Answer Key to Exercise on Old Chinese rime classes

Study the following stanza from the poem titled lù míng鹿鳴in the Shijing詩經. The pronunciations of all the characters are given in pinyin:

鹿 鳴 lù míng

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| 呦呦鹿鳴，yōu yōu lù míng食野之苹。shí yě zhī píng我有嘉賓，wǒ yǒu jiā bīn鼓瑟吹笙。gǔ sè chuī shēng | With pleased sounds the deer call to one another,Eating the celery of the fields.I have here admirable guests;The lutes are struck, and the organ is blown [for them].(Trans. James Legge) |

1. In the stanza cited above, actually three of the four lines rhymed in Old Chinese. Therefore based on the Modern Chinese pronunciations, can you make some guesses as to which lines should have rhymed?

Since the first two lines rhyme in modern Chinese, let’s assume that they rhymed in Old Chinese as well here, unless we have evidence to the contrary. Now we have to decide whether line 3 or line 4 rhymed with the first two lines in Old Chinese. If we do not know anything about how rhyming works in the Shijing, it is hard to decide between line 3 and line 4.

Now if we look at the first two lines, they form one couplet with one idea or image. Lines 3 and 4 form another couplet with another idea or image. Therefore it is possible for these two couplets to have rhymed, i.e. lines 2 and 4 should rhyme.

Actually in the regulated verse in the Tang dynasty, even-numbered lines should rhyme, and the first line would often be included in the rhyme as well. Although we cannot use the rhyming rules from the Tang Dynasty to justify our guess here with regard to Old Chinese, it is nonetheless useful to refer to the rhyming rules in the regulated verse for some reference.

Therefore we conclude here that it is more likely in this stanza from Shijing that lines 1, 2 and 4 should have rhymed in Old Chinese.

1. Do all of these three lines still rhyme in modern Chinese? If not, then which line or lines of these rhyming lines do not rhyme any more in modern Chinese?

No. Lines 1 and 2 rhyme in modern Chinese, but line 4 is different from both lines 1 and 2.

1. As pointed out above, one of the four lines did not rhyme in Old Chinese and it still doesn’t rhyme with anything else in Modern Chinese. Which line did not rhyme?

It is line 3.

1. What is the rime class that can be derived from this stanza?

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