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978-1-107-05453-0 - The Indo-European Controversy: Facts and Fallacies in Historical Linguistics

Asya Pereltsvaig and Martin W. Lewis

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The Indo-European Controversy

Over the past decade, a group of prolific and innovative evolutionary biologists has sought to reinvent historical linguistics through the use of phylogenetic and phylogeographical analysis, treating cognates like genes and conceptualizing the spread of languages in terms of the diffusion of viruses. Using these techniques, researchers claim to have located the origin of the Indo-European language family in Neolithic Anatolia, challenging the near-consensus view that it emerged in the grasslands north of the Black Sea thousands of years later. But despite its widespread celebration in the global media, this new approach fails to withstand scrutiny. As languages do not evolve like biological species and do not spread like viruses, the model produces incoherent results, contradicted by the empirical record at every turn. This book asserts that the origin and spread of languages must be examined primarily through the time-tested techniques of linguistic analysis, rather than those of evolutionary biology.

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