Towards «Dene-Basque»

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Especially after World War II, Karl Bouda has made numerous attempts to relate Basque to other languages/language groups resting, as with others, on the classical ideal of knowledge - to reduce an «infinite» number of propositions to a small number of postulates.

So it is a pity that Professor Bouda (1901-1979) no longer is able to watch and to contribute to present-day omnicomparative research. In his comparative work, Caucasian did play a prominent role, even leading him to a linguistic entity called «Euskarro-Caucasian». One of the North Caucasian words supposed to be cognate with Basque was the term for «wolf»: (1) Basque otso - Batsic borg, Áwarian bac, etc. Bouda not only concentrated on Basque-Caucasian but also postulated relationships to Uralic, Sino-Tibetan, Chukchi-Kamchatkan and Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian). A nice Austronesian (AN) equivalent (not mentioned by Bouda) can also be found in the case of «wolf»: AN wasu, Kavalan wasu’, Pazeh wats’u’, Ami watsu (all three Formosan languages).

This Basque-North Caucasian-Austronesian equation then would contribute to the establishment of the Dene-Caucasian proto-form: wats'u. The other members of this macro-family are Yeniseian, Sino-Tibetan, and Eyak-Athapascan. The position of Austronesian has not been clarified so far; maybe it is a «mischsprache» as it seems to have Nostratic elements too.

The Proto-Nostratic form for «wolf, dog» is k'/q'üjnA > Indo-European kwö̂n-/kun- «dog» (cf. English hound), Uralic küjna «wolf», Altaic k'ina- «id.» - and therefore not connected to the above Dene-Caucasian example (Note that Kartvelian = South Caucasian is a Nostratic language).

Another Dene-Caucasian example (given by Bouda) is:

(2) Basque e-ema-n «give» - Artshi (East Caucasian) ma’ - AN li-ma «hand, five» - Thai my «hand» (Chukchi my-ng- «hand» would have to be interpreted as a loan then).

Bouda has listed other cases which are re-visited in the following.

(3) Basque bihi- East Caucasian x’i(n) «seed, corn, core» - AN bənih, binih (with infix -ə/ən-) «seed».

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(4) Basque (h)ez-e - Abchasic 3a - AN ba’t’ah, Tagalog basa «wet».
(5) Basque lagun «companion, comrade, husband, etc.» - Cherkessian leγ ‘mate, comrade» - AN laki «husband».
(6) Basque berri «new» - Awarian babar «young» - AN bayu «new».
(7) Basque ur «water», e-ur-i «rain» - Awarian or «river», Lakkadian b 2e-ar «lake» - AN udan, Malagasy urana «rain».
(8) Basque e-bak-i «cut» - AN bijak (with infix -ij-?) «separate, divide».
(9) Basque gose «unger, hungry» - Darginic guš, Lakkadian kasi «id.» - AN gutm «starve».
(10) Basque gau «night» - AN γαβi «+ evening» - Thai g’am «night».

Also in the beginning of the Fifties, Robert Shafer, following in the wake of Edward Sapir, showed that the North American Na-dene stock was linked with Sino-Tibetan 3. Mutatis mutandis, both Bouda and Shafer may therefore be said to have been forerunners of what today is called Dene-Caucasian.

The word for «smoke» for instance would give a good example: Basque khe, Cherkessian k’e, Kukish-Lushei khu «smoke, vapour», Thai-Lao gwán «smoke», Athapascan -gúb «foggy», Thingt gwas «fog».

Basque therefore would not stand alone as sometimes postulated. The above and other cases would all give evidence for a prehistoric culture of the Aurignacien period extending from the Atlantic Ocean to Lake Baikal. The latter would have been then also the original homeland of the Indians speaking Eyak-Athapascan (who later crossed the Bering Land Bridge). Consequently, the correct name of the macro-family would be «Dene-Basque» (going from east to west as is common practice) 4.

LABURPENA

Karl Bouda eta Robert Shafer jaunek aurretik egindako saioetatik abiatuz, Dene-Euskara (Dene-Kaukasiera Euskararekin) izeneko macrofamilia berri baten adibidea ematen dira. Austronesiar familia ere erlazionatuta egon liteke.

2. The Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen.


4. My remarks here are a follow-up of W.W. SCHUHMACHER, Basque and Modern Omnicomparative Linguistics, FLV 53 (1989), 50-51, where «Dene-Basque» here however is used in narrow sense, i.e., the Nostratic component is neglected. I have not been able to consult the work of S. CHIRIKBA «on the North Caucasian [i.e. Dene-Caucasian] character of Basque»; cf. V.T. SHEVOROSHCHIKIN and T.L. MARKEY (eds.), Typology, Relationship, and Time, Ann Arbor, 1986, p. XVI. Cf. also the article of M. MORVAN, A propos du basque (H)IL, FLV 53 (1989), 45-48, also referring further to possible Amerind relations (which then must date from the common period in Asia, if not
Based on a previous attempt made by Karl Bouda and Robert Schafer, a new macrofamily called Dene-Basque (Dene-Caucasian with Basque), apparently related to the Astronesian family, is here illustrated.