

Grammatica et verba
Glamor and verve

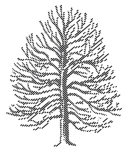
Studies in South Asian, historical, and Indo-European
linguistics in honor of

Hans Henrich Hock

on the occasion
of his seventy-fifth birthday

edited by

Shu-Fen Chen and Benjamin Slade



Beech Stave Press

Ann Arbor • New York

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Typeset with L^AT_EX using the Galliard typeface designed by Matthew Carter and Greek Old Face by Ralph Hancock. The typeface on the cover is Post Hock by Steve Peter.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

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.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-9895142-0-0 (alk. paper)

I. Indo-European languages. 2. Lexicography. 3. Historical linguistics. I. Hock, Hans Henrich, 1938- honoree. II. Chen, Shu-Fen, editor of compilation. III. Slade, Benjamin, editor of compilation.

P512.H56G73 2013

410—dc23

2013026393

Printed in the United States of America

17 16 15 14 13 6 5 4 3 2 1

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An Outline of the History of Maldivian Writing

JO ST G I P P E R T

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 *Tbaana* 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 *dhāraṇī* 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.

I 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.

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which is very similar to *dhāraṇī*'s of (northern) Vajrayāna 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 Vajrayāna-type Buddhist environment. This is confirmed by the inscriptions on them which represent a mantra pertaining to Yamāntaka, 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 *Nāgarī* 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 *lōmāfanu*'s, i.e. copper plate grants issued by Maldivian kings in connection with the foundation and maintenance of mosques. The eight *lōmāfanu*'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 *Evēla akuru*, i.e. script (*akuru* < Skt. *akṣara*) of yore (*e vēla* = ‘that time’). The language is an ancient variety of Dhivehi, hereafter named “Old Dhivehi”, which abounds with Sanskritisms (sometimes written in *Nāgarī* 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 *fatkoḷu*’s, i.e. ‘valuable leaves’), inscriptions on wooden boards (so-called *filā fatkoḷu*’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.

e) 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) **gama* < E(arly) I(nsular) P(rakrit) **gāma*, or of the *v* 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).

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island names) < MiDh *duvu* < ODh *divu*, *duvu* < DP *diva* < EIP *dīpa*. In accordance with the so-called *two-mora* rule,⁵ 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 *raʔ* < MiDh *rat̪* < ODh *raṭu* ‘island, land’ < IP **raṭa* < EIP **rātta* < Skt. *rāstra-* (long vowel reduced before the geminate, ~ Pali *rattʰa-*) vs. MoDh *rē* < MiDh *rei* < ODh **rei* ‘night’ < DP **reyi* < EIP **rāti* < Skt. *rātrī-* (single consonant after long vowel, vs. Pali *rātti-*). In a similar way, Skt. *sūtra-* ‘thread’ led to MoDh *ū* (via ODh **uvu* < DP **suva* < EIP **sūta*, 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 *voʔ* ‘lamp’ < MiDh *voṭ* < ODh *vet(u)* < DP **veti* < EIP **vātti* < 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 **kudā* < EIP *kuta* < Skt. *kṛta-*; MoDh MiDh ODh *boḍu* ‘great, big’ < DP **boṇḍa* < EIP **buʔanta* < Skt. *brhanta-*; or the name of the lunar constellation MoDh *miaheliya* << DP **mīyasirasa-* < EIP **migasirasa-* < Skt. *mṛgaśirasa-*. 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 **pena* < EIP **pāniya* < Skt. *pāniya-*,⁶ MoDh *fōnu* ‘foam’ < MiDh **ponu* < ODh **penu* < DP **pena* < EIP **pēna* < Skt. *pʰen/ṇa-*, and MoDh *fōni* ‘juice’ < MiDh **poni* < ODh *peni* < DP **peniya* < EIP **pēnita* < Skt. *pʰānita-*. In the same context we may note the loss of inherited *h* as in MoDh *ay* ‘hand’ < MiDh *at* < ODh *atu* < DP **ata* < EIP **atta* < Skt. *hasta-* or MoDh MiDh ODh *mā* ‘big’ < DP **mā* < EIP *maʔā* < Skt. *mahā*.

