

Foreword

For more than a hundred years, since Ernst Leumann published the first excerpts from the poem now known as the *Book of Zambasta* in the early 1900s, the nature of Old Khotanese metre has been a controversial topic. While Leumann regarded Khotanese metre as essentially quantitative (moraic) and derived it from a Proto-Indo-European metrical system supposedly reflected also in the Greek hexameter and the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, other scholars have understood it in very different ways: as a purely stress-based metre related to that of poetry in some other Iranian languages; as an adaptation of Indian metrics; or as representing a transitional stage from a quantitative to a stress-based system.

The present study is an attempt to analyse Old Khotanese metre on an exclusively empirical basis, without theoretical or historical preconceptions. I conclude that the metre is indeed based on the quantitative (moraic) principle but that stress also plays an essential role. Specifically, I show that the lightening of unstressed heavy syllables in certain cadences, previously regarded as sporadic or irregular, occurs systematically and is attributable to the presence of an obligatory ictus. Recognition of this fact leads to new discoveries regarding the equally controversial issue of Khotanese accentuation and other aspects of the language and its history.

Having no competence in Indian, let alone Indo-European, metrics, I have not attempted to investigate the origin or relationships of the Old Khotanese metrical system, but I hope that the present study, together with the metrically scanned text of the *Book of Zambasta* which accompanies it, will provide a sound basis for the re-examination of such questions and will encourage scholars with the appropriate skills to take them up. The fully searchable text of the poem which is available online as a supplement to this book is intended to make it possible to check the validity of the results reached here and to develop further hypotheses about Khotanese metre, including its possible connections with other metrical systems.

I take this opportunity to express my thanks to my successor as editor of the *Beiträge zur Iranistik*, Agnes Korn, for saving me from many errors and for her patient help in making an extremely dense text somewhat more reader-friendly, and to Dieter Gunkel, Doug Hitch and Mauro Maggi, each of whom kindly read one or more drafts of this work and gave me the benefit of their expert advice. Mauro Maggi also generously provided me with a copy of his unpublished 1992 dissertation *Studi sul sistema accentuale del cotanese*, a work which is indispensable for any study of Khotanese stress. Needless to say, none of the above should be held responsible for the arguments or conclusions presented here.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of Ron Emmerick, the editor and translator of the *Book of Zambasta*, with whom I was privileged to study Khotanese in Hamburg in 1978. I do not know whether I would have been able to convince him of the correctness of my analysis of Old Khotanese metre, which differs from his in many respects, but I can be sure that he would have examined my arguments with scrupulous impartiality and passed judgement, whether positive or negative, with his renowned frankness. Today I regret once again, as I have many times over the years, that his premature death, exactly 21 years ago, has robbed us of his trenchant and insightful criticism.

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