, *-a(:)-* in West-IE], or *(h)o*, *o(h)*, for that matter.

As we can see (cf. excerpts from Dolgopolsky's *Nostratic Dictionary*), A.D. now uses correctly reconstructed IE roots: for instance, IE **xant-* 'forehead, front' [directly from Nostratic **qanTV*] > Hitt. *hant-* vs West-IE **ant-*.

A.D. started to compare Nostratic languages several years before I-S did, never finding out about I-S's work, until V. Dybo introduced them to each other (Dybo was secretly conducting an experiment, comparing I-S's and A.D.'s