Grammatica et verba
Glamor and verve

Studies in South Asian, historical, and Indo-European linguistics in honor of
Hans Henrich Hock
on the occasion
of his seventy-fifth birthday

edited by
Shu-Fen Chen and Benjamin Slade

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An Outline of the History of Maldivian Writing

JOST GIPPERT

Among the Indo-Aryan languages, Dhivehi, the language of the Maldives, is very peculiar with respect to its written appearance, given that it underwent in its history a radical change of scripts which by the end of the 17th c. AD led from a typical Southern Brahmi cursive named Dives akuru to a right-to-left directed script named Thaana that has no equivalent anywhere else. The period covered by both these scripts extends over approximately 800 years, the oldest records of Dhivehi proper dating back to the 12th c. AD when the islands were converted to Islam. However, the few pre-Islamic written monuments that have been preserved clearly show that knowledge of writing must have been present in the Buddhist age preceding the Muslim epoch, even though it was primarily Sanskrit, not an ancient type of Dhivehi, that was the medium of literacy then. With the discovery of a brick-shaped coral stone inscribed with a Buddhist dhârâṇî in a primeval type of Brahmi on the island of Landhoo in the northernmost atoll of the Maldives a few years ago,¹ evidence for Maldivian literacy has changed dramatically: we may now safely posit writing to have been present on the islands continuously for at least 1500 years, starting with an “Insular” Prakrit that must have been the predecessor of what developed to be the Dhivehi language of today. In the following pages, I intend to outline the state of knowledge concerning the history of Dhivehi and its writing systems, achieved in the course of a thorough investigation of the written documents available so far.

1 The periodization of Maldivian literacy

On the basis of the written records and their (presumable or explicit) dating, we arrive at five periods of Maldivian literacy that can be distinguished with respect to the contents, the state of the language, the writing system, and the writing materials used:

a) Buddhist Prakrit period (?–ca. 10th c. AD)

This period is, for the time being, only represented by the Brahmi inscription from Landhoo mentioned above. Its content is a spell against demons and evil events,

¹Cf. Gippert 2004a as to the editio princeps of the inscription.
which is very similar to dh¯aran.¯ı's of (northern) Vajray¯ana Buddhism. The language is a peculiar Prakrit, herein termed “Dhivehi Prakrit”, intermingled with Sanskritisms.

b) Buddhist Sanskrit period (ca. 10th–12th c.)

This period manifests itself in a few inscribed artefacts from various islands, which have been collected in the National Museum of the Maldives in Male. The main objects under concern are two statues bearing several faces, with weapon-like symbols suggesting that they pertain to a Vajray¯ana-type Buddhist environment. This is confirmed by the inscriptions on them which represent a mantra pertaining to Yamántaka, the texts being essentially identical. Both inscriptions are written in an extremely awkward way, in the same cursive as that used in the following centuries.² There is only one monument inscribed in N¯agar¯ı script; its contents have not been identified yet. It is likely that in the same period an ancient stage of Dhivehi was also written, e.g. in documents concerning the foundation of Buddhist monasteries; however, no such records have been unearthed so far.

c) Old Dhivehi period (middle of the 12th–end of the 16th c.)

The Islamicization of the Maldives by around the year 1153 brought about radical change in that it led to the destruction of nearly all Buddhist monuments on the islands, including written records of the preceding period. The documents preserved from the four centuries representing the early Islamic period of the Maldives are so-called l¯om¯afanu’s, i.e. copper plate grants issued by Maldivian kings in connection with the foundation and maintenance of mosques. The eight l¯om¯afanu’s that have remained accessible (either in toto or partially) extend from ca. 1194 to about 1620. They are written in an early form of the Dives akuru cursive sometimes called Ev¯ela akuru, i.e. script (akuru < Skt. aks.ara) of yore (e vela = ‘that time’). The language is an ancient variety of Dhivehi, hereafter named “Old Dhivehi”, which abounds with Sanskritisms (sometimes written in N¯agar¯ı script in the earlier records) and Prakritisms as well as loans from Persian and Arabic (sometimes written in Arabic script in the later records).³ The period ended with the short interval of Portuguese rule on the Maldives (1558–73).

d) Middle Dhivehi period (end of the 16th c.–18th c.)

The subsequent period is characterized by the application of writing materials other

²Cf. Gippert to appear for a thorough account of the inscriptions, which were destroyed during the political turmoil of February 2012.
³Arabic was also used in inscriptions in that period; cf. Gippert 2003:46 as to the wooden board inscription of ca. 1340–8 of the Male Hukuru mosque.
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than copper plates, including paper documents (so-called fatkolu’s, i.e. ‘valuable leaves’), inscriptions on wooden boards (so-called fila fatkolu’s, i.e. ‘wooden f.s’), and (coral) stone inscriptions, all written in what may be regarded as the “standard” form of Dives akuru, with many foreign elements interspersed in Arabic script. The language of these monuments may be termed “Middle Dhivehi”. The period ended with the gradual replacement of Dives akuru by the Thaana script in the course of the 18th c.

c) Modern Dhivehi period (18th c.–today)

The introduction of the Thaana script by the end of the 17th c. marked the beginning of the modern period of Dhivehi literacy, which extends up to the present day. Although Thaana is but partially derived from Arabic (cf. below), it was clearly devised to overcome the problem of having to mix (left-to-right) Dives akuru with (right-to-left) Arabic in nearly all contexts. Within the past three centuries, Thaana has undergone a few changes, though none of them systematic.

