

Linguistic history and historical linguistics

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This invited response to a piece by LaPolla, published in issue 39/2 of *LTBA*, addresses both LaPolla's misrepresentations of the history of linguistics and his flawed understanding of historical linguistics. The history of linguistic thought with regard to the Tibeto-Burman or Trans-Himalayan language family vs. the Indo-Chinese or "Sino-Tibetan" family tree model is elucidated and juxtaposed against the remarkable robustness of certain ahistorical myths and the persistence of unscientific argumentation by vocal proponents of the Sino-Tibetanist paradigm, such as LaPolla.

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1. Rāvaṇa and LaPolla

महाकाल Mahākāla 'great blackness' is a Śaivite god, who originally embodied the male counterpart to Kālī. He was subsumed into the Buddhist pantheon as a guardian of the Dharma, in which manifestation he bears the name of धर्मपाल Dharmapāla or, in Tibetan, མོས་སྒྲོལ་ Chos-skyoñ. This Tantric god embodies a wrathful aspect of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in the Vajrayāna Buddhism of Nepal, Tibet, the Dàlǐ kingdom,¹ the Tangut kingdom, Mongolia and Japan, whereas lord Mahākāla served as the patron deity of the Mongol and Manchu imperial courts in China during the Yuán and Qīng periods.

1. In territorial terms, the Dàlǐ kingdom (937–1253), based in Dàlǐ and covering most of today's Yúnnán province and adjacent portions of Sīchuān and Guǐzhōu provinces and neighbouring portions of Burma, Laos and Vietnam, succeeded the earlier Nánzhào kingdom (649–903), centred in Wēishān. Notwithstanding a turbulent interregnum and the transition from a Nánzhào elite, speaking a Loloish language, to a Bái speaking elite at Dàlǐ, the worship of Mahākāla and other Buddhist traditions in this area evince considerable cultural continuity (Bryson 2012).

Strictly speaking, Tibetan མགོན་པོ་ *mgon-po* serves as a translation for Sanskrit नाथ *nātha* ‘lord, guardian, protector’. Historically, however, *mgon-po* has long functioned as the colloquial epithet for Mahākāla, whose proper Tibetan designation is རྒྱུ་མཚན་པོ་ *nag-po chen-po* ‘great blackness’. Ksenia Borisovna Kepping (2003) documented numerous formulaic references in Tangut texts to the Tibetans as the “black-headed” and to the Tangut as the “red-faced”. During her extended sojourn in Leiden in the 1990s, she often expressed her conviction that this literary convention was intimately connected to the widespread worship of Mahākāla in Tibet. Hill (2013) has likewise documented that Old Tibetan and later texts are replete with the term མགོན་པོ་ *mgo-nag* ‘black-headed’ to denote the Tibetan people.

In Tibet and Mongolia, both the Tantric and esoteric Buddhist traditions feature ritual texts that are connected with the worship of Mahākāla (Bryson 2012, 2017). In his *Asia Polyglotta*, Julius von Klaproth (1823: 343–344) makes reference to a collection of Indic texts called “Mani-Gombo”, evidently མ་ཉི་མགོན་པོ་ *Ma-ñi mGon-po* ‘precious Mahākāla’. He cited one of these texts that recounted that the Tibetans were the descendants of the progeny of the two apes *Sarr-Meyin* and *Rakya*. Whilst *Sarr-Meyin* clearly corresponds to Mongolian *sarmayčün* ‘ape’ (Lessing et al. 1960) and Kalmyk *sarmötšŋ* or *сармөчн* ‘ape’ (Ramstedt 1935, Muniev 1977), the term *Rakya* obviously represents a transcription of Sanskrit राक्षस *rākṣasa*.

The མ་ཉི་བཀའ་འབྲུག་ *Ma-ñi bKaḥ-hbum*, a more famous corpus of translated Indic mythical and doctrinal texts traditionally attributed to king རྩོད་བཅོམ་ལྷན་པོ་ *Sroñ-btsan sGam-po*, likewise retains a rendition of this myth, the social function of which Melnick and Bell (2017) interpret in the context of post-imperial Tibet as follows:

The reference to an incarnation of a bodhisattva generating a race of humans in Tibet is none other than the Tibetan unifying myth in which Avalokiteśvara, in the form of a monkey, and the goddess Tārā, in the form of a rock demoness, spawned six children who would become the chiefs of the first six tribes of Tibet. With Avalokiteśvara – the father of all Tibetans – acting as Tibet’s patron deity, this myth engenders a powerful narrative of cultural unification in the wake of political decentralization.

However tempting it may be to impute such a cohesive social function retrospectively to the myth, the same strains of Hindu lore are repeated in many pockets of the Himalayas in other language communities that were historically never part of the Tibetan empire.

In 1835, Francis Hamilton recorded that the Hayu, a Kiranti tribe of eastern Nepal, “worship Rawun, the Raksha king of Lunka” (Campbell 1840: 611). Over a century later, Michailovsky (1981, 1988) documented the Hayu oral tradition purporting that the Hayu ancestors had come from “Lanka Palanka” and that the Hayu themselves were descendants of Rāvaṇa and his army of राक्षस *rākṣasa*. Michailovsky

proposed that this lore, which manifestly derives from the रामायण *Rāmāyaṇa*, might originally have been suggested to this Kiranti language community by the Nepali speaking खस *Khas* in order to distinguish the Hayu, as descendants of Rāvaṇa, from the new Aryan settlers, who represented the descendants of राम *Rāma*.

