

Recenzje / Reviews

Alexander Vovin and Sami Ishisaki-Vovin 2021. *The Eastern Old Japanese Corpus and Dictionary*. Handbook of Oriental Studies // Handbuch der Orientalistik. Section Five Japan. Volume 17. Leiden | Boston: Brill. Pp. XV + 1–501.

Following the appearance of the monumental two-volume grammar of *Western Old Japanese* in its *second* edition (Vovin 2020)¹, the same Publisher released – within practically one year, in the same series and under the consecutive series volume number – a new work by the same author (otherwise well-known for his productivity and prolificacy in the trade), this time in co-authorship with his spouse and also a linguist “engaged in the fieldwork of several Japonic varieties, including her native Toyama dialect”², and with *Eastern Old Japanese* in focus.

This reviewer emphatically juxtaposes the *Western* and *Eastern* components of the two glottonyms used by Vovin(s) also somehow due to certain personal reasons worth mentioning here: in mid 1980s and 1990s he experienced the privilege and simultaneously great burden and responsibility to organize and institutionalize consecutively three academic-level Japanese study courses in Poland where at that time only one university (Warsaw) was in the position to offer limited recruitment for such studies and there were neither human (teaching staff) nor material (handbooks, dictionaries, etc. – not to speak of specialized libraries or financial support to acquire what was desperately needed) resources to found other such institutionalized courses. Miraculously, all the three initiatives proved successful and developed into solid and safe institutions thanks initially only to private resources (literature and audio records in the first place) of the

¹ Vol. 1 was published in 2005, vol. 2 – in 2009 by Global Oriental in Folkestone, Kent, UK (a Brill’s imprint); Vovin 2020:xxi-ii provided (convincing, in this reviewer’s opinion) reasons for the necessity to publish it only a decade (and half in the case of vol. 2) after the first impression. Anyway, it also reflects the rate of progress in recent research.

² Quoted from the elegant introduction of the authors on the back cover.



slowly but steadily growing teaching staff put at the students' disposal, and widening access to copying machines³. Efforts to provide instruction also in language variants other than "contemporary standard" and "handbook Japanese" (more or less *nihongo*, in opposition to *kokugo*) were tremendous and often futile and this in the first place concerned the "historical languages" – Classical Japanese and Old (~ "Ancient"⁴ or "Azuma", see Miyake 2003:159 and 272) Japanese. The greatest problem was always with teachers as well as teaching materials⁵ and one could not even imagine any grammar or dictionary of Old Japanese suitable for students and the subtle differences indicated by the modifiers like "Western" or "Eastern" seemed to be beyond comprehension of even knowledgeable native Japanese teachers available. Actually, it was only after the reading of "Section 2" on "Previous Scholarship" in Vovin 2020 (:20–21) that this writer could really feel some curing relief: "there are very few general descriptions of the Western Old Japanese language grammar published even in Japanese [...] none of" them being "complete" (20) and "There is only one grammatical sketch of Old Japanese written in a Western language (Syromiatnikov 1972)" (21). The relief, however, also could not be complete: "The grammatical description of Eastern Old Japanese actually fared much better [...] there are three comprehensive monographs on the subject" (*ibid.*).

The "only" Western-language sketch referred to above does but mention dialect differentiation: "Records of the 8th century do not reflect all the dialects, but mainly the Central Western and, to some extent, the Eastern [...]. In the present work, Eastern dialectal features are rendered sporadically because of lack of space" (Syromiatnikov 1981:13⁶).

The very first sentence opening the volume states that "the book [under concern here] has no exact predecessors" (front matter, "Preface" p. IX) as far as Eastern Old

³ At present, apart from the University of Warsaw, Japanese studies are in Poland in the offer of the Jagiellonian and Adam Mickiewicz (BA, MA, and PhD courses) Universities, Nicolaus Copernicus University (BA, MA) and Foreign Language College in Poznań (BA; the latter three host the establishments mentioned in the text), and the human as well as material base is incomparably better than described due to exemplary support from respective Japanese institutions and years of accumulating experience and resources (and the Japan Foundation should be particularly praised here).

⁴ For Vovin it should be extremely interesting to know that the first aids at our disposal in this respect were Syromiatnikov 1981 ("a rather poorly translated from the original Russian", Bentley 2001:2) and... Kolpakchi 1956. It was years later that the first two volumes of the 時代別国語大辞典 [*Jidaibetsu kokugo daijiten* 'great dictionary of the Japanese language by epochs'] reached our shelves (both 室町時代編 *Muromachi jidai hen* 'Muromachi period' 1-2 (while the remaining vols. 3–5 and the 1990 *Jōdai hen* (上代編 'antiquity period') volume are, unfortunately, still absent here). Both Kolpakchi and Syromyatnikov (the 1972 original) have been referred to several times each in Vovin 2020.

⁵ The first handbook of Classical Japanese and the only aid of this kind appeared in Poland as recently as 2013 (Iwona Kordzińska-Nawrocka. *Klasyczny język japoński*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego).

⁶ In the original (1972:9): "В памятниках VIII в. отражены не все диалекты, а в основном центрально-западный и частично восточный [...]. В данном очерке по недостатку места восточные диалектизмы приводятся лишь sporadически". A little more information on the „Eastern dialect [that] already existed in its primary form in the 8th century" could be found in Ohno 1970:39ff. and in Poznań sporadically mentioned in lectures only after a copy of the book was brought from Bonn University in late 1989.

Japanese language material research results are concerned and points to three studies by Yoshiharu Mizushima on *Man'yōshū* as the closest to what Vovin & Vovin is to offer. This is the authors' perspective while the reviewer sees the uniqueness of the book also in some wider perspective.

