

BECKWITH Christopher (2002). *Mediaeval Tibeto-Burman Languages* (Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000). Leiden, Boston, Köln : Brill.

The book is a collection of papers on Tibeto-Burman historical linguistics which were presented at a Tibetology conference held at Leiden University in the summer of 2000. The appearance of this anthology is more noteworthy than the casual observer might suspect. Studies on Tibetan language and linguistics usually represent a vanishingly small minority of the papers presented at seminars of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, which are held at three-year intervals. It is a tribute to Christopher Beckwith that he managed to convene an entire session devoted not just to Tibetan, but to Tibeto-Burman linguistics.

In keeping with the ever palpable weight of Tibetan philological and scriptural tradition at such conferences, it was fitting that the twelve contributions to this session deal with the linguistic study of Tibeto-Burman languages with the earliest attested literary traditions. Since these traditions all date from the Middle Ages, the anthology is appropriately entitled *Mediaeval Tibeto-Burman Languages*. A thirteenth, externally solicited contribution by David Bradley is a sadly misguided attempt to place the twelve valuable symposium papers within the broader context of the Tibeto-Burman language family as a whole.

The book contains no less than five contributions by the editor if we include the Introduction. We shall discuss all five of these contributions in no particular order, but we shall begin with Beckwith's Introduction. In addition to listing the papers contained in the volume and offering some general observations on historical linguistics and Tibeto-Burman, Beckwith's introduction contains

three interesting statements. First, Beckwith reminds us of an important feature of the 1972 *Conspectus* by Paul Benedict:

...the only premodern Tibeto-Burman languages cited (unsystematically) in the book are what Benedict calls 'Written Tibetan' and 'Written Burmese'. These terms are in fact equatable with whatever is contained in, respectively, Jäschke's Tibetan-English dictionary and Judson's two Burmese dictionaries, both of which, though excellent, contain many modernisms alongside numerous archaisms. (pp. xii-xiv)

This is not a new observation, but it cannot be pointed out too often when dealing with the many Tibeto-Burman roots which Benedict 'set up' teleologically, to use Benedict's own term, through an imaginative process of syllable canon stuffing whilst keeping the 'Written Tibetan' and 'Written Burmese' in the forefront of his mind. Beckwith's second interesting statement is that the old Indo-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan phylogenetic model, defined by the assumption of a fundamental bifurcation of the language family into Chinese vs. all other languages of the family, is 'highly unlikely'. I agree. Third, Beckwith expresses another opinion which by contrast is not informed by a sound understanding of historical linguistics, particularly with regard to syntax. Beckwith opines that the typological difference in word order between Sinitic and Karen (SVO) vs. all other Tibeto-Burman languages (SOV) poses a 'fatal problem' to the Sino-Bodic hypothesis. More fundamentally, Beckwith misunderstands Sino-Bodic as being a higher-order subgroup comprising Chinese and 'Tibetic', whereas Sino-Bodic is a hypothetical higher-order subgroup comprising Sinitic and Bodic, and Bodic is a more inclusive group than Bodish, let alone Tibetic.

A second contribution by Beckwith reproduces Robert Shafer's 1943 Pyu data but 'mechanically' changes some of Shafer's orthographic conventions, yielding a two-page Pyu-English glossary. Any work on Pyu, an extinct and sorely neglected Tibeto-Burman literary language, is to be applauded. However, there

would have been more reason for applause if the author were to have undertaken the analysis of a hitherto unstudied text from the still largely unexplored corpus of Pyu texts. Beckwith perpetuates the antiquated and inappropriate term 'Myazedi inscription' for the Kubyaukkyi inscriptions. The Kubyaukkyi inscriptions were formerly known as the 'Myazedi inscription' because they were believed to be part of the grounds of the Myazedi temple, but it is now known that they actually formed part of the courtyard of the neighbouring Kubyaukkyi temple, which was built by a certain *râjakumâra* 'prince', viz. the son of the third historically attested Burmese king Kyanzitha (*imperabat* 1086-1112). The quadri-lingual inscriptions on the two obelisks are accordingly sometimes also called the 'Râjakumâra stone inscriptions'. Moreover, any future student of Pyu should keep in mind that, though Shafer discerned minor differences in grammar between the language recorded in the two varieties of Pyu script, which he termed 'Old Pyu' and 'Late Pyu', it is now known that the two varieties of Pyu script were actually in contemporaneous usage. Only an exhaustive study of the entire Pyu corpus will enable us to know whether the language recorded in the two scripts is a single language showing some gradual historical development or two related Tibeto-Burman dialects spoken within the confines of Pyu civilisation.

