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## Abstracts

### Fragments of magic, medicine, and mythology from Nimrud

M. J. GELLER

The publication of copies of new cuneiform texts offers an ideal opportunity to look for further duplicates and continue the process of adding to the known editions of the literary corpus. A selection of texts from the Nabû Temple helps to elucidate some aspects of magic and medicine, including the use of mythology to explain the role of the gods in therapy.

### The 'Battle of the Pass': two consequential readings

SALEH SAID AGHA

M. A. Shaban realized the necessity of the existence of a disenfranchised but empowered demographic base to carry out a revolution of the magnitude of the 'Abbāsid revolution. The sources do not provide for the existence of such a base amongst the Arabs of Khurāsān. Driven by an *a priori* perception, Shaban tried to establish the existence of a revolutionary class of 'Arab settlers' in the province. To that end, he chose to reinterpret the source material on the (Arab vs. Türgesh) 'Battle of the Pass' (c. 112/731, in Transoxania) and its aftermath. This was an unfortunate attempt. Close textual analysis of the standard Arabic of the sources and a detailed critical-historical consideration of the episode undermine Shaban's attempt. As far as the ethnic identity of the constituents of the 'Abbāsid revolution is concerned, the debate must go back to a pre-Shaban and post-Wellhausen plateau.

### On 'Sino-Bodic' and other symptoms of neosubgroupitis

JAMES A. MATISOFF

In a recent article entitled 'Sino-Bodic' (*BSOAS* 60/3, 1997, 456–88), the Dutch linguist Sjors van Driem, a leading specialist in the Himalayan branch of Tibeto-Burman, makes far-reaching claims for an especially close relationship between Chinese and the 'Bodic' branch of TB, which is understood as comprising languages including Tibetan and the Kiranti group of Eastern Nepal. On the one hand, Van Driem's comparisons rely on his own close familiarity with the Kiranti languages, and on the other, William Baxter's reconstructions of Old Chinese. Unfortunately, however, the comparisons offered do not prove a special Sino-Bodic relationship. Many of the cognate identifications are uncertain or incorrect. Even when genuine cognates are involved, usually the TB root is found in other branches of the family besides 'Bodic'. In the present state of our knowledge of comparative TB, we should avoid jumping to conclusions about the internal supergrouping of the major branches of the family. After all, even Indo-Europeanists are still disagreeing about such matters after 200 years of scholarship.

### Ophthalmic surgery: a chapter in the history of Sino-Indian medical contacts

VIJAYA DESHPANDE

Although in Chinese culture surgery has not usually been seen as a major part of medical practice, during the Sui (A.D. 581–618) and the Tang dynasties (A.D. 618–907), it showed a marked flowering in the field of ophthalmology. Chinese historical records, popular literature and medical works and compilations indicate that it was closely related to Indian medicine. The origins of this transmission can be traced to early Chinese Buddhist canonical literature. Chinese and Indian ophthalmological works of the time are studied here, especially ophthalmic diseases like pterygium, entropion or trichiasis and cataract, which often call for surgical intervention as a way of giving curative or palliative treatment. The texts reflect upon the origin, route and nature of this transmission, and vividly depict the gradual introduction of various aspects of

surgery into Chinese medicine. Indian medicine was thus a prominent contributor to the development of Chinese medicine and, especially, surgery from the seventh century A.D. onwards.

### The game of leaves: an inquiry into the origin of Chinese playing cards

ANDREW LO

This article discusses the extant material on the 'game of leaves' of the Tang and early Song period, and argues that it is most probably not a card game as assumed in influential works on the history of Chinese printing, but a board game of promotion and demotion. Using dice, it involves looking up instructions from a rulebook written on rapidly searchable 'leaves' or pages. The later Southern Song period is proposed as the likely date of the earliest Chinese playing card, and a Yuan date of 1294 is given as the earliest reliable recorded date. No rules for card games from this early period have been discovered, and no extant cards can be confidently dated to this period. However, the late Ming *ma diao* card game shares a similar feature to some early Indian and European card games, and provides tantalizing evidence for a consideration of the transmission of playing cards from China to the West.

### *The Wolaytta language* by Marcello Lamberti and Roberto Sottile: some reactions and reflections

R. J. HAYWARD

*The Wolaytta language* (Lamberti and Sottile 1997) represents the first publication of a really substantial monograph on an important Omoto language. In conjunction with a review of this potentially important work, the article presents the author's own analyses of selected aspects of Wolaytta phonology and grammar. Several of these are in essential agreement with the views advanced in *The Wolaytta language*, and here an attempt is made to carry the discussion a little further, often in addressing the diachronic dimension. In a number of cases, however, the analyses of Lamberti and Sottile are subjected to strong criticism, and alternatives are advanced. This is particularly true with respect to the confused description of nominal morphology, where the category of definiteness—very important in many, perhaps all, Omoto languages—goes unrecognized. Similarly, a failure to distinguish certain relative verb forms has resulted in the postulation of a quite unnecessary 'subjunctive' mood within the verb paradigm.

### The Chinese for 'Confucius' confirmed

T. H. BARRETT

In an earlier issue of the *Bulletin* (62/1, 1999) it was pointed out that the Chinese underlying the Latin name Confucius is very hard to find in print, raising the possibility even that it might be a 'back-formation' from the Latin. This is not the case. Though our dictionaries are unhelpful in tracing the history of what is in fact a common but colloquial form, it is well attested in sources preserving the vernacular of the Mongol period.