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One year after the first part,1 Hans Dettmer has published the second part of his translation of the administrative “regulations” (ryō 令) from the law codex compiled in the “Yōrō”-era (養老, 717–24). It covers the remaining sections of the earliest existing bureaucratic prescriptions that were enforced in 757 and survived in two commentaries. The earlier text, “Explaining the meaning of the regulations” (Ryō no gige 令義解, 833), has been selected by the author for his rendering. With this volume, the translation of the ryō-section of the codex is complete.2 I shall seize the opportunity of its publication for an assessment of the project based primarily on this second volume.3

The Yōrō-codex is the last edition of public law codified in the decades before and after the year 700. This means that the set of “regulations” it established for administrative agencies and bureaucratic procedures remained, at least theoretically, “formally applicable law”4 until the beginning of the Meiji period. The ten scrolls or “books” (maki 巻) of this administrational sub-code survived in a fairly complete form as opposed to the complementary constituent of the codex, the “penal codes” (ritsu 律), of which only few segments are extant from the original ten “books”.5 This makes the codex, on the whole,

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2 A third volume with the translation of the “penal codes” (ritsu) of the codex will appear in 2012.


4 Dettmer 2009, xiii.

and the “regulations”, in particular, a rare genuine historical source from the Nara period, representing codified public law valid theoretically until the 19th century.

Despite its importance, only few of the code’s 30 sections have been translated into Western languages. This is revealed by the list provided in Dettmer’s first volume that displays all existing translations into English, French or German. This table also shows that most of the previously published translations have been done by Dettmer himself. He has studied and translated the codex since his student days in Munich in the 1950s evidenced by his two major studies on early history based on the codex: the analysis of the law system of the Nara period (1959) and his study on the bureaucracy of the 8th to 10th centuries (1972). Thus, not only the Yōrō-codex, but also its translation has a history, and we should consider ourselves fortunate that Dettmer has remained active since his retirement from the Chair of Japanese History at Bochum University in 1992 by presenting it now to the public.

The subtitle of this publication, “Übersetzung des Ryō no gige”, suggests that the work entitled Ryō no gige is to be found in translation. This is only partly true, however, since only those passages representing the “regulations” were extracted and rendered into German. The modern standard edition of this book in the series “Newly revised and enlarged Compendium of Japanese history” (Shintei zōho Kokushi taikei 新訂増補国史大系), on which the translation is based, marks these ryō-sections by reproducing them in larger script and arranging them in a single row, whereas the later commentary, that “explains...

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6 DETTMER 2009, p. xviii-xx. Translations into English: Samson: sections 2, 6, 7, 8; Crump: section 11; French: Maché: section 26; German: Schmidt: section 11, Lewin’s manuscript: section 2–5, Dettmer: 8–10, 12, 13, 15, 24. In addition to this list, Rüttermann has recently published a German translation of section 21, Kushiki ryō, in JH 11 (2007), pp. 5–51.


10 DETTMER (2009: ix) has been using the 1959 edition of the series.
In a few cases, Dettmer paraphrases the commentary in footnotes, but in general, these parts of the text still await translation. Thus, the Ryō no gige has not been translated as a whole, but simply serves as basis for the reconstruction of the administrative code, which does not exist in any other form than in later commentaries or as passages quoted in other documents (“scattered fragments”, itsubun 逸文). The editors of the volume “Penal and Administrative [codes]” (Ritsuryō 律令) of the series Nihon shisō taikei (日本思想大系) adopted the same method and extracted the original codex from commentaries and fragments. Accordingly, they called their modern edition simply Ritsu [and] Ryō. A subtitle along this line would have also suited Dettmer’s translation better than the one chosen, which may give rise to misunderstandings and hides more than it reveals about the content of this book: It actually presents the core codex of administrative law from the Nara period in a first complete translation into a Western language without any of the Heian period exegesis.

In this second part of the translation, the sections six to 30 of the codex are presented. The original version of the text has been written presumably in plain classical Chinese and does not have any of the markers that could facilitate the reading of kanbun for Japanese readers. In this part, the text consists of grammatically complete sentences. Thus, the “regulations” are far less enumerative in character here than the initial five sections which mainly...
consisted of lists that catalogue the bureaucratic framework of the centralised state. The grammatical structure of the sentences here is nevertheless comparatively simple and quite repetitive and the main difficulty this law text poses for a translator remained basically the same: how to render the institutions and their responsibilities, and how to explain their interactions with each other and the subjects under their control in a language that is intelligible to a foreign reader. One reviewer of the first volume has been slightly critical about some expressions coined in this process, a surprising critique in view of the experience of the translator, who had, in addition, for sections two to five, a draft of a translation by Bruno Lewin, another erudite scholar of post-war Japanese studies in Germany and who is among others an acknowledged specialist of that period. For some of the examples mentioned by Rüttermann, like the translation of onmyō 險陽 as “Mantik,” one would have preferred indeed a less interpretative rendering and opted for the more direct “Yin and Yang”. However, there are good reasons, especially when the expression occurs in this case, as part of an institution to translate it more descriptively as “Kanzlei für Mantik”. On the whole, Dettmer did very well in selecting appropriate and comprehensible German equivalents for terms and expressions of the ancient bureaucracy, thus making this a readable translation, which does not deviate too far from the original. In addition, nearly all decisions for choosing certain renderings are made plausible to readers by inserting footnotes. These do not only provide the Chinese character(s) of a word or an expression but also offer the whole spectrum of the words’ meaning and often, as in the case of chapter headings or very important terms, these notes also refer to other translations, cite modern Japanese commentaries, or give alternative Japanese readings. At times, the amount of additional information given by Dettmer suggests that he could be more keen on starting a hermeneutical dialogue on the meaning of terms than on wanting to give fixed translations which are valid for one point in time. Overall, the impressive number of more than 5400 footnotes gives us