A third paper by Beckwith deals with two purported isoglosses ostensibly reflected only by Pyu *tdû* 'water' and *sû* 'ten' and Tibetan *chu* 'water' and *bcu* 'ten'. The fact of the matter is that there are several different roots which are reflected by words meaning 'water' in various modern Tibeto-Burman languages. Not all of these are derivable from *ti 'water'. For example, Limbu preserves both the widespread Tibeto-Burman root *ti as the modern form *thi*... 'millet beer', whereas Limbu *cwa/l /cwat/* 'water' may reflect the same water root seen in Beckwith's purported Pyu-Tibetan water isogloss. Limbu also reflects another water root *wa as the bound morpheme <wa-> 'water', not to mention the well-attested Tibeto-Burman 'water' root *ku. Limbu is by no means alone in reflecting more than one of the several old Tibeto-Burman

etyma denoting 'water', 'liquid', 'juice', 'fluid', etc. The root for 'ten' ostensibly reflected just by Pyu and Tibetan is more interesting, though it too may be more widespread, e.g. Bái <tsE⁴> 'ten' and perhaps the Lhokpu prefix <cu-> '-teen' in numerals from 11 to 19. It is doubtful therefore whether just one doubtful isogloss is enough to classify Pyu and Tibetan 'together at a higher node in the family tree'.

A fourth contribution by Beckwith deals with 'the Sino-Tibetan problem', a conundrum of Beckwith's own creation. The paper examines 61 selected roots and ignores most relevant Tibeto-Burman cognate sets. He treats the relationship between Chinese on one hand and the Tibeto-Burman languages minus Chinese on the other hand as being on par with the relationship of either of these two constructs with 'Japanese-Koguryoic' and Indo-European. In fact, Chinese is a subgroup within the Tibeto-Burman family, but the Tibeto-Burman languages minus Chinese is not a valid phylogenetic grouping at all. After some muddled deliberations, Beckwith concludes that 'further study is therefore needed to determine more precisely the history of the interrelationship of these four families'. No further comment is needed.

The last paper by Beckwith is co-authored by Ksenia Borisovna Kepping and provides 'a preliminary glossary of Tangut from the Tibetan transcriptions'. In fact, the Tibetan transcriptions of Tangut ideograms were not studied by Beckwith and Kepping. These were read by Kepping and myself together at the Institute for Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg, then Leningrad. There is considerable variation in the Tibetan transcriptions of a single Tangut ideogram, and the list published by Beckwith does no justice to this variation. Moreover, the Tangut ideograms do not appear alongside the corresponding transcriptions. Therefore, the interested reader will have to await the publication of the exhaustive study of the Tibetan transcriptions of the Tangut ideograms which has been prepared by Kepping and myself.

A pair of thematically related papers were contributed each by Kashinath Tamot, Rudolf Yanson, and Shobhana Chelliah &

Sohini Ray. Tamot's two wonderful papers deal with Early Classical Newar, the first being a brief but highly insightful treatise on some characteristics of Early Classical Newar, and the second a valuable 16-page glossary of Early Classical Newar forms. The first paper argues Tamot's old thesis that Early Classical Newar represents a distinct stage of development from the later stage that is conventionally termed 'Classical Newar'. He illustrates his discussion with some lexical comparisons between modern Newar, Tibetan and Benedict's Tibeto-Burman proto-forms. The article would have benefitted from a copy editor, as errors abound in the short contribution, e.g. 'this data has...' and 'Hans Jorgensen' instead Hans Jørgensen, etc. The 16-page Early Classical Newar glossary is a valuable resource, and the dated sources as well as the places of occurrence in the text are indicated for each item in the glossary.

Rudolf Yanson contributed two papers to the volume, the first being a study of the Pali influence on Burmese, and the second a brief glossary of Burmese forms which occur in 12th century epigraphy. As the vehicle of Buddhism, the Pali language served as a model for emulation, and it has long been appreciated that the influence of this Indo-Aryan tongue on the Tibeto-Burman native language of the Burmese was quite pervasive. Yanson's study of many particulars shows that the influence 'was essential and manifold, and affected important spheres of Burmese grammar. Suffice it to say that the most usual way of expressing past-present tense in modern Burmese owes its existence to Pali, while certain attributive constructions were introduced into Burmese grammar as a result of attempts to imitate Pali' (p. 56). Yanson also provides a four-page glossary of Old Burmese words from 12th century inscriptions that do not already occur in the list of Tibeto-Burman roots in Benedict's 1972 *Conspectus*, or that do occur 'but need comments'. He improves upon Benedict's system of transliteration in several respects for reasons which are lucidly explained. Yanson juxtaposes the epigraphic forms and the modern Burmese forms.

Shobhana Chelliah and Sohini Ray provide two highly informative studies on early Meithei, the first being a survey of old

Meithei manuscripts, and the second a contrastive list of 39 basic vocabulary items in archaic and modern Meithei. The old Meithei manuscript inventory describes the script used, the number and genre of the manuscripts as well as their dating, authorship, housing and present ownership, paper, current condition and cultural significance. There is also a discussion on the state of Meithei historical lexicography, detailing relevant sources and contributions.