In comparison to Vovin 2020, it presents itself modest and much less impressive in volume (one spending her/his life among dictionaries and grammars of hundreds of languages seems to be affected by an unconditioned reflex to expect a grammar to be smaller in size than a dictionary) and when one opens it, the "usual" pages with two–three columns of print expected are not in sight. Judging by the title, one should be aware of the *two* components constituting the work but still one can be astonished that the "Dictionary of Eastern Old Japanese" ("Part 2" in the book) is only... 54 (or, more precisely, 52) pages long (428/430–482, 10% of the volume), at the same time being the fully documentary dictionary of the language in question "includ[ing] all words found in the Eastern Old Japanese poems, irrespective of the fact whether they are identical with their Western Old Japanese cognates or not" (p. X). Moreover, the dictionary is not conceived or perceived by the authors as an index to the "Corpus": mentioning Mizushima's works that "come close" to their result (cf. above), the authors comment on Mizushima's "limitations", *i.a.* emphasizing their awareness that "an index, even the best one, is not an equivalent of a dictionary" (p. IX)⁷.

The "Dictionary", "compiled by Sami Ishisaki-Vovin on the basis of th[e] corpus" (p. X), is Eastern Old Japanese-English and the "Index" concluding the entire volume (493–501) functions indeed as an index enabling one to use the "Dictionary" also the English-Eastern Old Japanese way.

The front matter includes "Preface" (IX–X), "Acknowledgments" (XI), "Abbreviations" (XII–XIV), and "Charts" (seven listed, XV).

The "Introduction" (1–38) starts with the presentation of the source material (all known Eastern Old Japanese texts: "the actual Eastern Old Japanese corpus is bigger than just books fourteen and twenty of the *Man'yōshū*", p. IX), with certain exciting themes like whether "poems with an unidentified geographical location can be identified" (9–12), *man'yōgana* script ("in Eastern Old Japanese considerably simpler than in Western Old Japanese", 17(–26)), a brief grammatical outline of Eastern Old Japanese ("here we only offer some general notes" and also recommend further reading for "an interested reader", 26–31; cf. also footnote 9 below). Listed are "all specific vocabulary items that occur in" Eastern Old Japanese (31–35) and "all Ainu loans" in Eastern Old Japanese "that can be found in books fourteen and twenty" of *Man'yōshū* (35–38).

In Vovin 2020:63 one reads that "Apart from place names [...], there are very few Ainu loanwords in Western Old Japanese" (only two are mentioned) "but there are plenty of Ainu loanwords in Eastern Old Japanese", hence the 52-item list in the volume under

⁷ This reviewer understands it only too well as a co-compiler of an Ainu-English dictionary-index to a closed corpus of Bronisław Piłsudski's Sakhalin Ainu texts simultaneously being an attempt at a reconstruction of Piłsudski's Ainu dictionary considered lost (Majewicz & Majewicz 1986, ²1998).

scrutiny here can be of special interest for many readers and reasons, one among the latter being Vovin 1993.

It is the contextual “Corpus” documentation of all known Eastern Old Japanese texts meticulously explained and commented on word after word, that constitutes the core of the book, spanning over 389 (or 387) pages (75% of the entire contents from cover to cover) and authored (“done”, p. IX) by Vovin, “the presentation of [which] follows the same model as Alexander Vovin’s edition and translation of the *Man’yōshū* (*ibid.*)⁸.

The book surely is addressed to linguists, specialists in Japanese linguistics and historical linguistics (of the region and in general), but excellent multifaceted and multidirectional commentaries should attract the attention of anyone involved in the study of Japan or just wishing to deepen her/his knowledge about the culture and realities of (not only ancient) Japan. For instance, there is a longish-looking commentary (202–203) on the toponym <Tusima ~ Tsushima 對馬, present day rendering 対馬> with (seemingly, too) abundant detailed information on the physical geography of the island in question in its initial part, although one reaching for a volume with such title ignorant of its existence and location can hardly be expected (even though relatively few among Japanologists visited it) and the geographical details could easily be found in many reference sources. Yet, one can only enjoy further reading to realize how functional all the details are. In relation to it, one more of the many praiseworthy advantages of Vovin’s work considered by this author necessary to mention is the precise and rigorous cross-reference system (minimum repetition and redundancy with maximum information) worth following in other academic publications. And persons with the experience like this reviewer (cf. the beginning of this text), while welcoming the dictionary presented here and considering it as one more (among many) great achievement of the author(s), can only regret that books like the one under scrutiny here and also like the Vovin 2020 grammar did not exist some 25–35 years ago – our lives and tasks, surely also organizational outcomes, could then be much easier and much better⁹.

Disastrous communication that the author of the work under scrutiny here, Alexander Vovin, for many of us simply *Sasha*, left us prematurely (born 1961) forever on April 8, 2022, just when the present text was in print. For linguistics, a tremendous and irreplaceable loss and harm...

⁸ *Man’yōshū A New English Translation Containing the Original Text, Kana Transliteration, Romanization, Glossing and Commentary* by Alexander Vovin, at least seven vols. (*Books 1, 5, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20*) published so far since 2009 by Brill or Global Oriental (see footnote 1).

⁹ It is perhaps not out of the place to signal here the existence of an extensive (over 1,050 pages !) Eastern Old Japanese grammar (Kupchik 2011) with an evident Vovin’s handprint on it (and on many other significant works in the discipline of the two recent decades, like e.g. Bentley 2001 or Miyake 2003).

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