However, in view of Hamilton's account of the ritual dances performed and the lore recounted by Hayu tribesmen at the Indra Jātrā festival as early as 1835, it seems doubtful that Nepali speakers could have foisted this belief system upon the Hayu so soon after the Gorkha conquest and caused this narrative to become indigenised in such a thoroughgoing fashion so quickly. To the east of the Hayu across the Dūdh Kosī, the elderly generation of Dumi speakers recounted native lore in the late 1980s that the Hayu were descended from राक्षस *rākṣasa* and that the Hayu used to practise cannibalism, just as the Dumi themselves used to practise human sacrifice (van Driem 1993a).

When I lived in a Limbu village in the Phedāp region of eastern Nepal in the early 1980s in order to write a Limbu grammar, the father of Yaṅsarumba told me a Limbu version of this same legend. Disturbing to me at the time was Yaṅsarumba's father's clarification that their own resemblance to monkeys could be explained through their descent from Rāvaṇa and the simian वानर *vānara* that made up the army led by सुग्रीव *Sugrīva*. Yaṅsarumba's father too referred to this oral tradition as the story of लङ्का पलङ्का *Laṅkā-Palaṅkā*. Whilst sensitive observers of primate behaviour are perennially struck by the uncanny similarity which our simian relatives bear to ourselves, the reason that Yaṅsarumba's father's story gave me a sense of discomfort was, of course, that the ostensible descendants of Rāvaṇa resemble monkeys no more and no less than do the notional descendants of Rāma, or anybody else for that matter.

Historically, Hindu belief systems have disseminated as far as Bali and beyond. Strands of lore about Rāvaṇa, the *rākṣasa* and Sugrīva's simian army have remained robustly popular. The eastward spread of the Tantric rendition of Mahākāla from the Eastern Himalaya as far as Mongolia and Japan likewise attests to the appeal of the motif. These two strands of tradition intertwine in the *Ma-ṇi mGon-po* text discussed by Julius von Klaproth in 1823. LaPolla (2016: 288) has taken a single sentence fragment from this discussion out of context, recruited three named individuals to translate the sentence for him and then blithely stated that von Klaproth thought that "the Tibetans look like monkeys".

In fact, von Klaproth made no such statement, and LaPolla's depiction of the text is unconscionably ahistorical. A thoughtful reading of the passage from which the sentence was lifted out of context would have sufficed to forestall this blunder on LaPolla's part. More than a command of German is required properly to understand the discourse of von Klaproth and his contemporaries within the context of the linguistic literature of the early 19th century. Knowledge of the historical context and

an understanding of the ongoing discourse in contemporaneous sources, as well as comprehension of the language and style of diction employed, are prerequisites for gaining access to the purport and intent of writers of past centuries.

LaPolla's unfamiliarity with the history of linguistics is evinced by his having to take recourse to quoting a value judgement expressed in a Wikipedia article, opining that all of von Klaproth's insights are "completely outdated" and "only of literary interest". It is to a redressal of LaPolla's misappraisal of linguistic history propagated on the pages of this journal that we shall now turn.

2. Julius von Klaproth and his time

The renowned Sinologist Georg von der Gabelentz (1884: 359) assessed von Klaproth to be unrivalled in stature and importance as the founder and principal proponent of modern Oriental studies with a pan-Asian scope.² Since both the man and the significance of his work have been maligned in *LTBA*, I shall present a synopsis of the man's life and background here, based on easily accessible biographical sources (e.g. Eyriès 1857; von der Gabelentz 1884; Bässler 1884, Cordier 1917; Dann 1958, 1977; Naundorf 1977; Walravens 1999, 2002, 2006). This account serves as a brief preamble to the more immediately relevant issue of rectifying LaPolla's misappraisal of the man's enduring contributions to the field.

Julius von Klaproth's family background determined the intellectual context in which his scholarship arose. His father, Martin Heinrich Klaproth, was a renowned chemist whose diverse achievements included the discovery of the elements zirconium and uranium in 1789, titanium in 1792, strontium in 1793, chromium in 1797, tellurium in 1798 and cerium in 1803.³ The modern names for the elements beryllium and uranium were Martin Heinrich Klaproth's coinages.⁴ Klaproth's groundbreaking work was carried out in the *Apotheke zum Bären*, which he ran in Berlin from 1780 until his death in 1817.

Coming from a poor family, Martin Heinrich Klaproth had acquired his knowledge of chemistry from the age of sixteen through working at several chemists in different German towns from 1759 until 1780, when he was finally able to set up

2. "Die Jugendgeschichte der modernen, ganz Asien umfassenden Orientalistik ist an seinen Namen geknüpft wie an keinen zweiten" (von der Gabelentz 1884: 359).

3. Thomas Charles Hope independently discovered strontium in England in 1793. Louis Nicolas Vaquelin independently discovered chromium in Paris in 1797. Klaproth initially named cerium *Ochroit*, but later renamed the element *Cererium*, the precursor to the current name.

4. Beryllium was initially named glycinium by Vaquelin in 1798.

shop on his own. In sequel to his scientific discoveries, he was appointed chemist of the Berlin Academy of Sciences in 1800 and Professor of Chemistry of the Academy in 1810.