17 We find explanation as to why he has chosen “Mantik” in DETTMER 1972 (see note 7), p. 84, note 453.
18 The 25 sections translated in the second volume contain between 34 and 635 footnotes amounting to 5,479 notes in total. Based on my own count with the help of a text-editing program, Books two to ten consist of 39,388 Chinese characters as compared with the 9,372 single characters in Book one alone. Thus, the complete ryō consists of 48,760 Kanji in the Kokushi taikei edition to which the short passage from Nihon shisō taikei must be added.
an idea how meticulously this difficult source material has been handled and presented to the reader.\textsuperscript{19}

The value of the translation is further improved by the decision of the author to transfer the contents of all language notes into a glossary (“Index”, pp. 561-679). There, we find an estimated 3600 words and expressions arranged according to their number in the “Great Chinese-Japanese Dictionary” (\textit{Dai Kanwa jiten} 大漢和辞典) compiled by Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋轍次.\textsuperscript{20} This largest Chinese-Japanese dictionary has served as Dettmer’s principal tool for rendering the original and providing descriptions of the meaning of single characters and compounds. Thus, this glossary forms a veritable dictionary of the essential vocabulary of the bureaucracy and daily life of the Nara-period with definitions translated into German from Morohashi’s dictionary.\textsuperscript{21} This glossary will be quite helpful, especially if digitalised, for those wishing to embark on translating other important historical sources from that period, i.e., the second of the “Six National Histories” (\textit{Rikkokushi} 六国史), the \textit{Shoku Nihongi} 続日本紀, being certainly among the most urgent candidates.

In general, the internet has facilitated research on Japanese history in recent years to a remarkable degree. Archives and libraries have started to display

Thus, in the second volume, on each page we find on average 71 Chinese characters translated.

\textsuperscript{19} In the second volume I did not find any misreadings, typographical errors or other flaws except for one table in the explanations preceding section 21 (p. 331), which I believe does not represent the calendrical system around the time of the implementation of the codex in 757. At that time, the solar period determining the first month of the luni-solar year, “Midpoint of first month” \textit{shōgatsu chū} 正月中, was “Arousing insects” (\textit{keichitsu} 啟蟄); this is revealed by a calendrical fragment for the preceding year (Tenpyō \textit{shōhō} 天平勝宝 8, [756]), which is reproduced in \textit{Koji ruien} 古事類苑 (reprinted by Yoshikawa Kōbunkan 吉川弘文館, 1982; Hōgibu 方技部, p. 376). Thus, in Dettmer’s table, entries number two and three should be interchanged.

\textsuperscript{20} The glossary starts therefore with the first character of that dictionary, “one” (\textit{ichi} 一), and ends with “turtle” (\textit{kame} 龜, modern form 龜), one of the last characters that was given the number 48847 in Morohashi. Accordingly, we find an expression like “die rechte Zeit verfehlen” (“to miss the right moment”) that is explained with reading (“shikkō”\textsuperscript{,} p. 286, note 633) and Chinese characters (“失候”) in a footnote in this glossary listed under the number of the first character of this compound, which is 5844 (compound 63 of the character “shitsu” 失 in vol. 3, page 555).

\textsuperscript{21} The complete vocabulary of the “regulations” and this commentary is also contained in the Japanese index \textit{Ryō no gige sōsakuin} 令義解総索引 (compiled by \textit{Kamada} Takashi 鳥田隆之 et al, Takashina Shoten 高科書店 1991); all references mentioned that do not contain an “A” or “B” point to the passages from the core codex and are to be found in Dettmer’s glossary, as well.

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their holdings in digital libraries that allow anybody with access to the internet to view and even download books and documents. Therefore, time-consuming visits to libraries have become less frequent and costs for making reproductions have been reduced drastically. It does not require too much imagination to see that these virtual archives will ultimately display all relevant texts of a culture in digitalised form and, equally important, will dynamically link these treasures of the past to translations that might exist in whatever language. In Chinese studies, this vision of the future is already taking shape on some platforms, displaying classics in the original with translations added and linked to dictionaries. These translations, mostly into English and French, were taken from sound scholarship that often laid one hundred or more years mostly unread in library shelves. This reappraisal of translations, I hope, will make new ones possible, filling the gaps that still make it so difficult to conduct source based research on topics related to pre-modern Japan.

For all of these potential translations I would not hesitate to recommend Hans Dettmer’s publication as a model. He has presented a faithful and reliable translation of a relevant text to which numerous explanations are added, as well as a dictionary with essential vocabulary. This information will serve us well when we want to know more about the organisation and functioning of the ritsuryô state or when we need to research a specific aspect of the centralised state without having to start from scratch working through this difficult primary text.