The eminent Japanese scholar Tsuguhito Takeuchi provides an account of one of the old Zhangzhung manuscripts, viz. Stein Or 8212/188. A lucid introduction explains just what the extinct Zhangzhung language is, and points out that the old Zhangzhung language of the Dūnhuáng manuscripts differs significantly from the artificial language found in the *mDzod-phug*, which was evidently composed much later than its ostensible 8th century date. Takeuchi provides an account of his research and that of his colleagues in the Bon Studies programme headed by Yasuhiko Nagano at the National Museum of Ethnology at Osaka. Takeuchi describes the five old Zhangzhung texts under study from the caves at Dūnhuáng, and he provides a complete transliteration of text Stein Or 8212/188, which differs in some respects from the unpublished transliteration of the same text made by Frederick William Thomas, preserved in the Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library.

Finally, the thirteenth paper is an externally solicited contribution which David Bradley first presented as a conference paper back in 1993, containing some of his ruminations about 'the subgrouping of Tibeto-Burman'. Although Bradley had recourse to newer literature on Tibeto-Burman, he either ignored or misread much of the relevant literature in revising his 1993 conference paper. For example, he misreads the work of Mark Turin on Thangmi and myself on Barâm as indicating that these two languages are most closely affiliated with the Kiranti languages (p. 81). In fact, Turin and I have adduced evidence to show that that these two languages are most closely affiliated with Newar.

Bradley writes that Matisoff's non-hypothesis 'Kamarupan' is 'recognised' by Scott DeLancey and I (p. 77). In fact, Robbins Burling, François Jacquesson and myself are perhaps the strongest critics of the 'Kamarupan' catch-all, which confounds several distinct language subgroups in northeastern India, and the views of Burling, Jacquesson and myself are stated clearly in publications cited in Bradley's bibliography.

Bradley starts out by saying that in Tibeto-Burman linguistics it is high time to implement 'the traditional comparative method: internal reconstruction, reconstruction within closely-related subgroups, and then comparison of well-established reconstructed subgroups' (p. 73). Quite right. Yet Bradley propagates antiquated articles of faith and a number of new tenets that are nothing more than 'truths by assertion'. First and foremost, Bradley accepts the obsolete Indo-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan model, which presumes that all of truncated Tibeto-Burman (i.e. Tibeto-Burman minus Sinitic) shared common innovations that would define it as a coherent branch of the family vs. Sinitic. He adduces no evidence. Neither has anyone else ever done so for that matter. In other words, Bradley himself advocates one of the 'incorrect megaloclassifications' which 'still persist in the literature' (p. 73). Bradley tells us that the extinct Pyu language was 'most likely another Luish language' (p. 86), but again no evidence is provided. In fact, there is no indication that any systematic comparison of Luish and Pyu language data was undertaken. Many will be astonished to read that Bradley confuses Tamangic and West Bodish and actually equates the two groups (p. 79). Just as incomprehensibly, he lumps the Hrusish languages and the languages of the Kho-Bwa cluster together with Bodish (pp. 79-80). These embarrassments all serve to illustrate that Bradley's subgrouping is not at all based on the traditional comparative method or on any solid foundation whatsoever, not even on informed impressionism.

Some newer insights gained since 1993 do end up getting incorporated in Bradley's revised subgrouping paper, but often enough Bradley fails to acknowledge the authors of these newer

ideas. For example, some classificatory insights on 'Naga' groups are clearly taken from Robbins Burling (as quoted in my handbook, cited in Bradley's bibliography). Likewise, Bradley accepts my inclusion of Dhimalish within the Brahmaputran group, but he retains Shafer's term 'Baric'. Yet Baric really meant something else, which is just one of the reasons why Robbins Burling objects so strongly to Shafer's term. At least here Bradley does not repeat his earlier contention that Dhimal and Toto are dialects of a single language. In a similar vein, Bradley accepts my Mahakiranti hypothesis, though I no longer entertain the hypothesis myself because the most compelling morphological evidence turns out not to be a trait exclusively shared by Kiranti and Newaric, as I have explained in two recent publications.

In conclusion, *Mediaeval Tibeto-Burman Languages* is a valuable resource containing twelve important contributions on Tibeto-Burman historical linguistics. Interesting ideas and hypotheses are advanced and bandied about, and some of these are worth pursuing. The gratuitous and jumbled speculations on subgrouping in the thirteenth, externally solicited contribution are best ignored. The volume is a tribute to the editor, Christopher Beckwith, who convened the extraordinary conference session at which the papers in the present anthology were first presented. The publisher, Brill in Leiden, must be credited for producing a handsomely bound, well-designed and timely book.

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