The chemist's son, Heinrich Julius, was born in Berlin on the 11th of October 1783. In 1797, at the age of fourteen, Julius Klaproth failed to fulfil his father's wishes when, instead of pursuing chemistry, he taught himself Chinese, beginning with the *Mvsevm Sinicvm* by Bayer (1730) and other books of which he availed himself in the Royal Library in Berlin. He likewise taught himself Manchu, Mongolian, Turkish, Arabic and Persian. In 1801, he commenced his studies at the University of Halle, but soon left for Dresden and Weimar in order to consult Oriental collections there. At the age of nineteen, he published his two-volume *Asiatisches Magazin* at Weimar, which because of its scope, girth and erudition attracted considerable scholarly attention (von Klaproth 1802).

Upon the recommendation of count Jan Potocki, Klaproth was appointed adjunct at the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg in 1804. He took part in Count Golovkin's scientific expedition to the Orient, reaching Kyakhta on the 17th of October 1805. Upon his return to St. Petersburg in 1807, he was appointed member of the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences and granted Russian noble status in recognition of his linguistic research, by dint of which he was entitled to adopt the preposition *von* in his surname. In this new capacity, von Klaproth led a scientific expedition to the Caucasus and Georgia that same year, returning only in 1809.

From 1811 to 1814, he devoted himself to analysing his collected materials and writing up his findings in Berlin. He miscalculated the future course of events when he travelled to Elba in 1814 in order to seek an academic appointment in Paris from Napoléon Bonaparte, the exiled Corsican emperor of France. The Bourbon restoration that year saw Louis XVIII ascend the French throne in Paris. His plans thwarted, von Klaproth travelled from Elba to Florence, where he spent an extended sojourn. In June 1815, he settled in Paris, as he had been encouraged to do by his benefactor Jan Potocki, who took his own life later that year.

Subsequently, von Klaproth only left Paris twice, once to visit the Royal Society in London in 1830, and briefly to visit Berlin in the autumn of 1834. Thanks to the kind intercessions of both Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt, von Klaproth was appointed Professor of Oriental Languages and Literature at the University of Bonn on the 11th of August 1816. This chair was generously financed by Friedrich Wilhelm III, King of Prussia. Moreover, von Klaproth was exempted from all professorial duties in Bonn in order to enable him to continue living comfortably in Paris whilst pursuing his research single-mindedly.

His *démarche* to Napoléon and his decamping to Paris cost von Klaproth his Russian noble title and his affiliation with the Imperial Academy of Sciences at

St. Petersburg, which were withdrawn belatedly in 1817. In 1821, von Klaproth became one of the founders of the *Société Asiatique*. Between 1826 and 1829, the *Société* was torn between two feuding factions, with Julius von Klaproth, Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, Eugène Burnouf and Julius von Mohl pitted against the *fleuristes* or *philologues-poètes*, led by the acrimonious Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy. On the 27th of August 1835, von Klaproth died at home in Paris at № 5 rue d'Amboise at the age of 51, apparently of congestive heart failure.⁵ Alexander von Humboldt and the secretary of the Prussian mission headed the funeral procession as von Klaproth was laid to rest in the cemetery at Montmartre.

3. A legacy of enduring contributions

Julius von Klaproth's contributions to Oriental studies were numerous. Contrary to the misapprehension parroted by LaPolla, many of von Klaproth's contributions were both fundamental and enduring. In order to gain a proper understanding of the man's scholarship, it is useful to recall the state of the art during von Klaproth's lifetime, when the science of historical linguistics was still young.

Marcus van Boxhorn (1647) elucidated that language relationships needed to be based on cognate lexicon as opposed to false cognates and mere look-alikes, and he stressed the necessity of distinguishing cognate lexicon from loanwords.⁶ Crucially, van Boxhorn underscored the genetic significance of cognate morphological systems, whereby he pointed out that shared irregularities within such morphological systems, which he called *anomalien* 'anomalies', had even greater diagnostic value, being vestiges of older grammar, and that inherited flexional systems must be distinguished from morphological innovations and accretions, which he qualified as *çierselen* 'embellishments' later added to the morphological system of a language.

Lambert ten Kate (1699, 1710, 1723) identified what would later come to be known as the Second Germanic Sound Shift. He described the role of the root accent in Germanic, and he carefully expounded the principle of the *geregedle afleiding* 'regular derivation', a phenomenon that later became known to the *Junggrammatiker* of the 19th century as the *Ausnahmlosigkeit der Lautgesetze*

5. "Herzkrankheit und Brustwassersucht" (Walravens 1999: 20).

6. In these early days of historical linguistics, van Boxhorn's own comparisons were naturally prone to some of the errors that he himself warned against and thus sometimes contained what we now know to be false cognates. Moreover, loanwords in Turkish such as *pala* 'scimitar, oar-blade, paddle' and *sabun* 'soap' misled him for a time to entertain the notion that the Turks might represent "een gebroetsel van de Scythen", i.e. a people of bastard Indo-European affinity (1647c: 56).

‘exceptionlessness of sound laws’.⁷ Furthermore, ten Kate described the system of apophony in *ongelijk-vloeyende* or strong verbs, which ultimately led to the discovery of the Indo-European Ablaut.

