The Power of the Word

What Language Can and Cannot Tell Us About Prehistory

A Historical Prelude: The Rise of History Outside History

Sir William Jones, Third Annual Address to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1786

James Hutton, Theory of the Earth, 1788

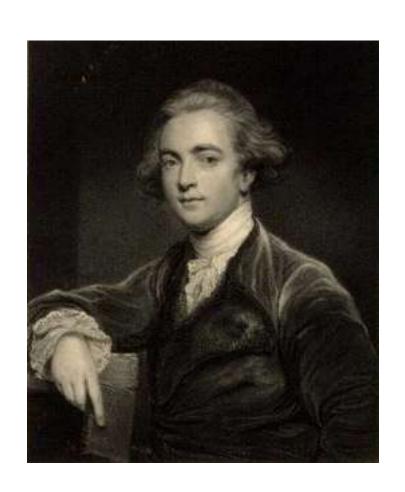
Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, organization of the National Museum of Denmark into three ages: Stone, Bronze, Iron, 1836

Charles Darwin, The Origin of the Species, 1859

Sir William Jones, 1746-1794

- Son of William Jones who devised the use of the symbol $\boldsymbol{\pi}$
- A lawyer who worked without success with Benjamin Franklin in Paris on issues arising from the American Revolution
- Appointed to Bengal Supreme Court (1783)
- Founder of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta and founder of Indian Studies
- Hyperpolyglot—knew 28 languages at his death

Sir William Jones (by Sir Joshua Reynolds)



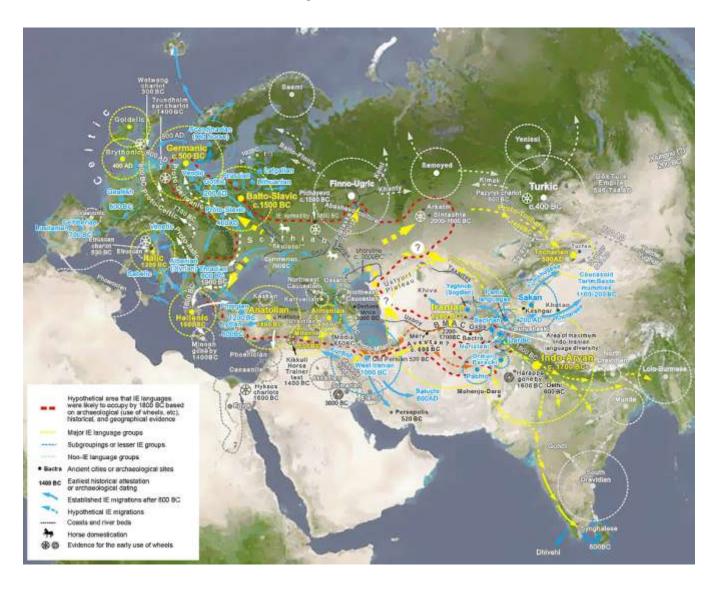
Conclusion to "Third Address"

 "The Sanscrit language...more perfect than Greek ... more copious than Latin... yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity ... than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists"

Marrying Archeology and Linguistics

- Glottochronology: assuming a constant rate of lexical replacement (sort of like carbon-dating)
 - 14% replacement per millennium
- Paleolexicology: reconstructing what a prehistoric people talked about
 - Beech line (Das Buchenargument)
 - Salmon argument (Das Lachsargument)
 - Neolithic Secondary Products Revolution
 - Wheat, wool, wheels, and horses, etc.

Proto-Indo-Europeans and Archeology



Other Examples

- The Homeland of the Athabaskan Languages
- Proto-Mayan

Distribution of Athabaskan Languages



Northern Origin of the Navajo Edward Sapir

- 'gourd' < 'ladle' < 'horn'
- 'seed lies' < 'finely divided particles lie' < 'snow lies'
- 'corn' < 'alien/foreigners' food'
- 'suffer sleeplessness', 'sleep slips away' <
 'something glides like a canoe'

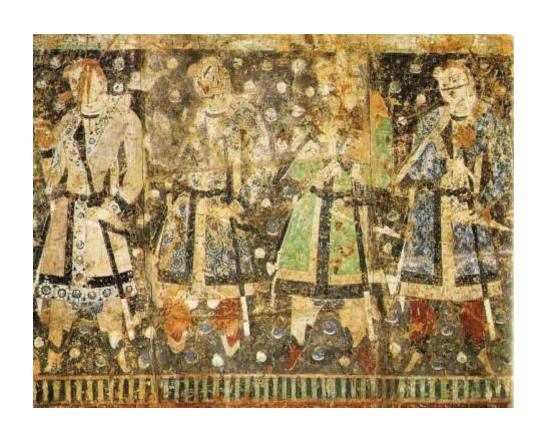
A Different Kind of Example: What the Mayans Talked About



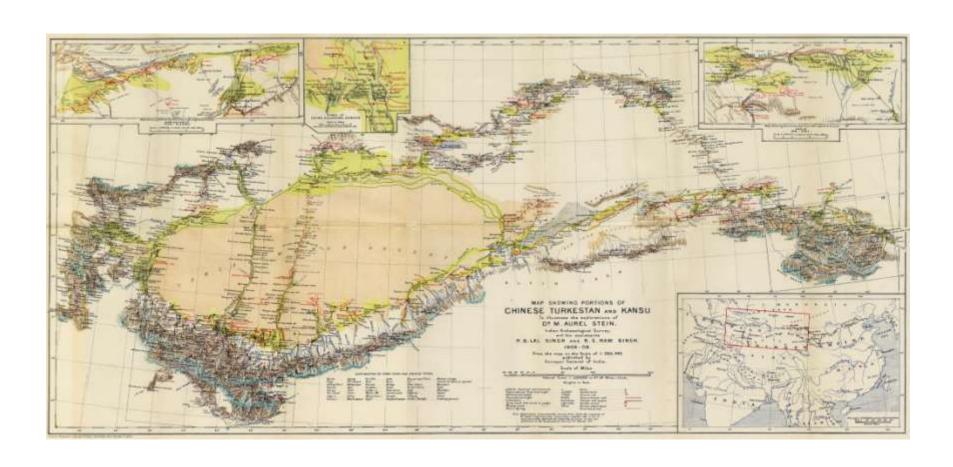
Before and After Decipherment

- Before: peaceful, theocratic, deeply spiritual Mayans were obsessed with numbers, calendrical matters, and astronomy/numerology
- After: Maya elite obsessed by war and bloodletting, desiring to humiliate, torture, and eventually kill neighboring rivals—and also fascinated by numbers, calendrical matters, astronomy/numerology

Tocharians and Tocharian



Indo-Europeans in Central Asia: the Tocahrians



So What Did the Tocharians Talk About?: Some Examples

- Laks 'fish' (< PIE *lak's '±salmon')
- Oṣṣale 'north' (as if < PIE *en-swelo- 'in [the direction of] the mountain')
- Retke 'army' (as if < PIE *rotxikos-'±pertaining to the chariot,' i.e., 'the chariotry'?)

Tocharian Buddhist Ascetic: Hopeful that the lecture is over and alms-distribution is near

