

Early Indo-European loanwords in the Uralic West?

Sampsa Holopainen, University of Helsinki

In this talk, the early Indo-European loanwords of Finnic and Saami and their prehistoric implications are discussed. According to a widespread view in Uralic linguistics in 1990s and 2000s, the Finnic and the Saami languages pose a large number of archaic Indo-European loanwords not found elsewhere in the family (see e.g. Koivulehto 2001; Sammallahti 1998; 2001). Koivulehto (2001) assumed that these loans were borrowed from Northwest Indo-European, the postulated (but debated) intermediary protolanguage of Germanic, Balto-Slavic and Italo-Celtic. These early loans were used as evidence of very early presence of the linguistic ancestors of the Finnic and Saami speakers in the areas around the Baltic Sea.

Since the early 2000s, the views on Uralic prehistory have significantly advanced and changed (Kallio 2006; Lang 2020), and the idea of very early Indo-European-Uralic contacts in the Baltic region does not look that plausible anymore. Part of the suggested etymologies have been rejected in subsequent research, and some of the allegedly Northwest Indo-European loanwords have been given alternative explanations as Balto-Slavic or Indo-Iranian loanwords (see Hyllested 2014; Junttila 2016; Holopainen & Junttila & Kuokkala 2017; Kümmel 2020; Holopainen 2021; Kallio 2022).

This talk presents an overview and critical re-evaluation of the remaining etymological material and discusses the implications the results have on the prehistory of Finnic and Saami. The etymologies discussed here include, among others, North Saami *arvi* 'rain' (< Proto-Saami **ervē* < ? Pre-Saami **üprä* or **iprä*) ← ? (Northwest-)Indo-European **ṛbhro-* (~ **ṛbhro-*) 'rain, rain cloud' (Koivulehto 2001: 246); North Saami *gožu* (: *gohččo-*) 'soot' (< Proto-Saami **kočōj* < Pre-Saami **kucoj*) ← ? (Northwest-)Indo-European **h₁usyo-* 'fire (?)' (Koivulehto 2001: 244–245); Finnish *kalja* 'weak beer' ← ? (Northwest-)Indo-European ← **h₂alu-* or *← **h₂al-ew-yo-* 'beer' (Koivulehto 2001: 240).

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