Traces of Yeniseian people upon the East European plain

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Abstract

In North and central part of the East European plain there are many hydronyms which are usually supposed to be of Finno-Ugric origin, but actually can’t be sufficiently explained through any of existing Finno-Ugric language. These hydronyms can be subdivided into three groups: 1) hydronyms with \[^{sa}\]/\[^{ʃa}\]/\[^{ʒa}\]/\[^{ta}\]/\[^{da}\]/\[^{ra}\]/\[^{na}\] ending, 2) with \[^{ga}\] ending, 3) with \[^{ma}\]/\[^{va}\] ending. These hydronyms can be explained through Yeniseian languages, for instance, in Ket language: /ses\[^{j}\] – “river” /qoks\[^{j}\] – “stream”, “creek” /ul\[^{j}\] – “water”. In an ancient Yeniseian language the root for “river” could probably have variants \[^{ses}\] and \[^{tet}\] and then it is possible to suppose the following transformations: \[^{ses}\]/*\[^{sas}\] \[^{sa}\] \[^{ʃa}\] \[^{ʒa}\], \[^{tet}\]/*\[^{tat}\] \[^{ta}\] \[^{da}\]/\[^{ra}\] \[^{na}\]. Hydronyms with \[^{ga}\] ending correlate with Ket root \[^{qoks}\]; and hydronyms with \[^{ma}\]/\[^{va}\] ending correlate with Ket root \[^{ul}\] “water”.

Keywords: Yeniseian languages; substrate hydronymy; Pit-Comb ware technocomplex

1. Introduction into the problem

In North and central parts of East European plain there are some place names which can’t be explained in a sufficient way through Uralic or through Indo-European languages and which are supposed to be so-called substrate Pre-Finno-Ugric toponymy.

I suppose the following quotation is very illustrative:

A much more complicated is the question of the possibility of classifying the Volga-Oka languages as belonging to a family of currently existing languages, and determining the ethnicity of their bearers. In any case, one can strongly doubt in their belonging to the Finno-Ugric languages. Several thousand Volga-Oka toponymic names represented on the map of the European part of the USSR cannot be explained with the help of the existing Finno-Ugric languages. However, there were several witty attempts of such explanation. For example, the name of Pinega – a big right tributary of the Northern Dvina – was compared with the Finnish pieni joki, i.e.: “small river”, Megrega – mägräjoki, i.e.: “badger river”; the name of Uftyuga could be explained as “bear river” (Mordvinic Erzya: ovto “bear”), Kalga as “fish river” (cf. Finnish kala “fish”), Volga as “white river” (cf. Finnish valnea “white”), and so on. However, all these particular interpretations, based entirely on random consonances, are a fall into the sea among a mass of utterly incomprehensible names such as: Votlozhma, Limenda, Sviyaga, Kostroma and so on. Moreover, sound complex \[^{ma}\] in none of currently existing

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1 Serebrennikov supposed that people who spread such substrate toponymy originated from the region that lays between Volga and Oka rivers (pic. 1), and that’s why he named these languages Volga-Oka languages.
2 See pic. 3.
3 See pic. 1, pic. 3.
4 See pic. 4.
5 See pic. 3.
6 See pic. 5.
7 The location of the Votlozhma river is yet unknown.
8 See pic. 6.
9 See pic. 7.
Finno-Ugric languages means has the meaning of “river”. The sound complex of *sha, sa* could be reduced to Mari word *iksa* “small river” with a big stretch, but this comparison also is very doubtful.

If we give up the intention to identify the Volga-Oka languages with the Finno-Ugric languages, then it turns out that there was no place for the Finno-Ugric on the ancient territory of the European part of the USSR. The ancient toponymy of Karelian-Finnish, Mordovian and Mari republics \(^{11}\) clearly shows that there were no threat-Finns in these territories before (Serebrennikov 1955: 28)

It is supposed that people who created this substrate toponymy were also creators of so-called Pit-Comb technocomplex \(^{12}\) (Krainov 1986: 8). The technocomplex was named after the characteristic way of decorating of the ceramics, which looks like the prints of the crests (pic. 2). This technocomplex was also connected with petroglyphs (for more details see: Lobanova 1996: 87 – 88).

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\(^{10}\) See pic. 8.

\(^{11}\) Now they are: the Republic of Karelia, the Republic of Mordovia and the Mari El Republic correspondingly (see pic. 9).

\(^{12}\) In this text term *technocomplex* is used instead of widely used term *archaeological culture*. Technocomplex can be determined as a regularly repeated system of artifacts connected with a certain region. It is much more correct to avoid using term *culture* when the discourse is about technocomplexes in order there would be no associations with cultures which are subject of cultural anthropology. Not every technocomplex is a culture, or, in other words, not every technocomplex assumes its own separate ethnic component.
The Pit-Comb Ware technocomplex existed in Northeast Europe (Scandinavia, Byelorussia, Russian Northwest, Baltic States, see pic. 1).
The time of existence of Pit-Comb technocomplex correlates well with Atlantic period when the climate was more humid and warmer than that of the present. In the Atlantic period waters were rich in fishes and shellfishes, marshes teeming with birds, and forests where deer and wild boars, as well as numerous small species, were plentiful, and thus main activities of people who created Pit-Comb technocomplex was hunting, fishing, and gathering.