In his 1823 *Asia Polyglotta*, von Klaproth asserted the correctness of the language family outlined by Marcus van Boxhorn in 1647, which encompassed Latin, Greek, Germanic, Baltic, Slavic, Celtic and Indo-Iranian, including Sanskrit. In 1647, the Scythian language family did not yet contain Albanian, which was only first demonstrated to be Indo-European in 1835 by Joseph Ritter von Xylander. In 1647, *Scythisch* likewise did not yet include Hittite, Luvian and Palaic because the clay tablets on which these extinct languages were recorded in cuneiform script had not yet been discovered, and later recognised as Indo-European by Bedřich Hrozný, only in 1915. Manuscripts written in Tocharian languages were not discovered until the beginning of the 20th century.

Julius von Klaproth is principally responsible for popularising the name Indo-Germanic for the language family, which at the time was a new name coined by the Danish geographer Conrad Malte-Brun in 1810 to replace the then already obsolete term *Scythisch* for the language family identified by van Boxhorn. Malte-Brun, who was living in exile in Paris, justified the new name *indo-germanique* in purely geographical terms, pointing out that the southeastern-most language of the family, Sinhalese, spoken on the island of Ceylon, was Indic, whereas the northwestern-most language of the family, Icelandic, was Germanic.

Across the Channel, Thomas Young coined the term “Indoeuropean” in October 1813 in a book review of Adelung’s *Mithridates*. Franz Bopp translated Young’s term as *indisch-europäisch* in 1833, but from 1857 Bopp championed the variant *indo-europäisch*, which Pictet rendered into French as *indo-européen* in 1859. After the Franco-Prussian War (July 1870 – May 1871), the German empire regained sovereignty over Alsace-Lorraine, or Elsaß-Lothringen, German-speaking territories which France had progressively conquered during the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV. Subsequent anti-Teutonic sentiment played a large role in popularising the label *indo-européen* in France and in the British Isles. Yet the newer term was geographically imprecise, for Icelandic is not spoken in Europe, but on a

7. “Ondertuffchen is het mij niet onaengenaem geweest, na ons onderzoek dezer Taeltoffte, te bevinden, dat het gemeene zeggen *daer is geen Regel zonder exceptie* bij onze Tael geen proefe meer kan houden, alzoo de uitzonderingen zo schaers zijn geworden, en, na de rijklijkheid der gevallen te rekenen, genoegsaem als tot niet zijn verfmolten” (ten Kate 1723: f. 2v). [‘Meanwhile, upon conclusion of our investigations, it is with some delight that I am able to observe that the common saying that *there is an exception to every rule* appears not to hold for our language inasmuch as any exceptions amidst the sheer abundance of regular cases appear to be so rare as to be reduced to nothing at all.’]

volcanic island on top of the mid-Atlantic Ridge, straddling the North American and the Eurasian plate.

The model of the language family that would grow into our modern understanding of Indo-European phylogeny was principally championed by Julius von Klaproth, who opposed the ideas of Sir William Jones, whom von Klaproth qualified as a *höchst unkritischer Kopf* (1823: 54). Jones was exposed to van Boxhorn's Scythian theory by James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, with whom Jones maintained a correspondence. In the first volume of his rambling six-volume *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, Burnett (1774: 602) had recapitulated van Boxhorn's theory of a Scythian language family,⁸ taken directly from Salmasius (1643), who had used the expressions *ab eadem origine venientia* and *ex eadem origine veniffe* with regard to the language family.⁹

Initially, inspired by Burnett, Jones still held that Greek, Latin and Sanskrit had "sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists". However, as time went on, Jones soon came to profess that most of the languages "from the China Seas to Persia", including Latin and Greek, had actually descended from Sanskrit. Jones accordingly called this language family the "Indian branch". Jones' two other language families were the "Tartarian" and "Arabian branches". Whereas von Klaproth disbelieved the Biblical account of the earth on numerous scientific grounds,¹⁰ Jones' three branches derived from Noah's three sons, whereas languages not belonging to these three branches were considered by Jones to be "antediluvian" vestiges, i.e. remnants from before the Biblical flood. In Jones' conception,

8. Marcus van Boxhorn originally described his "Scythian" theory in 1637 in a letter to his colleague Claudius Salmasius (van Boxhorn, posthumously 1662: 69–71). The letter in question does, however, contain false cognates amongst the adduced examples. Salmasius concurred with van Boxhorn that Greek, German and Persian had sprung forth "van een ende de selve afcomste" 'from one and the same source' (van Boxhorn 1647b: 6–7; cf. Salmasius 1643). Even before van Boxhorn and Salmasius, earlier versions of the theory had been taught at Leiden by Franciscus Raphelengius (1539–1597), the Flemish scholar Bonaventura Vulcanius de Smet (1538–1614) and the Silesian physician Johann Elichmann (ca. 1600–1639). The first comparative study of Indo-European cognates was published in Basel in 1537 by Sigismundus Gelenius of Prague (1498–1554) (cf. van Driem 2001: 1039–1051, 2005: 285–291, 2017).

9. "Now it appears to me evident, that those names in the Teutonic, the Persian, the Greek, and its most ancient dialect the Latin, are the same words, with less variation than could be expected in dialects spoken by nations living in countries so remote from one another, and that must have come off from the parent-stock at times so different. ...these names are the same in all four languages, I mean, the Teutonic, Persian, Greek, and Latin... See the proof of this, in that very learned work of Salmasius, *De Hellenistica*" (Burnett 1774: 602).

