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Sims-Williams, Nicholas: *The Book of Zambasta. Metre and stress in Old Khotanese*. Wiesbaden: Reichert 2022 (= Beiträge zur Iranistik 49). € 98,00. ISBN 978-3-7520-0688-9.

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The book under review is an extensive and up-to-date investigation of the metre of the *Book of Zambasta*, an anonymous Buddhist religious poem written in the Eastern Iranian language known as Khotanese. This language is attested in manuscripts dating from the 5th to the 10th c. CE from the southern rim of the Tarim Basin, in the Khotan oasis and Dunhuang. The *Book of Zambasta* is the longest extant Khotanese text in verse: it represents the primary source for our knowledge of the Old Khotanese metrical system. The analysis of the metre provides crucial information on the position of the stress, contributing to a better understanding of Khotanese phonology and morphology.

This book should be understood in the context of a renewed interest in the *Book of Zambasta* and Khotanese language and literature. Recently, a considerable number of new publications on these topics have appeared.¹ In 2023, the Persian Heritage Foundation awarded the volume the *Ehsan Yarshater Book Award for pre-Islamic Iran*.

As explained in the foreword (p. 5), the book was born out of the need for a modern and accessible comprehensive study of a topic – Old Khotanese metre – that remains

controversial despite a long research history.² Because of this long and somewhat cumbersome tradition of studies, the author makes a programmatic effort to examine all the available evidence anew. This entails a fresh metrical scansion of the whole text of the poem, included in full as a voluminous appendix constituting two-thirds of the book (pp. 107–310). This appendix is of the utmost importance because the author has striven to offer the readers the most updated text available. The result incorporates the literature published between 1968, the date of publication of the edition of the *Book of Zambasta* by the hand of the late R. E. Emmerick,³ and 2022: fifty-four years of philological work on the poem are now gathered in one source for the first time.

By accomplishing such a meticulous task, the author renders a substantial service not only to Khotanese philology and linguistics but also to Iranian and Central Asian Studies more generally. The updated and metrically scanned text of the *Book of Zambasta* is available for free download as a Microsoft Word® file from the Reichert Media Library (https://medialibrary.reichert-verlag.de/en/9783752002485_the_book_of_zambasta/), both in its complete version (file 1) and classified according to the three metres A, B, and C (files 2–4). This will undoubtedly become an indispensable scientific and didactic tool for scholars and students of Khotanese.

The first hundred pages of the volume have a twofold aim. On the one hand, they are meant to describe the metrical system of the *Book of Zambasta* and function as a companion to the scanned text of the poem. They constitute the first comprehensive introduction to the system after the one compiled by E. Leumann (1933–1936) in his first edition of the text. On the other hand, the fresh examination of the whole material enables the author to propose a set of new hypotheses concerning the moraic structure of certain cadences, the syllabic structure of Old Khotanese, and the history and position of stress in this language.

After a one-page foreword dedicating the book to the memory of the late R. E. Emmerick (p. 5), **Chapter 0** (“Pre-

¹ After this volume, in 2023 and 2024 alone, two substantial monographs, a PhD thesis, and six articles have appeared: A. Del Tomba, “Variation and change in the formal marking of Khotanese (II)”, in: *Indogermanische Forschungen* 128, pp. 157–178 (2023); F. Dragoni, *Watañi lantañ: Khotanese and Tumshuqese loanwords in Tocharian*, Wiesbaden 2023 (Beiträge zur Iranistik 50); F. Dragoni, “In the tune of the king of Khotan: the name of Khotan in the Tarim Basin and beyond,” in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 143/2 (2023), pp. 289–308; R. E. Emmerick, *A handbook of Khotanese, completed and edited by Mauro Maggi, John S. Sheldon and Nicholas Sims-Williams*, Wiesbaden 2024 (Beiträge zur Iranistik 51); S. Luzzi, *Piṇḍasāstra, an Āyurvedic Khotanese text. Critical edition, translation, commentary, glossary, and study of the sources*. PhD thesis, Sapienza University of Rome 2023; M. Maggi, “Three stanzas from the Pradakṣiṇasūtra in Khotanese,” in: Noriyuki Kudo (ed.) *Śāntamatih, manuscripts for life: essays in memory of Seishi Karashima*. Tokyo 2023, pp. 225–235; N. Sims-Williams, “Metrical passages in the Khotanese Saṃghāṭa-sūtra,” in: *Indo-Iranian Journal* 66/2 (2023), pp. 97–126; N. Sims-Williams, “Two more fragmentary folios from the Book of Zambasta,” in: *Journal of the Dunhuang and Turfan Studies* 22 (2023), pp. 1–14; N. Sims-Williams, *A missing chapter of the Book of Zambasta*, Wiesbaden (Forthcoming in 2024).