2 The linguistic background of Dives akuru

While Thaana was clearly designed in accordance with the phonological requirements of the Maldivian language of the late 17th century, comprising exactly twenty-four basic characters for the twenty-four basic consonant phonemes of the language (cf. §3 below), Dives akuru in all its varieties was much less in concord with the sound system of Dhivehi in its different stages. Even in the Prakrit period, the Maldivian writing system, which had historically developed from an early Brahmi type, was redundant in many respects due to the imbalance between the sound inventories of early Middle Indic (for which the Brahmi script had been invented) and of Insular Prakrit (and its descendant, Dhivehi). In order to illustrate this, it is necessary to re-draw here the main features of the sound history of Dhivehi in terms of a tentative relative chronology.4

2.1 Relative chronology of Dhivehi sound changes

a) Together with all other Middle Indic vernaculars, Insular Prakrit must have undergone the typical reduction of consonant clusters at an early stage. Thus, there is no trace of the r of S(ans)k(ri)t grāma- ‘village’ in Mo(dern) Dh(ivehi) gan (toponym) < Mi(ddle) Dh(ivehi) O(ld) Dh(ivehi) gamu < D(hivehi) P(rakrit) *gāmu < E(arly) I(nsular) P(rakrit) *gāna, or of the r of Skt. dvīpa- ‘island’ in MoDh dū (element of

4The following treatise builds upon previous work published by the present author and S. Fritz (cf. Fritz 2002; Fritz and Gippert 2000; Gippert 2004b).
island names) < MiDh divu < ODh divu, divu < DP div < EIP dipa. In accordance with the so-called two-mora rule, most consonant clusters in medial position changed into either single consonants or geminates, depending on or interacting with the length of the preceding vowel. In the relevant cases, Dhivehi only partly agrees with Pali; cf. e.g. MoDh ṟ < MiDh ṟ < ODh ṟa ‘island, land’ < IP *rha < EIP *r̯ha < Skt. ṟstra- (long vowel reduced before the geminate, ~ Pali raṭṭa-). Thus, there is nothing left of the distinction between *rha vs. *r̯ha. In a similar way, Skt. sūtra- ‘thread’ led to MoDh ū (via ODh *uru < DP *uru < EIP *uru, vs. Pali sūtta-). Before this, the distribution of retroflex and non-retroflex consonants in the neighborhood of r must have been realigned in many cases, yielding e.g. MoDh vo’ ‘lamp’ < MiDh vo < ODh vo(u) < DP *veti < EIP *vetti < Skt. varti- ‘wick (of a lamp)’. In the same context, we must assume that syllabic r was substituted by i or u after neighboring dentals were affected by r, as shown by MoDh MiDh ODh kula ‘done, made’ < DP *kuda < EIP kuta < Skt. kāta-; MoDh MiDh ODh bodu ‘great, big’ < DP *bundo < EIP *bu’anta < Skt. bhanta-; or the name of the lunar constellation MoDh miabliya << DP *mijasira- < EIP *mijasira- < Skt. mijasira-. Note that there is no indication that word-final consonants of Sanskrit (e.g., the accusative ending m) might have survived into EIP; at least they have left no traces in Dhivehi whatsoever.

b) Together with Sinhalese, Dhivehi is characterized by the loss of the aspiration opposition in stops. Thus, there is nothing left of the distinction between *p and *ph in MoDh fen ‘water’ < MiDh ODh pen(u) < DP *pen < EIP *pēnīya < Skt. pāṇīya-,* 3 MoDh fonu ‘foam’ < MiDh *ponu < ODh *penu < DP *penu < EIP *pēna < Skt. pēn/a-, and MoDh fon ‘juice’ < MiDh *poni < ODh peni < DP *pēni < EIP *pēnīta < Skt. pāṇīta-. In the same context we may note the loss of inherited b as in MoDh ay ‘hand’ < MiDh at < ODh atu < DP *atu < EIP *atta < Skt. basta- or MoDh MiDh ODh mā ‘big’ < DP *mā < EIP ma’a < Skt. māb.

c) Still at an early stage, open initial syllables consisting of nothing but a short vowel were dropped. This led to MoDh MiDh ODh dia ‘water’ < DP *dya < EIP *dia < Skt. dāka-, MoDh MiDh ran ‘gold’ < ODh ran(u) < DP *ran < EIP *vana < Skt. bāṇya-, or MoDh daśa(ṇa) ‘under’ < MiDh ODh datu < DP *dat < EIP *datta < Skt. dāṣṭa-āt. After this, the accent is likely to have been fixed upon the (resulting) first syllable of all words.

The stage reached at this point is here referred to as representing the “E(arly) I(nsular) P(rakrit)” commonly underlying Dhivehi and Sinhalese.

d) An important sound change in the prehistory of Dhivehi was the development of

3Cf. Fritz (2002:67 n. 257) with further references.
4Attested e.g. in the metrical recension of the Vikramarāja (31.1:74 / MR 222).
initial y to a voiced dental stop d as in the verbal root yā-‘go’ which is reflected in MoDh MiDh ODh da- (modern lexicon entry form dānt ‘go’). This sound change is one of the most remarkable shibboleths distinguishing Dhivehi from Sinhalese, where y had been preserved (lexicon entry form yanavā ‘go’).7

c) Another important early change consists of the leveling of long and short vowels. This led to the i in Skt. āvīpa ‘island’ (> ODh ādivu, via DP *divu, EIP *dipa) becoming indistinguishable from the i in Skt. bātīti ‘wall’ (> ODh bitu, via DP *biti, EIP *bitti)