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 **diya* < EIP **daka* < Skt. *ūdaka-*, MoDh MiDh *ran* ‘gold’ < ODh *ran(u)* < DP **rana* < EIP **ranna* < Skt. *hiranya-*, or MoDh *daṣu(-gā)* ‘under’ < MiDh ODh *daṭu* < DP **daṭa* < EIP **datta* < Skt. *ādʰastʰāt*. 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

⁵Cf. Fritz (2002:67 n. 257) with further references.

⁶Attested e.g. in the metrical recension of the *Vikramacarita* (31.1.74 / MR 222).

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initial *y* to a voiced dental stop *ḍ* as in the verbal root *yā-* ‘go’ which is reflected in MoDh MiDh ODh *da-* (modern lexicon entry form *danī* ‘go’). This sound change is one of the most remarkable shibboleths distinguishing Dhivehi from Sinhalese, where *y-* has been preserved (lexicon entry form *yanavā* ‘go’).⁷

e) Another important early change consists of the leveling of long and short vowels. This led to the *ī* in Skt. *dvīpa* ‘island’ (> ODh *divu*, via DP **divə*, EIP **dīpa*) becoming indistinguishable from the *i* in Skt. *bhītti* ‘wall’ (> ODh *bitu*, via DP **bitə*, EIP **bitti*). Original *ā* and *ā̄* represent a special case here in that *ā̄* in open syllables had a peculiar outcome, not falling together with *ā*; cf. e.g. MoDh *akuru* ‘letter, script’ < MiDh ODh **akuru* < DP **akərə* < EIP **akkara* < Skt. *akṣara-* vs. MoDh MiDh ODh *abarū* ‘year’ < DP **saṁsarə* < EIP **saṁcāra-* < Skt. *saṁcāra-*. It is assumed here that *ā̄* 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 *ā̄* as in Sinhalese) as in MoDh *rē* ‘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 **gemənə* < EIP **gāmena* < Skt. (instr.sg.) *grāmen/na*. In the case of *u* as well as the schwa vowel emerging from *ā̄* in open syllables (cf. above), the umlaut result is *i* as in MoDh MiDh ODh *iru* ‘sun’ < DP **sirə* < EIP *sūriya* < Skt. *sūr(i)ya-*. Obviously, this umlaut was also triggered by palatal affricates and sibilants (including inherited *ṣ*) as in MoDh *firi-* ‘male (person)’ < MiDh ODh *piri* < DP **pirisə* < EIP **puruṣa-* < Skt. *puruṣa-*, MoDh *mīb-ā* ‘man’ < MiDh ODh *mīb-* < DP **minis-* < EIP **manuṣ(s)a-* < Skt. *manuṣ(y)a-*, or MoDh MiDh ODh *dihā* ‘ten’ < DP **disə* < 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 *oʻ* ‘camel’ < MiDh ODh *oṭu* < DP **oṭə* < EIP **uṭṭa* < Skt. *uṣṭra-* and MoDh *koʻ* ‘making’ (converb) < MiDh *koṭ(u)* < ODh *koṭu* < DP **koṭə* < EIP **kuṭṭa* < Skt. *kuṭṭvā* this may have been the geminate retroflex following it; however, this does not hold for MoDh MiDh ODh *ge* ‘house’ < DP **ge* < EIP **giʻa* < Skt. *gṛha-*.

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.) *c* as in the latter language but also *j*; cf. e.g. MoDh *ras(gefānu)* ‘king’ < MiDh ODh *ras* < DP **rasə* < EIP **rāja* < Skt. *rājā*, or MoDh MiDh ODh *hataru* ‘four’ < DP **satarə* < EIP *cattāra* < Skt. *catvāra-* vs. MoDh *hay* ‘seven’ < MiDh ODh *bat(u)* < DP **sata* < EIP **satta* < Skt. *sapta*, MoDh MiDh ODh *ha* ‘six’

⁷Cf. Fritz (2002:11) with further references.