² E. Leumann, *Das nordarische (sakische) Lehrgedicht des Buddhismus* (ed. M. Leumann), Leipzig 1933–1936; R. E. Emmerick, “Khotanese metrics”, in: *Asia Major* 14 (1968), pp. 1–20; S. Konow, “The late Professor Leumann’s edition of a new Saka text [I]”, in: *Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap* 7 (1934), pp. 1–55; R. E. Emmerick, “Khotanese metrics again”, in: *Asia Major* 18 (1973), 137–153; R. E. Emmerick, “Commodianus and Khotanese metrics”, in: *Transactions of the Philological Society* 72/1 (1973), pp. 138–172; M. Maggi, *Studi sul sistema accentuale del cotanese*, doctoral dissertation, Naples 1992; D. Hitch, “Meter in the Old Khotanese *Book of Zambasta*”, in: *Ars metrica* 11 (2014), pp. 1–43; D. Hitch, *The Old Khotanese metanalysis*, doctoral dissertation, Harvard 2016.

³ R. E. Emmerick, *The Book of Zambasta*, London 1968.

liminaries”, pp. 9–12) shortly explains the phonetic values of the Khotanese Brāhmī graphemes and the metrical terminology employed by the author throughout the volume. It also contains a list of grammatical and language abbreviations. The list of symbols is particularly worthy of attention as it introduces a set of (new) conventions employed in the metrically scanned text: a grave accent for metrically lightened vowels, subscript and superscript letters for written but not pronounced letters (and vice versa), bold type for metrically double consonants, underlined syllables for other types of metrical lightenings.

Chapter 1 (“Introduction”, pp. 13–16) locates the study in its research context. In the first half of the 20th c., there was a stark contrast between Ernst and Manu Leumann’s⁴ “quantitative” or “moraic” theory and Sten Konow’s view of the metre as based on accentual patterns. The two positions were mutually exclusive. Some years later, R. E. Emmerick, starting from the Leumanns’ view of the Old Khotanese metre as a succession of long syllables (or “heavy”, containing two morae) and short syllables (or “light”, containing one mora), noted that some recurring metrical effects (2-mora syllables requiring a 1-mora reading and vice versa) could be due to the position of the word stress. He placed the metre of the *Book of Zambasta* in the context of a shift of an older quantitative system towards a later one primarily based on stress (Late Khotanese). This state of affairs should partially reflect the internal evolution of the language (Old to Late Khotanese). By introducing a diachronic dimension to the problem, he surpassed the rigid dualism of Konow and the Leumanns. More recently, M. Maggi and D. Hitch recognised the importance of Emmerick’s analysis as an essential step forward but pointed out the dangers of giving stress-based arguments too much weight. By doing so, they reassessed some interpretations of the Leumanns that Emmerick had dismissed too quickly. The author of the volume under review continues this reasoning: Emmerick’s analysis is too flexible and overestimates the explanatory value of stress patterns. He sides with Maggi and the Leumanns in seeing a resemblance with the Latin hexameter, a “hybrid accentual-quantitative metre” (p. 15). However, he also pointed out some methodological problems. Since the determination of the stress is frequently based on the metre (and vice versa), there is the understandable danger of a circular argument. We need to rebuild our knowledge of the metre of the *Book of Zambasta* on more solid foundations.