Original a and ā represent a special case here in that ā in open syllables had a peculiar outcome, not falling together with a; cf. e.g. MoDh akuru ‘letter, script’ < MiDh ODh akaru < DP *akarə < EIP *akara < Skt. aksara- vs. MoDh MiDh ODh akaru ‘year’ < DP *samsarə < EIP *sancara- < Skt. sancara-. It is assumed here that ā in open syllables developed into a schwa-like sound (ə), which later changed to u, i, etc.

f) One more important change is vowel umlaut conditioned by a subsequent i or y (possibly even e). By this umlauting rule, a changed into e (possibly via ā as in Sinhalese) as in MoDh re ‘night’ (cf. above), fen ‘water’ (cf. above), or MoDh ey ‘elephant’ < MiDh ODh *etu < DP *eti < EIP *atti < Skt. hasti-, perhaps also in ODh gemen (abl.sg.) ‘from the village’ < DP *gemenə < EIP *gāmena < Skt. (instr.sg.) grāmena/na. In the case of u as well as the schwa vowel emerging from ā in open syllables (cf. above), the umlaut result is i as in MoDh MiDh ODh iru ‘sun’ < DP *sirə < EIP sūrīya < Skt. sūrīya-. Obviously, this umlaut was also triggered by palatal affricates and sibilants (including inherited i) as in MoDh firi- ‘male (person)’ < MiDh ODh piri < DP *piriə < EIP *puruṣa- < Skt. puruṣa-, MoDh mih- ‘man’ < MiDh ODh mih- < DP *miṇi- < EIP *manus(y)a- < Skt. manus(y)a-, or MoDh MiDh ODh diba ‘ten’ < DP *diya < EIP *daśa < Skt. daśa. Another vowel change, which lowered the high vowels i and u to e and o, is harder to account for in terms of triggering conditions. In MoDh o ‘caramel’ < MiDh ODh oṣu < DP *oṣə < EIP *usṭa < Skt. uṣṭa and MoDh ko ‘making’ (converb) < MiDh koṭ(u) < ODh koṭu < DP *koṭə < EIP *koṭa < Skt. kṛtvā this may have been the geminate retroflex following it; however, this does not hold for MoDh MiDh ODh ge ‘house’ < DP *gə < EIP *gīva < Skt. gīva-

g) After exerting their possible umlauting effects, all palatal affricates and sibilants must have fallen together with s, thus leaving but one sibilant in the system. Importantly, Dhivehi is clearly distinct from Sinhalese here again as the merger in Maldivian includes not only (Skt.) ē as in the latter language but also j; cf. e.g. MoDh ras(geʃaʃna) ‘king’ < MiDh ODh ras < DP *raʃə < EIP *rāja < Skt. rājā, or MoDh MiDh ODh batuṇ ‘four’ < DP *satuṇ < EIP cattara- < Skt. cattara- vs. MoDh bay ‘seven’ < MiDh ODh bat(u) < DP *satu < EIP *sattə < Skt. sapta, MoDh MiDh ODh ba ‘six’

7 Cf. Fritz (2002:11) with further references.
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< DP *sa < EIP *sa < Skt. *sa(e), MoDh MiDh ODh bi(a) ‘hundred’ < DP *siya < EIP sata < Skt. *sata-, and MoDh MiDh ODh bab- ‘thousand’ < DP *sas- < EIP *sa’sa < Skt. sahasra-.

h) The next radical change concerned single non-retroflex stops in intervocalic position, which were reduced to glides (mostly y, more rarely v as in ODh divu ‘island’, cf. above, or MoDh faru ‘wall’ < MiDh ODh pavuru < DP *pavuvu < EIP *pákara < Skt. *prákara-).§ When the resulting glide was y, it caused umlaut of a preceding schwa-vowel as in MoDh MiDh ODh dia ‘water’ (via DP *diya < *diya < EIP *daka < Skt. udaka-), MoDh ODh miyaru ‘shark’ < DP *mayra < EIP *makara < Skt. makara- ‘sea monster’, or MoDh MiDh ODh rili ‘silver’ < DP *risva < *rśyva < EIP *rajata < Skt. rajata-, whereas a remained unaffected as in MoDh na ‘wind’ < MiDh ODh *nai < DP *nay < EIP *vāta < Skt. vīta- or, in a trisyllabic environment, in mati ‘above, upper part’ < DP *matiy < EIP *mattaka < Skt. mātaka-. Note that the sequences of *-eye developing from *ata, *aka and the like remain more stable (yielding MoDh i-stems) than *-iye representing older * (i)ya as in iru ‘sun’ < *sārīya- or fen ‘water’ < pen(u) < *pāniya- (as “consonant stems”, with u probably representing an intermediate ə); this may be taken to prove that the “original” y was lost in intervocalic position before the stops changed into a “new” y. Retroflex stops underwent a different kind of “lenition” in intervocalic position, leading from *r to *d and further to l as in kula ‘done, made’ << Skt. kṣata- or MoDh (MiDh) ODh kuku ‘hen’ < DP *kukulu < EIP *kukkuta < Skt. kukkuta-.