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< DP **sa* < EIP **ṣa* < Skt. *ṣa(t)*, MoDh MiDh ODh *hia* ‘hundred’ < DP **siya* < EIP *sata* < Skt. *śata-*, and MoDh MiDh ODh *hāh-* ‘thousand’ < DP **sās-* < EIP **sa’assa* < 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 *fāru* ‘wall’ < MiDh ODh *pavuru* < DP **pavərə* < EIP **pākara* < Skt. **prākara-*).⁸ When the resulting glide was *y*, it caused umlaut of a preceding schwa-vowel as in MoDh MiDh ODh *dia* ‘water’ (via DP **diyə* < **dɔyə* < EIP **daka* < Skt. *udaka-*), MoDh ODh *miyaru* ‘shark’ < DP **məyərə* < EIP **makara* < Skt. *makara-* ‘sea monster’, or MoDh MiDh ODh *rihi* ‘silver’ < DP **risiyə* < **rəsəyə* < EIP **rajata* < Skt. *rajata-*, whereas *a* remained unaffected as in MoDh *vā* ‘wind’ < MiDh ODh **vai* < DP *vayə* < EIP **vāta* < Skt. *vāta-* or, in a trisyllabic environment, in *mati* ‘above, upper part’ < DP **matiyə* < EIP **mattaka* < Skt. *mastaka-*. Note that the sequences of **iyə* developing from **ata*, **aka* and the like remain more stable (yielding MoDh *i-*stems) than **iyə* representing older **(i)ya* as in *iru* ‘sun’ < **sūriya-* 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 **ʈ* to **ɖ* and further to *ʃ* as in *kula* ‘done, made’ << Skt. *kṛta-*⁹ or MoDh (MiDh) ODh *kukulu* ‘hen’ < DP **kukulə* < EIP **kukkuta* < Skt. *kukkuta-*.

i) The disappearance of stops from medial positions caused an imbalance in the system which must soon have led to the reduction of geminates to singleton stops. This changed e.g. EIP **mattaka* to DP **matiyə* (> MoDh *mati* ‘above’), EIP **akkara* to DP **akərə* (> MoDh *akuru* ‘letter’), and EIP **dakkina* (< Skt. *dakṣiṇa-* ‘southern, right’) to DP **dekinə* (> ODh MiDh *dekuṇu*, MoDh *dekumu*). This development seems further to have affected all kinds of geminates, including sibilants as in EIP **sa’assa* (< Skt. *sahasra-*) > DP **sāsə* > ODh etc. *hāh-* ‘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 *han* ‘skin’ < MiDh ODh **hamu* < DP **samə* < 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 *h*). Thus *hāh-* ‘1000’ < DP **sās-* < EIP **sa’assa* < Skt. *sahasra-* or *mā* ‘big’ < DP **mā* < EIP **ma’ā* < Skt. *mahā*. In closed syllables,

⁸The Skt. term in question is usually spelled *prākāra-*, not *prākara-*; however, the older Dhivehi forms force us to assume a short second syllable here.

⁹The Aḍḍū dialect has *keḍe* instead; cf. Fritz 2002:36.

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the resulting vowel may also be short, as in **boṇḍa* ‘big’ < DP *boṇḍa* < EIP *bu’añta* < Skt. *bṛhanta*-.

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, *s* reflecting all former sibilants and affricates developed into a new *h* 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 *h*- today. It is probable that word-final *ṣ* had been dropped after *s* before this change occurred as only this accounts for word-final *s* having been retained until today;¹⁰ thus, we find word-forms like *hās* ‘thousand’ besides *hāh-e*² ‘one-thousand’ 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 *ras* ‘king’.

l) Sequences of a syllable-final nasal plus a following stop (as in **boṇḍa* ‘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(ṅ)ga* < DP **aṅga* < EIP **aṅga* < Skt. *aṅga*-.¹¹ As the nasal element of these sounds (here symbolized by *ṅ*) was usually not written in Old and Middle Dhivehi,¹² 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. *abarū* ‘year’ < DP **saṁsara* < EIP **saṁcāra* < Skt. *saṁcāra*-, or MoDh *fas* < MiDh ODh *pas* < DP **paṁsə* < EIP **pañca* < Skt. *pañca* ‘five’ and < EIP **pāṁsu* < Skt. *pāṁsu*- ‘sand’.¹³

m) Word-initial *h*- tends to disappear, at least before high vowels; cf. e.g. MoDh *in* ‘border’ < MiDh *in*, *im(u)* < ODh *imu* < DP **simə* < EIP **sima* < Skt. *sīmā* or MoDh *ū* ‘thread’ << Skt. *sūtra*- (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 *v* resulting from syncopation in causative formations where *v* reflects the *p* of the secondary *payā*- suffix of Sanskrit; cf. e.g. MoDh *dakkā* (converb) ‘showing’ < MiDh *dakkai* < ODh *dakvai* < DP **dakavaya* < EIP **dakkapayya* < Skt. **drakṣapayya*.

