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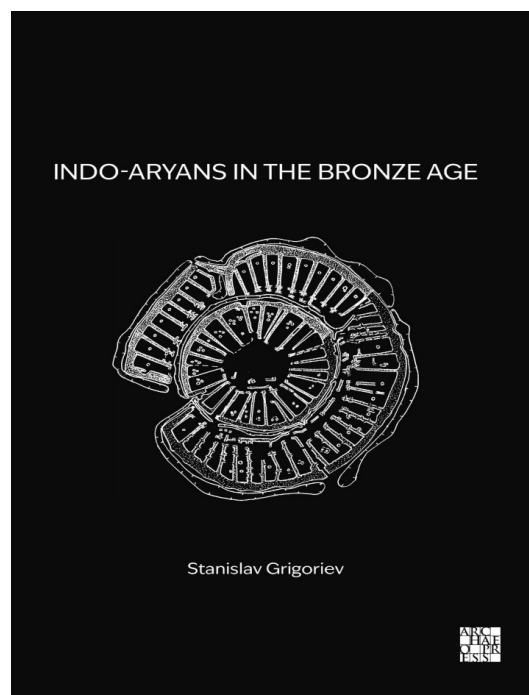
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Reviews

Stanislav Grigoriev, *Indo-Aryans in the Bronze Age*, Archaeopress Archaeology, Bicester 2025, 298 pages, 92 figures, 2 tables. ISBN Hardback: 9781805830665, Digital: 9781805830672, DOI [10.32028/9781805830665](https://doi.org/10.32028/9781805830665)

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Indo-Aryans in the Bronze Age by Stanislav Grigoriev engages with one of the most complex and contested issues in Indo-European studies, namely the origin, formation, and dispersal of Indo-Aryan-speaking populations. The monograph is embedded in a long historiographical tradition that stretches from early comparative philology to present-day interdisciplinary research combining archaeology, historical linguistics, and palaeogenetics. Grigoriev's primary aim is not simply to locate a geographical homeland for the Indo-Aryans but to expose the methodological fragility of dominant explanatory models and to propose a more coherent interpretive framework grounded primarily in archaeological evidence while critically reassessing linguistic and genetic data. Throughout the work, the author adopts a systematically critical stance toward the steppe hypothesis, which has long associated Indo-Iranian and Indo-Aryan dispersals with the Pontic-Caspian and Trans-Uralian steppe cultures, especially Sintashta and Andronovo. He argues that this model relies on unstable correlations between material culture, biological ancestry, and language and that its persistence reflects scholarly convention rather than empirical necessity.

A fundamental theoretical principle of the study is the strict analytical separation between language, material culture, and biological descent. Grigoriev stresses that ethnicity is a social and symbolic construct rooted

in collective memory, tradition, and processes of self-identification, none of which can be accessed directly through archaeological remains. Material culture reflects technological practices, subsistence strategies, and ritual behaviors, but these cannot be straightforwardly translated into linguistic or ethnic categories. Genetics reconstructs biological relatedness and long-term demographic trends but contains no information about language or cultural affiliation. Consequently, the author rejects the widespread tendency to equate archaeological cultures with linguistic communities or to infer language shifts directly from genetic admixture. Linguistics remains indispensable for reconstructing proto-languages and identifying patterns of contact, yet its application to prehistoric contexts is severely constrained by the absence of written documentation. Archaeology provides concrete spatial and temporal frameworks for cultural processes but cannot determine linguistic identity. Genetics contributes valuable data on population history but cannot resolve questions of cultural transmission. Grigoriev therefore insists on the necessity of a rigorously critical synthesis of all three lines of evidence.

Chronological inconsistency is identified as a major source of distortion in earlier reconstructions of Indo-Aryan migration. Archaeological chronologies rely primarily on radiocarbon dating and thus produce probability ranges rather than precise dates, whereas linguistic chronologies are derived from comparative reconstruction calibrated against historically attested languages. When these two systems are correlated without methodological caution, artificial synchronisms are created between archaeological cultures and linguistic stages. Grigoriev demonstrates that many existing migration models depend on selectively chosen or simplified dates that obscure the inherent uncertainty of radiocarbon chronologies. This practice generates internally inconsistent scenarios in which linguistic divergence is forced to coincide with archaeological horizons without independent corroboration. In the author's view, the endurance of such models is a product of disciplinary inertia rather than of cumulative empirical validation.

The linguistic analysis situates Indo-Aryan languages within the Indo-European family and explores their relations with Iranian, Finno-Ugric, and Yeniseian languages. Grigoriev acknowledges the close affinity between Indo-Aryan and Avestan but emphasizes their divergence into separate branches of Indo-Iranian. He devotes special attention to substrate influences in South Asia, arguing that Indo-Aryan languages absorbed substantial lexical material from pre-Aryan populations, particularly Dravidian and Munda speakers. These borrowings concern ecological terminology, agricultural practices, social institutions, and religious concepts, indicating prolonged coexistence and cultural interaction rather than abrupt linguistic replacement. The Rig Veda and Avesta are treated as composite literary corpora combining ritual, mythological, and historical elements. While they preserve valuable insights into early Indo-Aryan and Iranian societies, their poetic and ideological character precludes their use as direct geographical testimonies of prehistoric migration. Grigoriev therefore rejects interpretations that attempt to map Rigvedic landscapes onto specific archaeological cultures. Linguistic evidence

from Northern Eurasia, including possible contacts with Finno-Ugric and Yeniseian languages, is interpreted as reflecting long-standing interaction zones rather than mass population movement from the steppe into South Asia.