i) The disappearance of stops from medial positions caused an imbalance in the system that must soon have led to the reduction of geminates to singleton stops. This changed e.g. EIP *mattaka to DP *matiya (> MoDh mati ‘above’), EIP *akkara to DP *akara (> MoDh akuru ‘letter’), and EIP *dakinya ( < Skt. dakṣiṇa- ‘southern, right’) to DP *dekinya (> ODh MiDh dekunu, MoDh dekunu). This development seems further to have affected all kinds of geminates, including sibilants as in EIP *sa’sa (< Skt. sahasra-) > DP *sas- > ODh etc. bāh- ‘thousand’, as the future development of the sibilant exhibits no trace of a former gemination. The same holds true for geminates of nasals and liquids, as in MoDh ban ‘skin’ < MiDh ODh *banu < DP *sama < EIP *camma < Skt. carma- in comparison with MoDh gan etc. < EIP *gāma < Skt. grāma- (cf. above).

j) A new type of long vowel emerged from the contraction of vowels in hiatus position (in turn caused by the loss of original b). Thus bāh- ‘1000’ < DP *sas- < EIP *sa’sa < Skt. sahasra- or mā ‘big’ < DP *mā < EIP *ma’ā < Skt. mahā. In closed syllables,

§The Skt. term in question is usually spelled prākara-, not prákara-; however, the older Dhivehi forms force us to assume a short second syllable here.

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the resulting vowel may also be short, as in *boṇḍa ‘big’ < DP boṇḍa < EIP buṇṭa < Skt. ṽṛṇa-. The stage reached at this point is here referred to as “D(hivehi) P(rakrit)”. All subsequent changes are either directly or indirectly documented in the historical sources.

k) After the reduction of geminates, $ reflecting all former sibilants and affricates developed into a new $ sound in word-initial and medial position. This resulted in the numerals listed under (g) as well as many other words quoted above beginning with $- today. It is probable that word-final $ had been dropped after $ before this change occurred as only this accounts for word-final $ having been retained until today; thus, we find word-forms like hās ‘thousand’ besides hāh-e $- or hāh-ā(i) ‘thousand and’, or the ODh plural rahun- ‘kings’ and the indefinite singular rah-aku ‘a king’ besides the “basic” singular form rā ‘king’.

l) Sequences of a syllable-final nasal plus a following stop (as in *boṇ. d. ‘big’) are the only consonant groups that had survived from Old Indic into Dhivehi Prakrit. Such sequences are represented in the modern language by prenasalized stops; cf. e.g. MoDh aṅga ‘mouth, limb’ < MiDh ODh a(n)ga < DP *aṅga < EIP *aṅga < Skt. aṅga-. As the nasal element of these sounds (here symbolized by $) was usually not written in Old and Middle Dhivehi, it is probable that it was no longer assumed to represent a distinct phoneme. For former sequences of nasal plus sibilant, Modern Dhivehi shows no traces of the nasal element whatsoever; cf. e.g. MoDh etc. abaru ‘year’ < DP *sanisara < EIP *sanicāra < Skt. sanicāra-, or MoDh fīs < MiDh ODh pas < DP *pāṁs < EIP *pāṇa < Skt. pāṇa ‘five’ and < EIP *pāṁsu < Skt. pāṁsu ‘sand’.

m) Word-initial $- tends to disappear, at least before high vowels; cf. e.g. MoDh in ‘border’ < MiDh in, im(u) < ODh imu < DP *sim < EIP *śima < Skt. śima or MoDh ū ‘thread’ < Skt. śūra- (cf. above).

n) Short open second syllables tend to be syncopated, at least from Old Dhivehi onwards, with new geminate consonants emerging in certain constellations. This is especially true for sequences of stops plus $ resulting from syncopation in causative formations where $ reflects the $ of the secondary $a- suffix of Sanskrit; cf. e.g. MoDh dakkā (converb) ‘showing’ < MiDh dakkai < ODh dakevai < DP *dakvaya < EIP *dakkapayya < Skt. *dvakapaya.

**The dialect of Fuah Mulaku is exceptional in this respect; cf. Fritz 2002:12.**

**The dialects may vary in this respect as in the case of Aḍḍū boṇdo vs. Standard bodu; cf. Fritz 2002:31.**

**Cf. Fritz 2002:30 as to the usage of “empty nūn”.**

**The dialect of Fuah Mulaku may have preserved a trace of such nasals in nasalized vowels as in fahã ‘five’; cf. Fritz 2002:23.**
o) The schwa-vowel assumed for Dhivehi Prakrit is replaced by other short vowels depending on its position in a word. In word-final position, the result is usually u in Old Dhivehi, except after s and y where s seems to have disappeared early; cf. MoDh go‘ body; locative suffix’ < MiDh ODh gai < DP *gayo < EIP *gata < Skt. gat- (cf. above). In contrast to this, sequences of (DP) *yo usually develop to i(y)a in both medial and word-final position; cf. MoDh di(y)a ‘water’, hi(y)a ‘hundred’, and miyaru ‘shark’ (cf. above).

p) Subsequently, word-final u is lost after voiceless stops and l; cf. MoDh goy ‘sort, kind’ < MiDh (ODh) got(u) < DP *goy < EIP *gai < Skt. gotra- (cf. above); MoDh ay ‘hand’ < MiDh ODh at(u) << Skt. hast- (cf. above); MoDh ko ‘making’ (converb) < MiDh ODh kot(u) << Skt. kṛta-; or MoDh teo ‘oil’ < MiDh tel < ODh telu < DP *telu < EIP *tela < Skt. taila-.

