Digging for Words
Archaeolinguistic case studies from the
XV Nordic TAG Conference held at the
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Edited by
Rune Iversen
Guus Kroonen

This volume offers a collection of case studies at the interface between linguistics and
archaeology. These case studies were presented at a session titled "Archaeology and Language"
at the XV Nordic Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) conference, held at the University
of Copenhagen in April 2015. The main goal of these sessions was to present new and ongoing
studies that combine aspects of archaeology and linguistics and theoretical perspectives on
the field of archaeolinguistics, and to encourage new, fruitful studies on archaeology and language.
The questions raised in this session concern the future of archaeolinguistic research. What
can archaeologists and linguists learn from each other’s disciplines? What kind of research
questions are particularly prime to future research areas?

Rune Iversen is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Archaeology, SAXO Institute,
at the University of Copenhagen. His research interests centre on the European Neolithic and
Bronze Age, with a special focus on the third millennium BCE, cultural diversity, sociocultural
transformation processes and archaeolinguistics.

Guus Kroonen is an Associate Research Professor at the Institute for Nordic Studies and
Linguistics at the University of Copenhagen and an Assistant Professor at the Leiden University
Center for Linguistics. He is a historical linguist specialising in the Indo-European languages,
and his research focuses on etymology and protoinsular language contacts.

Contributors:
Kai Bellamy, Jeff Benjamins, Annabelle Bonnke, Ellen Debenjak, John S. Henderson, Kathryn
M. Hudson, Rune Iversen, Guus Kroonen, Marka Létala, Deborah Mostert, Johanna Nichols,
Peach, Krista, Jorgen Kristiansen, Ulf Olssen, Richard A. Rhodes.

This is an extremely well-crafted and well-crafted collection
of articles. It should well earn us to become a reference for how to
integrate archaeology and historical linguistics.

Kristian Kristiansen University of Gothenburg

Will involve deeper thinking on broader and more important anthropological
questions, such as the relationship between material culture and
speech communities, as well as the expansion of populations and the
interaction between them.

Dr. Tao Li, Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History
(The EurasianJungle Project)
## Contents

List of Maps and Illustrations ............................................................................................................................................ iv
List of Tables ..................................................................................................................................................................... iv
List of Contributors ............................................................................................................................................................ v
Session Programme ........................................................................................................................................................... vi
Preface .............................................................................................................................................................................. vii

*Rune Iversen and Guus Kroonen*

Investigating Interaction between South America and West Mexico through the Lexicon of Metallurgy ............... 1
*Kate Bellamy*

(Re)considering the Archaeolinguistics of Mesoamerica ................................................................................................. 20
*Kathryn M. Hudson and John S. Henderson*

Re-examining the Linguistic Prehistory of Aleut ............................................................................................................. 31
*Anna Berge*

An Archaeology of Air ..................................................................................................................................................... 39
*Jeff Benjamin*

Maritime Helsinki – Two Case Studies Combining Archaeology and Linguistics in the Helsinki Archipelago.............. 46
*Annukka Debenjak, Marika Luhtala and Paula Kouki*

Vectors of Language Spread at the Central Steppe Periphery: Finno-Ugric as a Catalyst Language ......................... 58
*Johanna Nichols and Richard A. Rhodes*

Notes on the Indo-European Vocabulary of Sheep, Wool and Textile Production........................................................... 69
*Birgit Anette Olsen*

Ancient Witches and Modern Folktales in the Archaeological Records of Northern Italy............................................ 78
*Debora Moretti*
Preface

In this volume of British Archaeological Reports (BAR), we offer a selection of case studies on the interface between linguistics and archaeology. These case studies were presented at the session ‘Archaeology and Language – the Future of Archaeo-Linguistic Studies’ at the XV Nordic Theoretical Archaeology Group (Nordic TAG) hosted by the Departments of Archaeology and Near Eastern Archaeology at the University of Copenhagen in April 2015.

The concept leading to this session was conceived following a rather serendipitous cooperation between the two session organisers that had begun at Copenhagen University several years earlier (Iversen & Kroonen, 2015, 2017). Although being active in different fields, archaeology and linguistics, we found that the chronological and geographic scope of our independent research projects showed a considerable overlap, notably in the isolation and interpretation of the evidence for contact between hypothesized cultural and linguistic groups in Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Denmark (see Iversen and Kroonen 2015, 2017). It was the ensuing dialogue between our disciplines that inspired us to organize this meeting.

The main goal of the session was to present new and ongoing studies that combine aspects of archaeology and linguistics, theoretical perspectives on the field of archaeolinguistics and to encourage more new, worthwhile studies on archaeology and language. The questions we raised in this session focussed on the future of archaeolinguistic research, namely: What can we learn from each other? And what kind of research questions are particularly suitable for future integrated studies?

We, as the organisers of the session, were very happy with the great interest it attracted. It was the largest session at that year’s Nordic TAG with contributions covering large parts of the world and spanning many different time periods and topics (see below). In particular, we would like to thank the linguists and archaeologists who contributed to this volume, but we also like to thank the rest of the participants who presented their papers, as well as all of those who attended our session and participated in the discussions.

The session resulted in a number of contributions, which we have ordered according to geographic location. We set off in the Americas, following the metallurgical links between South America and West Mexico as studied by Kate Bellamy. We remain here to enjoy John S. Henderson and Kathryn M. Hudson’s study of the archaeolinguistics of Mesoamerica, then move on to North America with Anna Berge’s re-examination of the linguistic pre-history of the Aleut languages. Somewhere along the heavily urbanized Atlantic coast of the United States, we take off with Jeff Benjamin’s archaeology of air, landing in Europe to engage in an archaeolinguistic survey of the Helsinki archipelago. From here Johanna Nichols guides us to the east, tracing the spread of the Uralic languages along the ancient Fur Road. Finally, we turn back to Europe with Birgit Olsen’s inroads into the Indo-European terminology for wool and textiles in Italic. Here, we conclude our journey with Debora Moretti’s archaeolinguistic study of the North-Italian folklore concerning witchcraft.

Thanks are due to the staff at BAR Publishing, in particular Jane Burkowski and Chris Myers, for their help in producing this volume. We also thank the anonymous peer reviewers, both those involved in the initial assessment of the individual papers and those who reviewed the volume in its entirety at a later stage. The scholars behind these two rounds of reviews were enormously helpful at raising the quality of this publication, for which we are highly grateful. Finally, we thank Anthony Jakob, who assisted enormously in proofing and correcting the language of the final draft of this volume.

Rune Iversen (University of Copenhagen)
Guus Kroonen (Universities of Leiden and Copenhagen)

References