**TRANSCRIPTIONS & CONVENTIONS**

Old Iranian

I generally follow contemporary Iranists’ rendering of Old Iranian languages, with a few important exceptions explained in the footnotes and endnotes. When I have quoted other scholars verbatim I have retained their transcriptions unchanged, or have noted any changes I have made. Because both scholars and laymen now regularly confuse the terms *Iranian* and *Iranic*, with often disastrous results, I use the term *Iranian* only to refer to the modern country called Iran, its inhabitants, culture, and so on. By contrast, essentially following the usage of John Perry,¹ I use the term *Iranic* for the language family that includes Avestan, Median (Scytho-Median), Persian, Scythian, Sogdian, Old Khotanese, Ossetian, Pashto, and other related languages ancient and modern, previously called “Iranian”.

Semitic

For Assyrian and Babylonian Akkadian I follow the system of the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (CAD). For Imperial (Biblical) Aramaic I follow the transcription system used in my introductory Aramaic grammar.²

Chinese

It is still traditional in works on *premodern* Chinese culture to transcribe all Chinese characters as they are read (i.e., pronounced) today in Modern Standard Chinese (MSC), or Standard Mandarin. That is because


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the reconstruction of earlier periods of Chinese is still primitive at best and most reconstructions are controversial. I follow traditional practice and mainly use the “modified Wade-Giles” transcription for Mandarin, because it is the most accurate and helpful for historical purposes and is still widely used by scholars of premodern China.

Important Chinese items are first presented in the format: Wade-Giles transcription | Chinese character(s) | (Pinyin transcription in parentheses).

I have thus also often provided Pinyin system transcriptions for Mandarin for the sake of readers who have learned that system. However, it is crucial for readers to know that Pinyin values of the transcriptional Latin letters often have little or even nothing to do with the traditional value of those letters in most European languages. They do not correspond well even to the pronunciation of modern Mandarin and certainly cannot be taken to represent any premodern pronunciation of Chinese, except sometimes by accident. Pinyin spellings of Mandarin can thus be very misleading for a book on Classical Antiquity. The Wade-Giles system is much more accurate not only for Mandarin but even for historical work. Nevertheless, conversion tables can easily be found online and in many standard reference works for Chinese studies.

For attested Middle Chinese (MChi)—i.e., medieval forms recorded in foreign segmental (“alphabetic”) writing systems—each is cited in the transcription system used for the language in which the form is recorded. Traditionally reconstructed (or HSR)3 Middle Chinese forms are marked with an open star (⭐), and are cited from major reference works of that tradition, given in abbreviation in each instance. Where no reference is given, the reconstruction is my own, using loanword data, data from attested transcriptions, and internal reconstructions (including HSR).

For Old Chinese (OChi), reconstructed forms—marked with an asterisk (*)—are cited based on my own strictly linguistic approach (i.e., chiefly using foreign transcriptions and loanwords) presented in many publications,4 or on major traditional HSR method studies. In the

few instances where I give a completely new reconstruction, the relevant source materials are cited and discussed.

Other Languages

The traditional standard systems used by most scholars are followed, including the Hepburn system (ヘボン式) for Japanese, and the McCune-Reischauer system (매클리시워 표기법) for Korean. There is no standard scientific transcription system for Old Tibetan, so I use a conservative system that is still used by many scholars, and is followed in many of my publications involving Tibetan.  

The few linguistic terms that may be unfamiliar are defined, with examples, in the Index.

5. For example, in Beckwith (2006).