q) The glide v is lost in most intervocalic positions, yielding another set of (contracted) long vowels or diphthongs; cf. e.g. MoDh du in island names < MiDh -duvu, ODh divu (cf. above); MoDh u ‘thread’ << DP *suv < EIP *sūt < Skt. sūtra- (cf. above); MoDh MiDh reo ‘pond, pool, (bathing) tank’ < ODh *vēvu < DP *vēva < EIP *vāpi < Skt. vāpi-; or, in a syncope constellation, MoDh dorō ‘gateway’ < ODh doruvet.i < DP *dorūvetai < EIP *dvāravat.ika < Skt. *dvāravartika.

r) In a similar way, n tends to be lost in the position between non-high vowels. Thus, vana, the present participle of the verbal root va- ‘be(come)’ (Skt. vā), yields vā within the Old Dhivehi period, and older vul.ena, present participle of the verb ‘live’ (Skt. root vart?), develops into vulē, later ulē (written vulē and ulē in Dives akuru for lack of a special symbol for long ē).

s) The vowel e is backed to o in the position before retroflex consonants. This change is dateable to the 13th or 14th c. A.D.; cf. MoDh MiDh atolu ‘atoll’ replacing ODh atel-u (< DP *sā(m)telo < EIP *sā(m)tīta < Skt. *sam.īta-).

t) Word-final u is lost after m, the consonant falling together with n as in MoDh gan (toponym) << Skt. grāma- or MoDh han ‘skin’ << EIP *kamma < Skt. karma-. This change, too, is dateable to the 14th century as it can be observed in the later lōmāfānu’s (cf. e.g. kan ‘fact’ < ODh kanu << EIP kamma < Skt. karma-).

u) Non-geminate ŋ in non-initial position develops into a special sibilant, usually tran-

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14Cf. Fritz 2002:65 as to dialectal divergences in this context.
15The compound seems not to be attested; however, vartika- in the sense of ‘stalk’ is attested in the Mahābhārata.
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scribed ِ, as in MoDh da‘u(-ga) ‘under’ < MiDh ODh daṭu << Skt. adhaṭṭaḥ or MoDh dorōi ‘gateway’ < ODh doraveti << Skt. *dvāravarta-. This change must have passed through an intermediary r-like pronunciation (cf. Czech ˇ r) witnessed by spellings with r or rh in Roman transcripts provided by European travelers since the early 17th century.

v) Non-geminated p changed into f as in fen ‘water’ << Skt. pāṇiya-, etc. This remarkable shibboleth of Modern Dhivehi, probably influenced by the pronunciation of Arabic teachers, must have emerged between the early 17th and the middle of the 19th century as the French traveler Pyrard de Laval, who sojourned in the Maldives from 1602–7, still notes p in all relevant cases in his word list (e.g. penne ‘eau’) while a later witness, Lt. W. Christopher, who visited the Maldives in 1834, already writes f (e.g. feng ‘water’).

w) As in the last case mentioned, word-final n acquires a velar pronunciation, clearly documented in Christopher’s word list (cf. feng ‘water’) but not indicated in any way in Thaana spellings.

x) Word-final voiceless stops and l develop in different ways. Together with the preceding vowel, l yields either a long vowel or a diphthong; cf. e.g. MoDh ma ‘flower’ < MiDh *mal < ODh malu < DP *mals < EIP *māla < Skt. mālā ‘garland’ or MoDh teo ‘oil’ < MiDh *tel < ODh telu < DP *teḷ < EIP *teḷa < Skt. taśa-. Word-final t becomes γ, yielding another type of new diphthong as in goy ‘sort, kind’ < MiDh (ODh) got(u) < Skt. gotra- or MoDh ay ‘hand’ < MiDh ODh at(u) < Skt. āstā-. (cf. above). The other word-final stops (k and t > ʃ) are reflected by a glottal stop today; cf. e.g. MoDh ko (still written kōs) ‘making’ (converb) < MiDh koṭ(u) < Skt. kṛtvā or hār- ॑ ‘one thousand’ (lit. ‘thousand-one’) < MiDh ODh *hār-eku < DP *sats-ekś < EIP sa’as-ekka < Skt. *sahasra-ek-.“

y) The retroflex nasal ɳ. is confounded with the dental nasal n in most environments, but word-final n is retained after it as in MoDh fonu < fonu ‘foam’ << EIP *peṇa < Skt. phen/na- or, with a neo-geminate, MoDh fannu < fannu ‘beach’ < MiDh ODH *pannu < DP *pannọ < EIP *paṇṇaka < Skt. paṇṇaka- ‘water plant’ (?). As the Thaana script possesses a peculiar letter for retroflex ɳ (cf. §4 below) and a retroflex pronunciation has been preserved in some environments, especially the future suffix ne, this change must have started after the conception of the new script.

z) The “new” ay-diphthongs tend to be monophthongized, yielding a long ą-vowel as in [ā] ‘hand’ < ay < MiDh at(u) < Skt. bāṣṭa. This process is not reflected in the Thaana spelling.