10. "...physikalische Gründe in Menge vorhanden sind, welche beweisen, dass unser Erdball viel älter ist als die Mosaischen Traditionen ihn zu machen scheinen" (von Klaproth 1823: 41).

Sanskrit was ancestral to Latin, Chinese, Ancient Egyptian, Japanese, the languages of Ethiopia, Peruvian, the Celtic languages, Mexican, Greek and Phoenician, whose speakers all “had a common source with the Hindus”.

In a rather bizarre twist to the tale, Jones’ study of Hindi led him to believe that Hindi was unrelated to Sanskrit. Instead, Hindi was of “Tartarian or Chaldean origin” (Jones 1786, 1792, 1793). Nonetheless, the absurd myth ascribing the discovery of the Indo-European language family to Jones has remained astonishingly robust. The language family, already with the explicit inclusion of Sanskrit, was first identified in Leiden in 1647, and Adriaan van Reeland (1706: 209–210) reflected on the importance of Salmasius’ inclusion of Sanskrit in van Boxhorn’s Scythian language family, based on the lexicon of Ctesias of Cnidos dating from the 5th century BC. Through his *Asia Polyglotta*, von Klaproth defended this model and replaced the obsolete name *Scythisch* with the new name Indo-Germanic. Whereas Jones never adduced any evidence in support of his garbled second-hand understanding of the Scythian language family theory from Leiden, von Klaproth adduced numerous lists of cognate reflexes of Indo-Germanic roots, as he likewise did for what was then still called the Finno-Ugric language family, which he renamed Uralic,¹¹ as well as for Yeniseian, Kartvelian, Afroasiatic, Austronesian, and Altaic.¹²

In his *Asia Polyglotta*, von Klaproth also scoffed at Jones’ simplistically equating the biological ancestry of people with the linguistic affinity of the language which they happen to speak. In fact, he was famous in his day for arguing against the widespread view that equated race and language:

11. The name Uralic was first proposed for the language family in *Asia Polyglotta* (von Klaproth 1823: 182–183, 188; cf. Blažek and Kovář 2013: 287).

12. Various linguistic phyla are clearly distinguished diagrammatically in a fold-out section of the atlas volume of *Asia Polyglotta*. Whereas the name “Altaic” would only be coined by Matthias Alexander Castrén in 1850, fifteen years after von Klaproth’s death, Castrén’s construct encompassed both Uralic and Altaic. Our modern understanding of the Altaic family, comprising Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic, corresponds to the linguistic phylum identified by von Klaproth in *Asia Polyglotta*, where he voiced objections to the labels *Tataren* or *Tatarisch* then in widespread use to designate these language communities. Korean and Japanese, however, along with Ainu and many Palaeo-Siberian languages were relegated by von Klaproth each separately to their own proper lonely linguistic phylum. The contours of the Altaic language family as defined by von Klaproth in *Asia Polyglotta* were first outlined by Nicolaes Witsen (1692). Philipp von Siebold later added Japanese (1832a: 238–244), and he also soon asserted that Korean and Japanese within this language family stemmed from the same shoot (1832b, I, VII: 10). At the importunity of the editors, in the present article, the traditional English spelling *Yenisseian*, in which the doubling of the *s*, following older German and Dutch sources, ensures a voiceless pronunciation, has been replaced by the newer Russian-inspired spelling with a single *s*, which has recently come into vogue, particularly amongst American scholars. Similarly, the conventional English designation *Kalmuck* has been replaced in this article by the Russian spelling ‘Kalmyk’.

It would have been correct to say that the Germanic languages and Sanskrit derive from the same roots, but it is sheer nonsense to say that Germanic derives from Sanskrit, let alone that the people speaking Germanic languages descend from the Hindus, or vice versa.¹³ (1823: 43)

In Paris, the geographer Jean Jacques Nicolas Huot also propagated von Klaproth's principled distinction between biological ancestry and language.

According to us, the opinion of von Klaproth corroborates our own opinion, which is shared by all those who study nature, namely that languages can only furnish inconclusive traits for the classification of the types or races of man.¹⁴

(in Malte-Brun 1832, I: 521)

Most importantly, von Klaproth's stance influenced Max Müller, who famously went back from Oxford to Germany to lecture to his countrymen against confounding language and race.

Linguistics and ethnology can, at least for the time being, not be kept strictly enough apart, and many misunderstandings and numerous controversies stem from inferences made about language on the basis of blood relationship or about blood relationship on the basis of language. Only after each of these disciplines has, independently of the other, arrived at its own classification of peoples and languages, only then can their findings be correlated, but even then we shall no more be able to speak of an Aryan skull than we would be able to speak of a dolichocephalic language.¹⁵ (1872: 17–18)

Sadly, this essential distinction was to be lost on many people, not just in Germany.

Julius von Klaproth (1830) was also the first to practise linguistic palaeontology, using reconstructible phytonyms in light of the natural geographical distribution of plant species in an attempt to narrow down the geographical location of the Indo-Germanic homeland. His work inspired both Franz Felix Adalbert Kuhn, who wrote the study *Zur ältesten Geschichte der indogermanischen Völker* in

13. "Es ist richtig zu sagen, die deutsche Sprache stammt von denselben Wurzeln ab als das *Sanskrit*, aber unsinnig darum das *Deutsche Volk* von den Hindu abzuleiten."