The archaeological dimension of the book constitutes its empirical foundation. Grigoriev surveys a broad range of material cultures traditionally linked to Indo-Aryans or Indo-Iranians across South Asia, Central Asia, Eastern Iran, and the Eurasian steppe. In South Asia, he challenges the assumption that the decline of the Harappan urban system corresponds to an invasion or migration of steppe populations. Instead, the transition to post-urban cultural formations is interpreted as an internally driven process marked by regional differentiation and adaptation to shifting ecological and economic conditions. The Gandhara Grave and Painted Grey Ware cultures are analyzed as products of local development combined with selective external influences from Central Asia, rather than as archaeological correlates of Indo-Aryan invaders. Their burial practices, settlement structures, and ceramic traditions demonstrate continuity alongside innovation, suggesting cultural transformation without demographic rupture.

In Central Asia and Eastern Iran, the diffusion of catacomb burial traditions and associated material forms is treated as evidence for extensive cultural interaction networks rather than as markers of linguistic identity. These ritual practices are understood as transferable traditions that could be adopted by diverse populations. Particular attention is devoted to the Sintashta and Andronovo cultures of the Trans-Urals. While acknowledging their technological complexity and their importance for Bronze Age social organization, Grigoriev emphasizes their composite nature and the multiplicity of traditions involved in their formation. This cultural hybridity undermines attempts to associate them exclusively with Indo-Iranian speakers. The spread of pottery styles, metallurgical technologies, and burial customs is interpreted as reflecting sustained intercultural contact rather than a single directional migration.

The Near Eastern evidence, especially the appearance of Indo-Aryan linguistic elements in the Mitanni kingdom, occupies a significant position in the author's argument. Grigoriev examines the diffusion of chariot technology and associated terminology, which has often been cited as proof of steppe migrations. He argues that technological innovations can spread independently of language through trade networks, political alliances, and elite emulation. The Mitanni case is interpreted as evidence for the presence of an Indo-Aryan-speaking elite within a predominantly Hurrian-speaking society, a pattern consistent with limited, socially differentiated migration rather than demographic replacement. The geographic source of this influence is traced not to the Pontic-Caspian steppe but to regions closer to Eastern Iran and Central Asia, reinforcing the author's critique of steppe-centered models.

In his treatment of palaeogenetic data, Grigoriev adopts a cautious and critical approach. While acknowledging the importance of genetic research for reconstructing population history, he warns against its direct application to linguistic interpretation. Genetic continuity does not imply linguistic continuity, and genetic admixture does not necessarily

correspond to language shift. The genetic record reveals complex patterns of interaction between Transcaucasia, the steppe, and Central Asia, but steppe-derived genetic components are extremely rare in ancient samples from Iran and South Asia. This rarity is inconsistent with hypotheses positing massive migrations of steppe populations into these regions during the second millennium BC. Instead, genetic data support a model of long-term, multidirectional interaction combined with relative population continuity, aligning more closely with archaeological and linguistic evidence for gradual diffusion.

A major polemical thrust of the book is directed against the steppe hypothesis of Indo-Aryan origins. Grigoriev identifies several internal contradictions in this model, including the absence of steppe material culture in South Asia, the mismatch between archaeological and linguistic chronologies, and the lack of genetic evidence for large-scale steppe-derived migration into Iran or India. He further argues that the steppe hypothesis fails to account adequately for the internal diversification of Indo-Iranian languages and their wide geographical distribution. Proposed migration routes are characterized as speculative constructs unsupported by consistent archaeological sequences. In contrast, a Near Eastern and Central Asian locus for early Indo-Aryan development offers, in his view, a more coherent explanation of the available data.

In place of the steppe model, Grigoriev proposes a scenario in which Indo-Aryan groups emerged within a broad interaction zone encompassing Eastern Iran, southern Central Asia, and adjacent regions. From this area, Indo-Aryan speakers expanded westward into the Near East and eastward into South Asia through a prolonged process of cultural diffusion accompanied by limited demographic movement. This model accommodates the substantial substrate influences observed in Indo-Aryan languages and the heterogeneous archaeological record associated with their early presence. Indo-Aryan identity is thus interpreted not as the product of a single migratory event but as the outcome of sustained intercultural contact, linguistic convergence, and gradual expansion.

The principal contribution of *Indo-Aryans in the Bronze Age* lies in its rigorous methodological critique and its insistence on interdisciplinary synthesis. Rather than offering a definitive solution to the problem of Indo-Aryan origins, the book exposes the weaknesses of prevailing models and compels a reassessment of the evidentiary foundations upon which they rest. Its strength resides in its extensive archaeological documentation and its cautious integration of linguistic and genetic data. Even where its conclusions remain controversial, the study provides a coherent and intellectually demanding framework for future research and represents a significant intervention in debates concerning Indo-European prehistory.