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For the southern dialects cf. Fritz 2002:35.
2.2 Insular Brahmi and Dives akuru: coping with redundancies

It is clear that when the stage of “Dhivehi Prakrit” was reached, the sound system of the ancestor of Dhivehi was extremely reduced in comparison with that of early Middle Indic as reflected in the character inventory of the Brāhmi script, with aksaras for aspirate stops, long vowels, or most of the sibilants being no longer needed. The Maldivian pāṇḍītīs nevertheless preserved the complete Brāhmi inventory, using the “superfluous” aksaras arbitrarily to denote related sounds in writing Dhivehi Prakrit or, later, Dhivehi. Even in writing Sanskrit (or Sanskritisms), the deficiency of the sound system of the spoken language led to a general confusion of aksaras indicating long and short vowels, aspirated and non-aspirated stops, and various sibilants. A few examples from the Buddhist inscriptions may suffice to show this effect.

a) The confusion of long and short vowels can clearly be seen in the names of bhūta- and bhūti-demons appearing as bhūta and bhūi in the Landhoo inscription. While the latter may represent the “true” Prakrit outcome *bhūi (> Dhivehi bu), the former with its intervocalic -t- must be regarded as a Sanskritism with “wrong” short u (and of course, the aspirated bh- is a Sanskritism in both forms). In a similar way, asiti ‘80’ must stand for Skt. aṣṭi, not its Prakrit outcome, because of the t being preserved; cf. the Dhivehi equivalent ābi. From the Sanskrit inscriptions in Evīla akuru,18 we may mention the compound vyagraśarmeda which obviously represents Skt. vyāgra-carma- ‘tiger skin’ but with the ā shortened. In contrast to this, the short i of Skt. cītta ‘mind’ appears as i in the introductory formula namas samantāvākṣitavādapatkanāṃ obviously standing for namas *samantakāyavākṣitavādparāṇāṃ ‘Reverence of the Vajras (of) body, speech and mind all around!’

b) The confusion of aspirates and non-aspirates as in vyagra- standing for Skt. vyāgra- ‘tiger’ can also be seen in the formulaic instigation binda ‘smash!’ representing Skt. bīnda, or in sarva-bhūta-bhām-kāra if this represents sarva-bhūta-bhāyam-kāra- ‘causer of fear for all beings’. In contrast to this, the Landhoo inscription exhibits pīsacā for the demon named pītsa in Sanskrit, and Skt. śt reflected partly by ś (in duṣṭa < duṣṭa ‘bad’), partly by ś (in cāsattī < śatāṣṭi ‘66’).

c) Apart from cases like asiti ∼ Skt. aṣṭi ‘80’, cāsattī < śatāṣṭi ‘66’, or sarma < carma ‘skin’, the confusion of sibilants manifests itself in the compounds yasīmusalaparṇas-pāsāta ∼ Skt. asimusalaparṇas-pāśāta ‘(You who have) sword, pestle, axe and snare in (your) hand!’ and sad-mukta, probably ∼ Skt. sad-mukta ‘six-faced (one)’, appearing in the Sanskrit inscriptions. Note that the j of Skt. vajra is substituted by d in vadra, in contradiction to the regular sound change; this might indicate external influences (from some other Indic vernacular transmitting Vajrayāna contents).

18 For the Sanskrit inscriptions cf. now Gippert to appear.
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d) In the Buddhist inscriptions, there is no confusion yet of sibilants and \( h \), which suggests that the sound change of stage §2.1 (k) had not yet occurred when they were written. However, the loss of the original \( h \) sound (stage §2.1 (b)) and of the hiatus resulting from it (§2.1 (j)) must have taken place before. This is proven by hypercorrect spellings as in the formula mahā vilamba, where mahā clearly stands for the negation particle of Skt. mā vilamba ‘don’t be late’.

2.3 The paleographic development of Dives akuru

The Dives akuru documents of the Old and Middle Dhivehi periods we have access to still exhibit a nearly complete Brāhmī inventory. To illustrate this, the paleographic development of Dives akuru is outlined in Table 1 below (pp. 92ff.), which comprises materials from the pre-Islamic documents as well as the śomāja’s, fatkul’s, and one longer inscription.\(^20\) The table immediately reveals that the “superfluous” aksāras for aspirates or “extra” sibilants tend to be given up in the course of time, leaving only \( \ddot{d} \) in continuous usage (at the expense of plain \( d \). As a general tendency, we observe that the “secondary” equivalents (aspirates or “special” sibilants) were preferred when sequences of identical aksāras were to be avoided in narrow contexts. As a special case, the \( p \)-aksāra developed to be a mere gemination marker in ligatures with a preceding stop, starting from ligatures of \( tt \). The same is true for the aksāra denoting the velar nasal \( n \), which is only attested in ligatures with following consonantal aksāras, often indicating their gemination in later documents. Another peculiar feature consists in the fact that from the oldest copper-plate grants onward, the \( y \)-aksāras were used as equivalents of the aksāras designating syllables with no consonantal onset; this feature may reflect the historical change of initial \( y \) to \( d- \) (stage §2.1 (d)) and internal \( y \) > \( \emptyset \) (stage §2.1 (h)), which left no syllables beginning with \( y \)- except, possibly, after \( i \) where \( y \) was a “natural” glide and did not need to be written.\(^21\) Another remarkable property is the fact that the \( j \)-aksāras were not used promiscuously with those of other sibilants but as equivalents of \( d- \)aksāras; this may have been caused by Sanskritisms where \( j \) is regularly replaced by \( d \) in the documents of Old and Middle Dhivehi as in the Buddhist documents (cf. above). Finally, a considerable amount of spelling variation emerges from the loss of -\( u \) after voiceless consonants in final and syncope positions, which led to \( u \) becoming exchangeable with \( vrīma \) and vowelless ligatures. It may suffice here to illustrate the most striking features addressed above with a few examples.

\(^{19}\)Cf. Gippert 2005:218.