14. "L'opinion de M. Klaproth ne fait, selon nous, que confirmer notre opinion qui est celle de tous qui étudient la nature: que les langues ne peuvent que fournir des caractères incertains pour la classification des espèces ou des races d'hommes."

15. "Linguistik und Ethnologie, können, für jetzt wenigstens, gar nicht streng genug auseinander gehalten werden, und viele Missverständnisse, viele Controversen haben ihren Grund eben darin, dass man von Sprache auf Blut, oder von Blut auf Sprache geschlossen hat. Haben erst beide Wissenschaften ihre Classification der Völker und Sprachen unabhängig von einander durchgeführt, dann wird es an der Zeit sein, die Resultate zu vergleichen, aber selbst dann kann man so wenig von einem Arischen Schädel als von einer dolichocephalischen Sprache sprechen."

1845, and Adolphe Pictet, who in his monumental two-volume study (1859, 1863) coined the term *paléontologie linguistique* for the methodology first developed by von Klaproth.

The comparative work by Julius von Klaproth was based on shared roots, and it is a testimony to his powers of discernment that, based on the identification of inherited vs. borrowed roots, he was able to establish that Tibetan, Burmese and Chinese,¹⁶ as well as certain *Transgangetische* ‘trans-Gangetic’ languages such as Garo,¹⁷ belonged to a single language family, from which he excluded Vietnamese, Thai, Mon, Khmer, Nicobarese, Japanese and Korean as belonging to different linguistic phyla.¹⁸ In von Klaproth’s comparisons, the recognition of sound change and phonological correspondences was implicit. However, it would be a sheer anachronism to fault von Klaproth with not having explicitly formulated sound laws. Whilst von Klaproth worked on Oriental languages, his Occidentalist contemporaries were only just beginning to understand the history of Indo-European.

In 1806, Friedrich von Schlegel discovered the First Germanic Sound Shift, which was rediscovered by Rasmus Rask in 1818 and once again rediscovered by Jacob Grimm in 1822, with Karl Adolf Verner improving upon Grimm’s formulations in 1875. It would only be after von Klaproth’s death that Carl Richard Lepsius (1861: 492–496) would conceive of tonogenesis. Based on the language relationships outlined in von Klaproth’s *Asia Polyglotta*, Lepsius proposed that Chinese tones had arisen from the merger of initials and the loss of finals based on correspondences between Tibetan, Cantonese, Hokkien and Mandarin. He argued that entire syllables had been lost in Chinese and that Chinese ideograms once represented words which may often have contained more than just the root syllables whose reflexes survive in the modern pronunciations. Just as Lepsius was inspired by the work of von Klaproth, his own work later inspired Bernard Karlgren.

Of relevance to this journal is that the Trans-Himalayan language family was first identified by Julius von Klaproth in 1823, who defined the family as consisting of Tibetan, Chinese, Burmese and all demonstrably related languages, including

16. “Das Tübetische hat viele Wurzeln mit dem Chinesischen gemein, weshalb ich in dem Wörterverzeichnisse beide Sprachen neben einander gestellt habe. Manche Wurzeln finden sich auch in den Transgangetischen Sprachen wieder... *Awa* oder das Land der *Birma*... Ihre Sprache hat viele Dialecte, weicht sehr von der Siamischen ab, zeigt aber in den Wurzeln manche Ähnlichkeiten mit der Tübetischen” (von Klaproth 1823: 346, 365).

17. “Sprache der Bewohner der Garrau Berge, an der Nordost-Gränze von Bengalen” (1823: 355).

18. About Vietnamese, von Klaproth wrote: “Annam... in ihre Sprache sind viele Chinesischen Wörter aufgenommen, obgleich sie für dieselben Begriffe eigenthümliche, von den Chinesischen gänzlich abweichende Wurzelwörter haben” (1823: 363), and he made similar observations about Sinitic loans in Japanese, Siamese and Mon (1823: 326, 364, 365).

the then newly documented “trans-Gangetic” languages. This language family was originally called Tibeto-Burman in the British Isles, e.g. Brian Hodgson (1857), Robert Cust (1878), Charles Forbes (1878), Bernard Houghton (1896). The ambiguous use of the term “Tibeto-Burman” in two contradictory senses first arose only half a century later, when an old rival phylogenetic model named “Indo-Chinese” began to gain in popularity. This other theory of linguistic relationship differed from von Klaproth’s well-informed Tibeto-Burman language family in that the Indo-Chinese construct contained all the languages of Asia and Oceania as far as Japan, Polynesia and Papua New Guinea.

The theory was dreamt up by a Scotsman named John Caspar Leyden, who made a meteoric career as a British civil servant in Asia during the Napoleonic wars but then died at the age of 35 soon after he reached Java. The idea that all Asian and Oceanic languages shared some “common mixed origin” appealed to British colonial authorities, who were persuaded that they would be better able to rule over Asian peoples if a programme of linguistic research to understand Indo-Chinese language could be effectuated.

