

RECENSIÓN DE / REVIEW OF: Jean-Paul Demoule. *The Indo-Europeans: Archaeology, language, race, and the search for the origins of the West*. Oxford University Press. Nueva York, 2023, xix + 563 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-750647-9.

Antonio Gilman  Department of Anthropology, California State University-Northridge, antonio.gilman@csun.edu
Juan Manuel Vicent García  Instituto de Historia, CCHS/CSIC, juan.vicent@cchs.csic.es

Jean-Paul Demoule's updated English version of his 2014 book, *Mais où sont passés les Indo-Européens?: le mythe d'origine de l'Occident* (Paris, Seuil), is a comprehensive and erudite historiography of Indo-European linguistics and of the attempts of various scholarly disciplines to give historical meaning to the distribution and diversity of Indo-European languages. As he makes clear in his Preface (pp. xviii-xix), this project rests on a dozen "canonical theses", of which the most important for historical purposes are five:

1. "The reconstruction of the original [Indo-European] language is the [successful product of] centuries of linguistic research".
2. "This shared language was spoken by an original People".
3. "The original People lived in an original [Eurasian] Homeland ... localized through linguistic paleontology and archaeology".
4. "Linguistic paleontology allows us to reconstruct the natural environment, economy and culture of the original People".
5. "The diffusion of ... Indo-European languages occurred through the migrations ... of peoples who can be traced in the archaeological record and who are the direct forebears of peoples described in Classical and Medieval texts".

In other words, the spread and differentiation of Indo-European is analogous to that of its best documented branch, the Romance languages, with the difference that the mechanism of its diffusion would be demographic spread instead of elite dominance.

Demoule means to demolish this model.

The essential problem is that the model relies on the normative approach traditional in European archaeology in the variant put forward by Gustaf Kossinna. The clearest, most succinct and accessible formulation is that of Gordon Childe (1929, pp. v-vi):

We find certain types of remains –pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites, house forms– constantly recurring together. Such a complex of regularly associated traits we shall term a 'cultural group' or just a 'culture'. We assume that such a complex is the material expression of what today would be called a 'people'. Only where the complex in question is regularly and exclusively associated with skeletal remains of a specific physical type would we venture to replace 'people' by the term 'race'.

The same complex may be found with relatively negligible diminutions or additions over a wide area. In such cases of the total and bodily transference of complete culture from one place to another we think ourselves justified in assuming a 'movement of people'.

It goes without saying that a people with a common culture would speak a common language.

As Demoule demonstrates, the difficulty here is that one cannot reliably couple material culture with language. In the absence of written texts, one cannot know what language spoken in any particular place, and in Indo-European languages such texts (with two exceptions, Hittite and Linear B Greek) do not appear until the Iron Age (or much later). The introduction of iron produces, however, such pervasive changes in material culture that it is very difficult to link an attested Indo-European culture of that period with its Bronze Age predecessor. Thus, the archaeological differences between Early Geometric and Mycenaean Greece made the discovery that Linear B was an earlier form of Greek something of a surprise.

If using archaeological evidence to trace Indo-European origins backwards in time from their first textual manifestations is difficult, tracing its spread from an original Homeland is no less so. Demoule's review of the linguistic paleontology (see chapter 18) shows that with a little special pleading the Homeland can be placed in many different locations between Ireland and Bengal. In any case, whatever Homeland culture one chooses, one cannot trace its spread outward using the evidence of material culture. If one prefers an Anatolian origin for Indo-European, the archaeological culture of its speakers has undergone more than "negligible diminutions or additions" by the time they have become Linearbandkeramik farmers in central Europe. If one prefers the more popular Steppe

hypothesis, not much of the Yamnaya culture remains by that time its practitioners have become Corded Ware/Battle Axe folk in northern Europe. (Genetic evidence for the westward movement of people from the steppes will not help: gene flow can result from exogamy as well as migration [pp. 314-317]).

What, then, motivates the dedication of scholars to the manifestly hopeless task of giving a concrete historical explanation for the spread of Indo-European? Many, of course, wish to enter the lists in which so many distinguished predecessors have competed: if Childe (1926), why not Renfrew (1987)? Demoule's exhaustive review of the reception of comparative Indo-European linguistics indicates darker reasons for the general interest in these matters, however: the successful spread of a European language group serves as a charter for the general superiority of European culture and the white race: "Throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, the true issue underlying research and debate –behind the outward mask of science– was the justification of racism and inequality between humans. The goal was to distinguish the 'Indo-Europeans' or their equivalent from the rest of humanity and to demonstrate their specificity or even supremacy. In recent decades, these attempts have not lost any of their original momentum" [p. 236].

In short, the Indo-European question has ideological, moral, and political implications that go beyond academic debates. Demoule sees it as an authentic origin myth for European culture, one that would serve to replace the biblical alternative, the hegemony of which was in conflict with the antisemitism that was dominant among non-Jewish Europeans.

The construction of this myth is also the history of the disciplines of linguistics, anthropology, and archaeology and of the development of the scientific racism that justified the colonialism and racial politics of the 19th and 20th centuries. Demoule explores this process meticulously, both the permanent features that give it coherence and continuity and its contradictions, aporias, and circular arguments. The book is organized in four 'movements', preceded by an 'overture', and followed by a concluding chapter ("Finale and second overture"), and an epilogue setting forth antitheses to the canonical theses presented in the Preface.

The overture sets forth the late 18th century discovery (and its antecedents) of the lexical and grammatical similarities of the languages that subsequently would be classified as Indo-European. The first movement (1814-1903: "All is resolved!") is centered on the 19th century and covers how comparative grammar and linguistic paleontology permitted the reconstruction of the original Indo-European language, how these results were combined with physical anthropology and archaeology, and how this combination would lay the foundation for converting the Indo-European question into a racist origin myth. The second movement (1903-1945: "Crimes and errors") shows how this culminated in the theoretical aberrations of national socialism and how these aberrations were supported by a large part of the scientific communities that followed lines of thought firmly rooted in their academic disciplines. Much of physical anthropology came to see itself as a form of 'raciology' based on objective methodologies such as craniometry, for example. The third, most extensive, movement (1945-present: "All is re-resolved") reviews recent developments: the revival of the Aryan myth by the French 'Nouvelle Droite' and its allies, the current state of play on the Homeland and the migrations from it, the addition of comparative mythology to the play book. All in all, the most important development has been the replacement of the old physical anthropology and its anthropometric tools by a biological anthropology based on genetics. Oddly, however, the result has been the revival, in almost identical terms, of the old migrationism. As Demoule remarks, "it is probable that the continuously evolving techniques of biological anthropology will provide increasingly significant results in the future. However, it is essential that they are not just used to prop up historical models that are not only obsolete, but also simplistic and sometimes even politically biased" [p. 237].

This is the central point of Demoule's critique, summarized in the last part of the book ("Finale..."): the Indo-European question cannot be answered by adding new evidence if that evidence is interpreted using obsolete models. Two centuries of research have not produced a consensus on the essential points. It is necessary, therefore, to reject the conceptual terms that formulate them, such as the Kossinnian paradigm and the arborescent model of linguistic differentiation. This would permit the consideration of alternative models (such as 'areal' linguistics) and analogies (such as creoles and pidgins). Demoule's book has been criticized by one reviewer (Björn, 2024, p. 1115) for its "attempts to entangle linguistic phenomena with political sentiments". On the contrary, its agreeable and informative reading of the Indo-European debate, being exempt of the assumptions and commitments of the disciplinary traditions under review, reveals clearly the heavy ideological and political burden they have carried.

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