This is why Chapters 2 to 6 are structured as a sort of *gradus ad Parnassum*. Starting from the fundamental structures of the Old Khotanese verse (**Chapter 2**: “The overall

structure of the verses”, pp. 17–24), the author guides the reader through the intricacies of identifying which syllables are light and which are heavy (**Chapter 3**: “Light and heavy syllables”, pp. 25–43). This chapter is the first comprehensive guide to the toolbox of the Khotanese metricist. It constitutes the foundation of an extensive examination of the different types of cadences (**Chapter 4**: “Cadences”, pp. 45–62) and of the non-cadential parts of the verse (**Chapter 5**: “Non-cadential segments”, pp. 63–72). One of the central assumptions of the author is that the ictus (i. e. a metrically prominent syllable in a cadence), whose position can be determined with the tools described in the preceding chapters, coincides with the word stress (primary or secondary). In **Chapter 6** (“Stress”, pp. 73–84), this hypothesis allows the author to use the metrical material to deduce the position of the stress in Old Khotanese (§ 6.2) and to identify Old Khotanese stress patterns (§ 6.3). Three appendices complete the first part of the volume. **Appendix 1** (“Double consonants”, pp. 85–90) discusses the metrical effects of consonants that are written double. **Appendix 2** (“The *uysnora*-effect”, pp. 91–92) lists all instances of lightening effects mainly of the type HHL > LHL (the so-called “*uysnora*-effect”⁵). **Appendix 3** (“Words whose stress can be deduced from the metre”, pp. 93–99) is conceived as a companion to Chapter 6. It lists all the words in which the position of the stress can be deduced from the metrical analysis of the cadences of the poem.

Specialists of Khotanese and (Middle) Iranian languages will find good starting points to further long-dormant discussions on Khotanese phonology and morphology.

Important sections in Chapters 3 and 4 are the following: pp. 31–32 (on the shortening of the second vowel of “four” [OKh. *tcahora-/tcohora-*], presumably a proclitic form as in Sogdian), § 3.10.3 and § 3.10.4 (respectively on the metrical weight of the peculiar instr.-abl. pl. ending *-yau/-yō*, and on the so-called X-position, in which the author finds himself at variance with D. Hitch’s recent analyses), § 4.1.3 (on the so-called “*handara*-effect” [new terminology introduced by the author],⁶ a central argument for the author’s view of Old Khotanese stress), § 4.2.3 (on the so-called

5 D. Hitch, “Meter in the Old Khotanese *Book of Zambasta*,” in: *Ars metrica* 11 (2014), p. 15.

6 Hypermetrical cadences with 7 morae instead of the expected 6 underwent lightening of the third mora from the end of the cadence, thus HLL or HH > LLL or LH (H = heavy [syllable], L = light [syllable]). This is explained by the author as a consequence of the position of the metrical ictus on the second syllable, not on the first. Thus, assuming the metrical ictus coincided with the word stress, one should read *han’dara-*, *a’ysmū*, etc. instead of *handara-*, *aysmū* etc. Word-initial stress would be expected according to Emmerick and Maggi’s assumption that the metrical ictus (= word stress) could only be found on the first syllable of a foot or a cadence.

4 Manu Leumann, the son of Ernst Leumann, revised and brought to completion the edition of the *Book of Zambasta* after his father’s death.

“*ttarandara*-effect” [new terminology by the author]), § 4.3.2 (on the so-called “*uysnorānu*-effect” [again, a new term] and primary and secondary stress).

In Chapter 5, the author successfully shows that non-cadential segments are worth examining in detail. Some sequences previously analysed as *ad libitum* successions of heavy and light syllables reveal, in fact, highly regular patterns.

Chapter 6 will undoubtedly spark broader debates among scholars familiar with Maggi’s analysis of Khotanese stress patterns. In contrast with the accent rules formulated by Maggi (1992), which implied a “quasi-fixed” stress in Khotanese, the author is of the opinion that “metrical and other evidence shows that Old Khotanese continues to be characterized by a free stress typologically comparable to the free accent of Vedic” (p. 23). However, it should be stressed that, as pointed out by the author himself (p. 73), these conclusions are limited to one text (the *Book of Zambasta*) and do not examine the problem from a diachronic perspective. Indeed, I would like to add that extending the analysis to other Old Khotanese verse texts (see now Sims-Williams 2023), cracking the riddles of Late Khotanese metre(s), and clarifying the prehistory of Khotanese accentuation (some very preliminary considerations are found in § 6.1) are fundamental tasks that await researchers working with Khotanese. Only these future investigations will allow one to prove or disprove the author’s hypotheses.

