

THE ARYANS PARADIGM: HISTORICAL, LINGUISTIC, AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This thesis examines the concept of the Aryans paradigm through historical, linguistic, and archaeological lenses. It explores the origins, migrations, and cultural influence of Indo-Iranian groups, commonly referred to as Aryans, across Central and South Asia. By integrating archaeological evidence from the Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) and linguistic data from Proto-Indo-Iranian languages, this research investigates the interactions between migrating Aryan groups and established local civilizations. The study emphasizes the complexities of defining Aryans in terms of ethnicity, language, and socio-cultural impact and highlights the significance of an interdisciplinary approach for reconstructing early Indo-European history.

Keywords: Aryans, Indo-Iranians, Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC), Proto-Indo-Iranian language, migrations, Central Asia, Indo-European studies, archaeological linguistics.

The Aryans paradigm occupies a central place in the study of early Indo-European history. The term “Aryan” has been used historically to describe groups of Indo-Iranian speakers who migrated across Central and South Asia during the second and third millennia BCE. Understanding the Aryans’ role in shaping early civilizations requires integrating linguistic evidence, archaeological findings, and historical texts.

This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the Aryans’ identity, migration patterns, and cultural influence by focusing on both material culture, especially from the Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC), and linguistic reconstructions from Proto-Indo-Iranian.

The research addresses four main questions:

1. Who were the Aryans, and how can their identity be established through historical, linguistic, and archaeological evidence?
2. What were their migration patterns across Central and South Asia?
3. How did Aryan migrations influence the socio-cultural and linguistic landscapes of local civilizations?
4. What methodological frameworks can best integrate archaeology and linguistics to study the Aryans paradigm?

Early studies of the Aryans focused primarily on linguistic reconstruction. Pioneers such as William Jones (1786) first observed affinities among Indo-European languages, leading to the identification of Indo-Iranian as a major branch. Modern scholarship, including works by Mallory (1989) and

Fortson (2010), emphasizes a multidisciplinary approach, combining linguistic, archaeological, and historical data to trace Aryan migrations.

Archaeological studies, particularly those by V.I. Sarianidi, have highlighted the BMAC as a crucial cultural and economic hub of the early second millennium BCE (Sarianidi, 1998; 2001). Excavations at Gonur-depe reveal advanced urban planning, irrigation systems, religious complexes, and craft specialization, suggesting interaction with migrating Indo-Iranian groups (Lamberg-Karlovsky, 2003; Possehl, 2002). Linguistic studies identify Proto-Indo-Iranian vocabulary reflecting technology, religion, and social structures, which may indicate contact between Aryans and BMAC populations (Parpola, 2015; Witzel, 1995).

Despite extensive research, debates persist regarding the Aryans' precise role in BMAC. Some scholars argue for direct settlement, while others suggest interaction without direct political or urban control (Mallory & Adams, 1997). This thesis aims to clarify these ambiguities by synthesizing archaeological and linguistic evidence.

This study employs an interdisciplinary methodology combining:

- 1) Historical Analysis: Reviewing textual evidence from Vedic, Avestan, and classical sources.
- 2) Linguistic Reconstruction: Analyzing Proto-Indo-Iranian vocabulary, morphology, and phonology to trace cultural and technological influence.
- 3) Archaeological Contextualization: Examining artifacts, urban layouts, irrigation systems, and religious structures from BMAC sites.
- 4) Comparative Synthesis: Integrating linguistic and material evidence to reconstruct Aryan migration patterns and interactions with BMAC populations.

Data were drawn from primary archaeological reports (Sarianidi, 1998; 2001), linguistic databases, and comparative Indo-European studies. Excavations at Gonur-depe, the BMAC's central settlement, reveal urban complexes including fortifications, religious temenos, necropolises, and specialized craft areas (Sarianidi, 2001). Artifacts such as ceramics, metalwork, and ritual objects indicate extensive trade and cultural exchange with regions of Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley (Possehl, 2002). Although no direct evidence confirms Aryan urban construction, the presence of Proto-Indo-Iranian cultural markers in material culture suggests interaction.

Proto-Indo-Iranian lexicon reconstructed from Vedic Sanskrit and Avestan reveals terms associated with agriculture, animal husbandry, religious rites, and urban features. Examples include words for dwellings, irrigation channels, religious offerings, and domesticated animals (Parpola, 2015). These linguistic elements, combined with BMAC archaeological context, imply the Aryans adopted and transmitted elements of BMAC culture without necessarily being city founders.

Based on linguistic and archaeological evidence, Aryan migrations likely originated in the Central Asian steppes during the late third and early second millennium BCE. Groups moved both eastward into the Indian subcontinent and southward into Iran. This migration coincides chronologically with the decline of BMAC urban centers, suggesting cultural interactions and potential assimilation (Mallory, 1989; Fortson, 2010).

The Aryans paradigm is complex, encompassing ethnicity, language, and socio-cultural influence. While archaeological evidence does not confirm direct Aryan governance of BMAC cities, linguistic and material data indicate intensive interaction. Aryans contributed to the diffusion of religious concepts (e.g., Soma/Haoma rituals), domesticated animals, and technological vocabulary across

Central and South Asia. These findings support a model of cultural exchange rather than direct conquest or settlement.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary analysis demonstrates the importance of combining linguistic reconstruction with archaeological context. The Aryans paradigm cannot be fully understood through a single discipline, as both language and material culture provide complementary insights into ancient population movements and cultural integration.

This thesis concludes that the Aryans were mobile Indo-Iranian groups whose migrations in the second and third millennia BCE intersected with established civilizations such as BMAC. Although they were not the primary builders of BMAC cities, Aryans actively participated in cultural and linguistic exchanges, leaving a significant imprint on local populations. The integration of archaeological and linguistic evidence clarifies the Aryans' role in shaping early Central and South Asian civilizations. Future studies, including ancient DNA analysis from BMAC sites, may further elucidate the genetic and cultural dimensions of Aryan interactions.

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