Ernst Kuhn (1883, 1889) finally removed the Austroasiatic languages from Indo-Chinese, but it was inconvenient for those who adhered to the Indo-Chinese model that in French the term *indochinois* referred geographically to French Indochina and linguistically to Austroasiatic. Therefore, Jean Przyluski coined the new French term *sino-tibétain* in 1924. The term entered English in a review by Edward Sapir (1925: 373), who first used an English rendering of Jean Przyluski’s *sino-tibétain*, saying:

Sino-Tibetan, by J. Przyluski (this term is much to be preferred to the misleading “Indo-Chinese” that has been current; “Sinic” is perhaps even better).¹⁹

Sapir was quite incorrect, however, in suggesting that Sino-Tibetan was somehow less misleading than Indo-Chinese. The mere rebranding of Indo-Chinese as “Sino-Tibetan” neither altered the language family tree thus designated, nor rendered the phylogenetic construct any more well supported. Subsequently, alternative language family tree models were proposed which ventured to rename the language family as Sino-Burman (Ramstedt 1957), Sino-Himalayan (Bodman 1973, 1980) or Sino-Kiranti (Starostin 1994).

The historical reality is that the terms “Indo-Chinese” and “Sino-Tibetan” have always denoted an invalid or, at best, empirically unsupported language family tree model. Contrary to a suggestion proffered by Handel (2008: 431), no comparative evidence has ever been adduced demonstrating that a distinction between two

19. My thanks go to Thomas Lindner, Professor of Linguistics in Salzburg, for drawing my attention to this review article.

phonemes *a and *ə existed at the level of the Trans-Himalayan proto-language and subsequently merged in every single branch of the language family other than Sinitic. In fact, Jacques has found reflexes of the same distinction in Tangut, and Hill has done so in Burmese (Hill 2015: 189–190). Moreover, the numerous isoglosses that happen to be shared between many linguistic subgroups other than Sinitic have no diagnostic value for phylogeny inasmuch as they merely represent archaic retentions. In explicit opposition to the bifurcating Sino-Tibetan family tree model, the Fallen Leaves phylogenetic model was proposed in 2001. This agnostic family tree has been known as Trans-Himalayan ever since 2004.²⁰

Like the family tree labels Indo-Germanic, Austroasiatic or Afro-Asiatic, the name Trans-Himalayan is purely geographical in inspiration, for this language family straddles the highest land barrier on the planet and is disseminated both north and south of the Himalayas. At the same time, the choice of name was a nod in the direction of the great Swedish explorer, Sven Hedin (1909), who popularised the expression Trans-Himalaya, albeit in a somewhat different sense. The Fallen Leaves model does not deny the existence of a tree, but is merely honest about our current state of knowledge, or lack thereof, with regard to the structure of this tree. Fallen Leaves is therefore also the model best equipped to accommodate diverse subordinate subgrouping proposals for testing and then either validation or refutation, e.g. Sino-Bodic (Simon 1929; van Driem 1997), Burmo-Qiāngic (Bradley 1997, 2002; Jacques 2014).

In addition to identifying the Trans-Himalayan or Tibeto-Burman language family, von Klaproth first identified the Austronesian language family in its present shape. The contours of Austronesian first came into view when Frederick de Houtman (1603: v), prompted by his cabin boy from Madagascar, realised that Malagasy was related to Malay. Malagasy is now known to be a member of the Maanyan subgroup of the Barito river area in southern Borneo (Dahl 1951). Jacob le Maire, who travelled throughout the Indo-Pacific in the years 1615 and 1616, observed that the languages of Polynesia were related to Malay and other languages of the Indonesian archipelago. On the basis of such observations and language materials, Adriaan van Reeland (1708: 55–139) established the genetic affinity between Malagasy, Malay and the Polynesian languages and identified Malayo-Polynesian as a language family.

However, it was Julius von Klaproth who in 1822, one year before the publication of his *Asia Polyglotta*, first identified the aboriginal languages of Formosa as members of the Malayo-Polynesian family on the basis of the catechisms and

20. Therefore, when Jacques (2017) proposes to rechristen Trans-Himalayan “multifurcate Sino-Tibetan” and to rename the Sino-Tibetan phylogenetic model as “bifurcate Sino-Tibetan”, this terminological sleight of hand essentially represents a falsification of the history of thought; cf. van Driem (2007).

linguistic materials produced by the missionary Daniel Gravius between 1647 to 1651. The Austrian priest Wilhelm Schmidt renamed the language family Austronesian in 1904, and currently we understand the Austronesian family to consist of ten branches, nine of which are represented by the languages spoken on Formosa, i.e. Atayalic, East Formosan, Puyuma, Paiwan, Rukai, Tsouic, Bunun, Western Plains and Northwest Formosan, whereas Malayo-Polynesian represents a single tenth extra-Formosan branch of the family (Blust 2009).

In summary, the profound impact of Julius von Klaproth's contribution to Oriental studies and linguistics is manifest in the enduring nature of his legacy, which includes, but is not limited to, the first published Western account of the life of the historical Buddha, the methodology of linguistic palaeontology, an insistence on the principled distinction between the linguistic affinity vs. the biological ancestry of a language community, the recognition of the indigenous languages of Formosa as Austronesian languages, a defence of the phylogenetic model of the Indo-Germanic language family and the popularisation of Malte-Brun's renaming as Indo-Germanic of the language family that had hitherto been named "Scythian", the recognition of the Trans-Himalayan or Tibeto-Burman language family comprising Chinese, Tibetan, Burmese and other languages demonstrably related to these three, and major novel comparative work on the Finno-Ugric language family, which he renamed Uralic.