The importance of the volume for scholars unfamiliar with Khotanese or (Middle) Iranian languages can hardly be overestimated. One of the chief advantages of having such a wealth of data available in a single, compact source is that specialists of other disciplines may independently access and evaluate the material. Among the many potential developments, I would like to draw the readers’ attention to the still unsolved question about the origins and external relationships of the Old Khotanese metrical system.⁷ As a possible starting point for further enquiries, one should note that the precise description of the three metrical patterns (A, B, and C) found on pp. 17–20, and especially the tables on p. 18, are an open call to metricists and specialists of neighbouring languages to engage in comparative work. For anyone familiar with Tocharian metres, for instance, a brief look at the tables on p. 18 and a cursory reading of § 2.1 and § 2.2 are enough to see substantial structural parallels between the 24-mora metre “A”, by far the most frequent Old Khotanese

metre,⁸ and the Tocharian 4×12 syllables metre, one of the most common Tocharian metrical patterns.⁹ The most widespread pattern of metre A can be schematised as 5+7(4+3) || 5+7(4+3), where the numbers indicate mora-counting, || the caesura, and + at least a syllable boundary, but in most cases, a word- or compound-boundary (see p. 17 fn. 8) dividing 7-mora cadences from 5-mora non-cadential segments. The 7-mora cadences have mostly the structure 4+3 (see § 4.2). The internal structure of the Tocharian 4×12 metre is commonly described as 5 || 7(4|3), where || indicates the primary and | the secondary caesura (Bross, Gunkel, and Ryan 2014: 6). The most frequent metrical patterns in the two languages not only employ the same number of morae (Khotanese) and syllables (Tocharian), but they also show the same internal organisation: this can hardly be due to chance and should become the object of a thorough investigation.¹⁰

In conclusion, this volume contains an accessible and thought-provoking analysis of the Old Khotanese metrical system of the *Book of Zambasta*. Its morphological and phonological consequences are also considered, leading the author to formulate an innovative view of the nature and position of stress in Old Khotanese. The open-access metrical scansion of the updated text of the poem will become an essential didactic and reference tool for students and researchers alike. Specialists of Khotanese will find many stimulating points of discussion in the first part of the book. Additionally, this is a volume that cannot be missed by experts in neighbouring (Middle) Iranian and Central Asian languages: they can now easily access a body of knowledge that was previously available only to a restricted circle of researchers.

⁸ In the *Book of Zambasta* alone, the author offers the following numbers: 2511 complete hemistichs in metre A, 970 in metre B, and 884 in metre C (see § 2.2).

⁹ M. Peyrot, “A comparison of the Tocharian A and B metrical traditions,” in: O. Hackstein and D. Gunkel (eds.), *Language and Meter*, Leiden 2018, p. 321; C. Bross, D. Gunkel and K. M. Ryan, “Caesurae, Bridges, and the Colometry of Four Tocharian B Meters,” In: *Indo-European Linguistics* 2 (2014), pp. 2, 6–8.

¹⁰ Further evidence of contacts between Khotanese and Tocharian in the realm of poetry is offered by the interpretation of some Tocharian A and B tune names as containing the word for Khotan, thus possibly reflecting tunes (and metrical patterns?) imported from the Khotan kingdom. See F. Dragoni, “‘In the tune of the king of Khotan’: the name of Khotan in the Tarim Basin and beyond,” in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 143/2 (2023), pp. 289–308. On linguistic contacts between Khotanese and Tocharian, see F. Dragoni, *Watañi lantam: Khotanese and Tumshuqese loanwords in Tocharian*, Wiesbaden 2023 (Beiträge zur Iranistik 50).

⁷ The reader will find a short research survey on the topic on pp. 13–14. While the Leumanns supported the view that Old Khotanese had preserved metrical patterns of Indo-European origin (cf. the Greek hexameter), Sten Konow argued that the Old Khotanese system could reflect the adaptation of an Indian model (the *dohā*).