\(^{20}\)For the abbreviations used cf. Fritz 2002: [II], 215 ff.; F1058 and F1153 denote two more recently restored fatkul’s of AH 1058 and 1153. Note that most of the inscriptions are calligraphic, thus exhibiting peculiar graphic shapes. As a full documentation cannot be attempted here, the table only comprises the basic aksāris with inherent a-vowel. Aksāris that are not attested as such but extracted from ligatures or the like are marked with a shaded background.

\(^{21}\)Note, however, that Dives akuru preserved the original function of the \( y \)-aksāras in certain ligatures. Cf. Gippert to appear for the use of \( y \)-aksāras in the Sanskrit inscriptions.
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Jost Gippert

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Table 1 (continued).

a) Aksaras for aspirates mostly occur in contrast with their “plain” equivalents. Thus we find kʰ after k in the island name Kakaloś appearing as kak'aloś throughout in L2 (vs. kakaloś in L4); gʰ after g in the king’s name Gaganāditya (Skt. ‘Sun of the Heaven(s)’) spelled gag'anađitya (or ditt’h) throughout in the lomāšāni’s (L1–3); masidu, the older loan for ‘mosque’ (< Arab. masjid, vs. later miskit) often spelt mas(u)dīdu, sometimes also mas(u)dīdu (L2 and L3); Daḥbidū, the name of an island reflecting Skt. Jambudvīpa, often spelled dabud'wu or d'abudwu (L3) besides dabudwu (L1–3) and jabudw- (L1, L3); the name of the caliph Abū Bakr spelled abūbakaru (L2); or baibat- ‘rice portion’ (Skt. bhagabhakta-) spelled baibat- alongside baibat- (L2, L3). Such constellations may also extend over word-boundaries as in the case of kāpurun ‘infidels’ (pl., < Arabic kāfir) once spelled kʰāpurun after the participle kʰ ‘speaking’ in L2; the participle tibi ‘being’ spelled tʰibī/t after mattr ‘above’ in L1 and seryātu ‘sharia (law)’ in L2; or even, with a change of the stop involved, in sadulu ‘rice’ (MoDh. bandu)²² once spelled sad'ulu after sadāka ‘alms’ (Arab. ṣadaqa) in L2. Mere variation may also be the reason for tibi sometimes being spelled tʰibī (L1–4).

The use of the aspirate aksaras in geminates may be regarded as a special outcome of the variation tendency, combinations such as tʰ alternating with “plain” t without any discernible rule in cases like utṛḷaṇa vs. uttarā ‘northern’ (Sanskritism, vs. “pure”)

²²The relationship with Skt. sanḍula- is unclear.
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| Dhiv. uturu; L1–3, F4 etc.); or sattə/a vs. satta ‘seven’ (Sanskritism, vs. “pure” Dhiv. bat(u); L2, L3). The combination th is by far the most common of these “hybrid geminates”. kk appears only in family names with the element -kokka- (aiyadikokkə/a, verukokkə/a, vs. poilukokka-; L2), while the use of bb is restricted to purbba/a ‘eastern’ (Sanskritism, for pārva) contrasting with pārba, pārba, pāruba, and pārva in the lōnāfanu’s and fātuku’s, and that of dd, to the Sanskritizing family name buddadisru(y)ə (for *buddaḍisīrə) in L3. The development of the r-aṣṭara into a mere gemination marker is attested for the Middle Dhivehi period, in words like dakkai ‘showing’ (converb, < Skt. *draksapaya) spelt daktaai (F3) or the island name Diggaru spelt diggaru (MM).

The voiceless aspirate p is attested only once so far, in pətima, the name of a mosque in L1; this obviously represents Arabic Fātimə, the name of the Prophet’s daughter, with the noteworthy substitution of f not by p, as usual, but by the aspirate as its closest equivalent.

b) The confusion of aṣṭaras for sibilants and h can easily be illustrated with examples such as Skt. senāpati ‘army-leader’ appearing as benevi (in benevi-ras, lit. ‘army-leader-king’, in L6) but also as senevi- (in senevi-ras- in L2 and L3) and, as a quasi-Sanskritism, cənəpati in L1. Similarly, Skt. satru- ‘enemy’ occurs as sutru-, sutru (in sat(r)ubaa ‘fear

Cf. also ekusattə/a ‘100’ as a hyper-Sanskritism.
of enemies’ ~ Skt. catru- (in catru-sangraha L4 vs. sattru-sangraha L5 ‘seizing of enemies’ ~ Skt. ‘satru-sangraha’), while the MoDh term is haturu.26 The Skt. epithet skakravarti- ‘emperor’ appears as sakkravarti’i in L4 and sakkravarti’i in L5, and the name of the Sumeru mountain, as sumeru in L5 but ṭumeru in L4.27 The equivalent of Skt. diś- ‘direction’ appears in locative and ablative forms as diś (L1–3), die (L3) di(y)ihe (L4), and disen (L1, L3), disen (L3), di(y)ihe (L4); correspondingly, we have a locative diś (L1–3 and L5) alongside an ablative die (L4) of Skt. desa ‘land’.

