

How Far Can the Archaeologist Trust the Historical Linguist?

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While archaeologists and archaeobotanists can support their conclusions with objective and scientific evidence, this is rarely the case with linguistic reconstructions. Even when we are able to reconstruct the forms of words with some accuracy, semantic reconstruction may be inaccurate because of undetected changes in the meanings of words. One case where reconstructions can be confronted with archaeobotanical findings may provide a picture of the reliability of the former. The subject is of particular relevance to the study of cereals.

In addition to the uncertainties of comparative reconstruction, two very new (and as yet unpublished) pieces of information have made it necessary to re-evaluate much of the recent work on earlier stages of Dravidian, including the history of rice. First, there is strong new evidence to support the Elamo-Dravidian (Proto-Zagrosian) hypothesis, which has been in limbo since David McAlpin left academia some thirty years ago. In addition, new light has been thrown on the history of early contacts between Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages. The implications of this new information will be discussed.