Pic. 2. Some samples of the Pit-Comb Ware from Karelia (image source: Lobanova 1996: 90)
Pic. 3. Locations of Pinega and Uftyuga rivers (image source: Pinega river)

Pic. 4. The map of Megrega river (the map has been made of a screenshot of Wikimedia maps)
Pic. 5. The location of Kalga river (images sources: Reki Karelii and a screenshot of Google maps)

Pic. 6. The location of Limenda river (the map has been made of a screenshot of Wikimedia maps)
Pic. 7. The location of Sviyaga river (the map has been made of a Bing maps screenshot)

Pic. 8. The location of Kostroma river (the scheme has been made of the scheme represented in Kostroma River)
2. Ket language is the key for understanding the substrate toponymy

It is possible to say that the hydronyms, which were considered by Serebrennikov, can be subdivided into the following three groups:

1) hydronyms with [sa]/[ʃa]/[ʒa]/[ta]/[da]/[ra]/[na] ending;
2) hydronyms with [ga] ending;
3) hydronyms with [ma]/[va] ending.

These three groups can be explained through Yeniseian languages.\(^{13}\)

In Ket\(^{14}\) language there are three roots with meaning “water”/ “river”: /ses/ – “river” (Werner 2002: 76); /qoks/ – “stream”, “well” (Werner 2002: 58); /ul/ – “water” (Werner 2002: 97).

Hydronyms with: [sa]/[ʃa]/[ʒa]/[ta]/[da]/[ra]/[na] ending correlate with Ket root /ses/ – “river”.

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\(^{13}\) See pic. 1.
\(^{14}\) Ket language is the sole surviving language of Yeniseian language family and the best described language of the family.
It is interesting to note the following: in Pumpokol\textsuperscript{15} language root “river” has the form of /tet/; in Arin\textsuperscript{16} language this root has the form of /set/, /sat/; in Kott\textsuperscript{17} language this root has the form of [jet] (Werner 1997b: 170) and also the form of [tjet] (Werner 1997a: 195). Thus, it is possible to say that in ancient Yeniseian language (i.e.: in a language that was the ancestor of all modern Yeniseian) the root for “river” could have variants of implementations: [ses] and [tet]. And then it is possible to suppose that form [ses] could give forms [sa]/[ja]/[3a] and form [tet] could give forms [ta]/[da]/[ra]/[na]. Also, we should keep in mind that these transformations could be the results of the influence of some Uralic languages. The following schemes of transformation can be drawn:

\begin{center}
\begin{align*}
\text{ses/*sas} & \rightarrow sa \rightarrow jà \rightarrow 3a \\
\text{tet/*tat} & \rightarrow ta \rightarrow da/ra \rightarrow na
\end{align*}
\end{center}


3. Some preliminary conclusions and further perspectives

1) It seems that substrate hydronyms of East European plain were created by some people who spoke a very ancient version of a Yeniseian language: speaking about Kott hydronyms with [jet]/[tjet] ending Werner says that they are separated from Assan hydronyms which have /ul/ ending (Werner 1997a: 195); while in the case of substrate hydronyms of East European plain we can see that different groups of hydronyms aren’t separated but coexist within the same area.

2) It can be perspective to try to decode the meaning of unclear place names through Yeniseian roots.

3) Reconstruction of ancient landscapes can help to understand the ancient representation of the world and topography.

4) In some Uralic languages there are some elements that can be interpreted as Yeniseian substrate elements (for more details see: Filimonov 2012). Also it is important that there is an unidentified substrate in Sami (for more details see Aikio), and thus it can be perspective to try to decode those substrate elements through Yeniseian languages.

5) The data of genetics seem to correlate with data of linguistics, i.e.: on the territory of Scandinavia where Sami were widely spread in ancient time (Hansen, Olsen 2004) can be seen some percentage of Y haplogroup Q (pic. 10), on the other hand Q haplogroup demonstrates rather high percentage among Ket population (Karafet 2002). These facts correlate with Yeniseian hydronyms of Eastern Europe and with the fact that in Sami there is an unidentified substrate.

\textsuperscript{15} Pumpokol is one of the Yeniseian languages. It has been extinct since the 18\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{16} Arin is one of the Yeniseian languages. It has been extinct since the 18\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{17} Kott is one of the Yeniseian languages. It has been extinct since about 1850s.

\textsuperscript{18} I suppose that [ma] and [va] elements should be considered as variants of the same components of hydronyms.

\textsuperscript{19} Assan is a Yeniseian language; it became extinct in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.
Data of genetics need not follow data of linguistics precisely, but if the issue is about cultural contacts, then there definitely should be certain traces of genetic contacts since languages and cultures are spread not by themselves, but by people.

Pic. 10. Geographic spreading of Q haplogroup (image source: Haplogroup Q-M242)

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*Reki Karelii* [Реки Карелии] (The rivers of Karelia) [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Реки_Карелии](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Реки_Карелии) – accessed August 2018

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