For the interchangeability of b with j cf. the name of the Buddha which usually appears as bud(b)u (L1, L2 etc.) but also as b(y)ajā (comitative) in L2 vs. “regular” budāi (L1, L2). The most complex permutation is found in an unexplained term which occurs in the spellings ujīcu (L4) and ujiṣaṭ (L5) in connection with the Sumeru mountain and śūrya-rāṇi ‘sun-beam’ (śūryāvāmi L4; śūryaṁrṇuma L5).28

c) The interchangeability of y-akṣaras with plain “vocalic” akṣaras is documented from the Sanskrit inscriptions on. Thus we find, within L2, the word avuḍodun ‘year(s)’ (originally pl.; Skt. samvatsara, borrowed from a non-Insular Prakrit) spelled with both a- and y-akṣaras side by side, without any context condition discernible (e.g. navuṇava avuḍodun vs. navuṇava (y)avuḍodun ‘ninth year’). In a similar way, the word aḷa ‘servant’ (definite form) appears as aḷa and (y)alā side by side in the fatkolu of A.H. 1038, and utturu ‘northern’ (< Skt. utṭarata-) as utturu and (y)uturu side by side in L4. It seems that only ya occurs after i-akṣaras as in di(y)ajin (< Skt. ‘udaka-sima-’) ‘water limit’ (L3; in F4 we read Ḟyayin with a ligature); however, plain e and u may follow i as in liev- ‘writing’ (causative, Skt. likḍāpaya; F5) etc. vs. li(y)ev- (F6) etc.

3 The background of the Thaana script

As was stated above, the invention of the Thaana script in the late 17th century brought about a radical change in Maldivian literacy as there was no more need then to cope with the redundant inventory of akṣaras inherited from antique times. With its twenty-four distinct characters, Thaana is well suited to cover the basic phonemic distinctions of the modern language, and with its right-to-left directionality it can easily be mixed with passages written in Arabic script. However, the Thaana characters were neither derived from Arabic letters nor from Dives akuru akṣaras. Instead, it is clear at once

24Attested in the Mahābhārata (7.145.432 and elsewhere).
27Both times compounded with manda(ḥ)āṃ, i.e. Skt. mandara-, the name of another mountain; cf. the compound numerumalayamandaramadisṭ- in the Divyāvadāna (8.68.2).
29It is a mere guess to see a case form of udicṭ ‘northern’ here (udicṭu loc.pl.?).
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(and has been observed before)\(^{10}\) that the first nine characters of the *Thaana* “alphabet” reflect the Arabic (or, rather, Persian) digits from 1 to 9; cf. Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thaana character</th>
<th>۰ ۱ ۲ ۳ ۴ ۵ ۶ ۷ ۸ ۹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sound value</td>
<td>b ʃ n r b ɻ k ʔ w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian digit</td>
<td>۴ ۳ ۲ ۱ ۶ ۷ ۸ ۹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeric value</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.

It seems not to have been noted that the next nine characters of the *Thaana* “alphabet” have a “numeric” source, too, viz. in the digits of *Dives akuru*. As a matter of fact, *Dives akuru* had inherited, together with its aksaras, a full set of one-digit numeric signs including zero, and at least two of the *lom/a/nu’s* (L\(^1\) and L\(^3\)) provide attestations for them.\(^{30}\) Comparing the digits as appearing in L\(^3\) with the *Thaana* characters from \(m\) to \(d\) as illustrated in Table 3, it is clear that the seventh item of the list was meant to be the character standing for retroflex \(n\), \(ڜ\), which is obsolete today; it was later replaced by palatal \(n\), \(ڞ\), which is an obvious modification of the character for plain \(n\), \(ڞ\), with an additional tail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thaana character</th>
<th>ڑ ژ ڞ ڢ ڦ ڦ/ڦ ڦ ڦ ڦ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sound value</td>
<td>m f d t l ڦ ڦ/ڦ ڦ ڦ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dives akuru digit</td>
<td>ڦ ڢ ڦ ڦ ڦ ڦ/ڦ ڦ ڦ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeric value</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6(^{32}) 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.

In a similar way, most of the remaining *Thaana* characters are likely to be secondary modifications. This is obvious, first of all, for \(p ڞ\), which consists of the \(f\)-character ڞ with an additional diacritic dot.\(^{31}\) It is also obvious for \(j ڢ\) and \(ɛ ڢ\) which are built upon \(d ڞ\) and \(t ڢ\) with the same additional tail as in \(n\). The same tail can further be seen in \(z ڢ\) and \(t ڢ\) if they rely upon \(r ڞ\) and \(b ڢ\). In the case of \(r ڞ\) and \(z ڢ\), this may be a calque of the Arabic script where the latter is derived from the former (with a dot, cf. ڞ vs. ڞ), while the formation of \(t ڢ\) from \(b\) may simply be due to the fact that \(b\) follows \(r\) in the alphabet just as \(f\) (\(> p\)) is followed by \(d\) (\(> j\)). Only for \(y\), \(ڞ\), no such


\(^{30}\) Mostly in numbering the individual plates of the copper plate grant.

\(^{31}\) Note that the digit ‘6’ occurs in mirrored form, too (ڦ).

\(^{32}\) Many other characters are used with diacritic dots in the transcription of Arabic words; cf. Fritz 2002:43.
Jost Gippert

explanation is available off-hand; maybe it was modeled upon the glottal stop, A. Cf. the schematic illustration in Table 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thaana character</th>
<th>€ ¶ $ % &amp; ©</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sound value</td>
<td>z t y p j e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source character</td>
<td>x a l s n o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound value</td>
<td>r b ? f d t</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.

All this leaves the question open how the alphabetic sequence came about or, in other words, why h etc. were associated with the Arabic numerals from 1 to 9 and m etc., with the corresponding “Indic” numerals. An acrophonic principle can be ruled out, as only for one letter, w, is there a certain similarity with the corresponding Arabic letter (wāf, ۰). The rationale behind the Thaana “alphabet” thus remains enigmatic.

References