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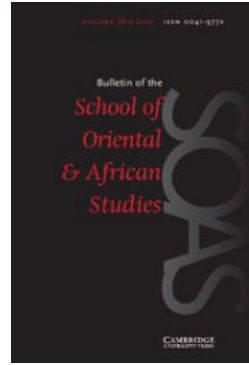
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WILLIAM H. BAXTER and LAURENT SAGART: *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction*. x, 448 pp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. £50. ISBN 978 0 19 994537 5.

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Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies / Volume 78 / Issue 02 / June 2015, pp 413 - 414

DOI: 10.1017/S0041977X15000361, Published online: 15 June 2015

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0041977X15000361

How to cite this article:

D.M. Goldstein (2015). Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 78, pp 413-414 doi:10.1017/S0041977X15000361

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Or so it seems. But then six pages later, there is a scene in which the Master P'u-ching reveals to Wu Yüeh-niang that Hsi-men Ch'ing has been reborn as their son Hsi-men Hsiao-ko (p. 417). Roy notes that this is what P'u-ching claims to be so (pp. xxvii, xlvi).

One can only begin to appreciate the work that has gone into this volume, with its numerous pages of notes, bibliography and index, and to the five volumes as a whole. The notes list occurrences of similar phrases or lines from other works of literature, and especially those from vernacular literature and various performing arts, which give us a sense of the wide reading of the anonymous Ming author and of Roy's erudition, since we still do not have good searchable databases of Chinese vernacular literature and drama texts, etc. to achieve something comparable. We are indebted to Professor Roy. The novel is a masterwork of Chinese fiction, and we celebrate the completion of his translation.

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This book is a major event. In a tour de force crowning decades of work on Chinese historical phonology and morphology, Baxter and Sagart offer a new reconstruction of the segmental inventory of Old Chinese (OC). Chapter 1 introduces the method and outlines the work as a whole, which is followed in chapter 2 by an overview of what is known about Old Chinese. Old Chinese is defined as the period from the earliest texts (the Shang dynasty oracle bones from c. 1250 BCE) to the unification of China under the Qin dynasty in 221 BCE. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the reconstruction that sets the stage for chapters 4 and 5, where Baxter and Sagart home in on the onsets and rimes, respectively. Chapter 6 concludes the book with a conspectus of OC, a sketch of some outstanding problems, and prospects for future research. An appendix of reconstructed forms and an index round out the work (a dossier of proposed sound changes from Old to Middle Chinese would also have been helpful). While this book will be required reading for anyone interested in the history of Chinese, the reconstruction it offers is not without its problems, and below I call attention to some issues concerning the proposed consonant inventory and syllable structure.

The origin of the distinction between the Middle Chinese (MC) Type A (non-palatal) and Type B (palatal) syllables has long been debated (p. 68). Karlgren simply reconstructed Type B syllables with an approximant *-y- before the nucleus (*Grammatica Serica: Script and Phonetics in Chinese and Sino-Japanese*, Stockholm 1940). Pulleyblank argued that Type B syllables originally had a long vowel, which underwent breaking and thereby gave rise to the approximant *-y- ("The consonantal system of Old Chinese", *Asia Major* 9, 1962, 58–144; "The consonantal system of Old Chinese, part 2", *Asia Major* 9, 1962, 206–65; he later abandoned this analysis). Starostin (Rekonstrukcija drevnekitajskoj fonologičeskoj sistemy, Moscow 1989) and Zhèngzhāng Shàngfāng 鄭張尚芳 ("上古韻母系統和四等、介音、聲調的發源問題," 溫州師範學院學報 4, 1987, 67–90) reversed

the correspondence, arguing that Type B syllables had short vowels. Norman (“Pharyngealization in early Chinese”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114, 1994, 397–408) took a different tack and argued that Type-A syllables were pharyngealized while Type-B syllables were not, and only the latter underwent palatalization. This is the analysis that Baxter and Sagart themselves advocate “on the grounds that it has the most explanatory power” (p. 69) and because it accounts for the data (p. 70) “more naturally than competing proposals.”

While their proposal is able to capture a number of phenomena, it also creates certain complications. Baxter and Sagart themselves acknowledge some typologically unusual properties (p. 73): “Reconstructing type-A syllables with pharyngealized onsets obviously leads to a very large inventory of consonants, in which all plain consonants have a pharyngealized counterpart, regardless of place or manner of articulation. We are aware that such a system is typologically unusual: in languages where pharyngealization affects consonants, it usually does not affect all of them; for instance, pharyngealized aspirated stops and pharyngealized voiceless consonants are probably quite rare.” Crucial here is whether “typologically unusual” actually means “without parallel”. If the latter, then the reconstruction violates the Uniformitarian Hypothesis. There is furthermore a question of phonetics. Pharyngealized and velarized consonants are very difficult to distinguish acoustically (Ladefoged and Johnson, *A Course in Phonetics*, 7th ed., Boston, 2014, p. 245), but Baxter and Sagart do not tell us how or why they settled specifically on the former.

Looking beyond OC, there is the question of how the reconstruction of the pharyngealized consonants sits with the Sino-Tibetan phylum more broadly. On the assumption of a Stammbaum with an initial split between Sinitic and Tibeto-Burman, pharyngealization in OC is either an inheritance from Proto-Sino-Tibetan or an innovation. If it is inherited, one wonders why it does not show up anywhere else (to my knowledge) in Tibeto-Burman. If, however, pharyngealization is an innovation, then it has to develop and recede in fairly short order, as it needs to arise after Sinitic splits off only to then vanish between OC and MC). Baxter and Sagart allude to this scenario on p. 74: “It is quite possible that the pharyngealization that led to the changes listed above actually existed only for a short time and, being typologically unusual, was rather unstable and soon led to further changes”. Perhaps, but on their reconstruction, the transition from OC to MC is one of massive phonological reorganization, as it is also characterized by tonogenesis, loss of the labiovelars and uvulars, the rise of retroflex segments, as well as the alveolo-palatal affricates.

This study is rightly attuned to syllabic structure, but the authors could unify their observations (e.g. on pp. 50–54 and 68) by postulating iambic stress for OC, such that disyllabic words would have been accented on the right syllable (not unlike what Sagart proposed in *The Roots of Old Chinese*, Amsterdam, 1999). The robust asymmetries between the initial and final syllables of disyllabic words that Baxter and Sagart postulate for OC (e.g. vowel reduction in so-called “presyllables”) would fall out from the greater prominence of the right syllable. Iambic stress would furthermore align OC with the “sesquisyllable” proposed for Tibeto-Burman (Matisoff, “Tonogenesis in Southeast Asia”, *Consonant Types and Tones*, Los Angeles, 1973, 71–95).

Despite these concerns, I want to reiterate my admiration for this ambitious, ground-breaking achievement.

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