In his lifetime, von Klaproth produced over three hundred valuable and influential publications, and, like most scholars, he was naturally not right in every instance. In addition to his numerous original contributions, von Klaproth also devoted much energy to assailing what he perceived to be the bogus scholarship of some of his contemporaries. In such cases, his writings were characterised by what Wilhelm von Humboldt qualified as *Ätzigkeit*, roughly 'vitriol'.²¹ Jean-Baptiste Benoît Eyriès described this character trait as follows:

Driven, one might say, by an excessive love of truth, by an untameable antipathy towards theories not supported by facts, by an implacable hatred for charlatanry, behind whatever mask it would hide, and against conceited ignorance, he would pursue them to the bitter end.²² (1857: 4)

One dreads to ponder how von Klaproth might have responded to LaPolla's casual misrepresentations.

21. In a letter by Wilhelm von Humboldt to Johannes Karl Hartwig Schulze, written June 1834, quoted by Walravens (1999: 44).

22. "Dominé, on peut le dire, par un amour excessif de la vérité, par une antipathie invincible pour les théories qui ne s'appuyaient pas sur les faits, par une haine implacable pour le charlatanisme, quel que fût son masque, pour l'ignorance vaniteuse, il les poursuivait à outrance."

4. Paradigm shift and scientific revolutions

On the 31st of August 2016, Alexander Coupe sent me a draft of LaPolla's (2016) article, requesting me to indulge LaPolla's latest piece with a rebuttal, to which LaPolla would then "be given the right of reply", adding his own opinion as editor of the journal that: "This is a discussion that our field needs to have, and we hope you will accept our invitation". Although a few colleagues told me at the time that the screed published in issue 39/2 of *LTBA* did not merit being dignified with a response, the present redressal of LaPolla's misapprehensions stems as much from a need to rectify LaPolla's maligning of a deceased scholar as to prevent his other egregious ruminations from misleading students and young scholars. The historical elucidations provided above serve to redress the ahistorical slander published in this journal.

However, LaPolla is no more knowledgeable about historical linguistics than he is about the history of linguistics. It is therefore astonishing to see LaPolla (1992, 1994, 2001, 2012a, 2012b, 2013) in several publications adopting what, in his case, presents a decidedly burlesque pose, as a preceptor of methodology, a role for which he is uniquely unqualified. In his recent *LTBA* instalment, LaPolla (2016) attempts to flog virtually every paper that he has ever written, though most are not germane to his chosen topic, and then persists in showcasing his perennial misunderstandings about historical linguistics. His inclusion of the ubiquitously attested "middle" marker **<si>* in his imaginary Rung taxon showcases his unfamiliarity with the available grammatical descriptions of the languages which he undertakes to subgroup, this flaw being but one of the manifold things wrong with Rung.

Kepping (1994) and I (van Driem 1991, 1993b) previously attempted to familiarise LaPolla with a few elementary lessons of historical linguistics, but our instruction fell on deaf ears. Moreover, as shown by Jacques (2016), LaPolla has persisted in his false representation of Tangut verbal morphology, although his factual errors were already pointed out clearly by Kepping (1994). These exchanges in the linguistic literature document LaPolla's reluctance even to accept factual correction. In two admirably dispassionate expositions, Hill (forthcoming) and DeLancey (forthcoming) each independently patiently lay bare how LaPolla's failure to grasp the comparative method is of a more fundamental nature than either Kepping or I had ever anticipated.

In view of the word limit imposed upon this invited response, I am in the fortunate position of being able to refer readers to these two new meticulous dissections of LaPolla's multiple methodological misunderstandings. With regard to LaPolla's misrepresentations of my own writings, it will suffice to refer the reader directly to the original sources cited by LaPolla, namely van Driem (1997, 2002, 2005, 2011, 2014). Consulting the articles in question will enable the judicious reader to

appreciate for himself or herself the extent of LaPolla's distortions of their content. Finally, it is astonishing that LaPolla concludes by mentioning Kuhn, whose writings he has failed to understand.

Thomas Kuhn (1970) documented the social history of scientific revolutions, whereby many scientific theories were upheld for decades, sometimes even centuries, despite a considerable body of counter evidence. As illustrated by Murray (1980, 1994), paradigm shift, particularly in the humanities, is to a large extent a social phenomenon, which involves personalities and egos. This mortifyingly human tendency, which is observed to run quite contrary to the spirit of empirical science, is perhaps even more pronounced in the field of linguistics, as documented by Amsterdamska, who observed:

...historical evidence does not support the contention that the discovery of empirical anomalies leads inevitably, or even quickly, to theoretical changes in science. Problems which cannot be explained by existing theoretical models are sometimes put aside or ignored, or even defined as non-problems. (1987: 252)

In the context of Kuhn's writings on paradigm shift, LaPolla incriminates himself when he pontificates that he sees no "better alternative that would require me to rethink my understanding of the Sino-Tibetan family". Dispelling myths such as the empirically unsupported Sino-Tibetan phylogenetic model is an onerous task because of the tenacity with which such narratives take hold of the human mind. Since LaPolla has shown himself impervious even to factual correction, could the matter of changing LaPolla's poorly informed opinions possibly be of any great consequence to historical linguistics, a field to which he remains very much an outsider?

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