¹⁰The dialect of Fuah Mulaku is exceptional in this respect; cf. Fritz 2002:32.

¹¹The dialects may vary in this respect as in the case of Aḍḍū *boṇḍo* vs. Standard *boḍu*; cf. Fritz 2002:31.

¹²Cf. Fritz 2002:30 as to the usage of “empty *nūn*”.

¹³The dialect of Fuah Mulaku may have preserved a trace of such nasals in nasalized vowels as in *fabā* ‘five’; cf. Fritz 2002:23.

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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,¹⁴ except after *s* and *y* where *ɔ* seems to have disappeared early; cf. MoDh *gā* ‘body; locative suffix’ < MiDh ODh *gai* < DP **gayɔ* < EIP **gāta* < Skt. *gātra-* (cf. above). In contrast to this, sequences of (DP) **ɔyɔ* 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 **gotɔ* < EIP **gōtta* < Skt. *gotra-*; MoDh *ay* ‘hand’ < MiDh ODh *at(u)* << Skt. *hasta-* (cf. above); MoDh *ko*² ‘making’ (converb) < MiDh ODh *koṭ(u)* << Skt. *kr̥tvā-*; or MoDh *teo* ‘oil’ < MiDh *tel* < ODh *telu* < DP **telɔ* < EIP **tēla* < 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 *dū* in island names < MiDh *-duvu*, ODh *divu* (cf. above); MoDh *ū* ‘thread’ << DP **suva* < EIP **sūta* < Skt. *sūtra-* (cf. above); MoDh MiDh *veo* ‘pond, pool, (bathing) tank’ < ODh **vevu* < DP **veva* < EIP **vāpi* < Skt. *vāpī-*; or, in a syncope constellation, MoDh *dorōsi* ‘gateway’ < ODh *doruveti* < DP **doravetiɔ* < EIP **dvāravattika* < Skt. **dvāravartika-*.¹⁵

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. *√ū*), yields *vā* within the Old Dhivehi period, and older *vūlena*, present participle of the verb ‘live’ (Skt. root *vart?*), develops into *vūlē*, later *ulē* (written *vule* and *ule* 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 *atelu* (< DP **sa(m)telɔ* < EIP **sa(m)tēta* < Skt. **sam̐t̥r̥t̥a-*).¹⁶

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 **camma* < Skt. *carma-*. This change, too, is datable to the 14th century as it can be observed in the later *lōmāfanu*’s (cf. e.g. *kan* ‘fact’ < ODh *kamu* << EIP *kamma* < Skt. *karma-*).

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

¹⁴Cf. Fritz 2002:65 as to dialectal divergences in this context.

¹⁵The compound seems not to be attested; however, *vartikā-* in the sense of ‘stalk’ is attested in the Mahābhārata.

¹⁶Cf. Fritz and Gippert 2007:427–8.

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scribed *ś*, as in MoDh *daśu(-gā)* ‘under’ < MiDh ODh *datu* << Skt. *adhashāt* or MoDh *dorōśi* ‘gateway’ < ODh *doruveti* << Skt. **dvāravartika-*. This change must have passed through an intermediary *r*-like pronunciation (cf. Czech *ř*) 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. *pāniya-*, 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 *mā* ‘flower’ < MiDh **mal* < ODh *malu* < DP **malə* < EIP **māla* < Skt. *mālā* ‘garland’ or MoDh *teo* ‘oil’ < MiDh **tel* < ODh *telu* < DP **telə* < EIP **tēla* < Skt. *taila-*. Word-final *-t* becomes *-y*, 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. *hasta-* (cf. above). The other word-final stops (*k* and *t* > *ś*) are reflected by a glottal stop today; cf. e.g. MoDh *ko*² (still written *koś*) ‘making’ (converb) < MiDh *koṭ(u)* << Skt. *kṛtvā* or *hāb-e*² ‘one thousand’ (lit. ‘thousand-one’) < MiDh ODh **hāb-eku* < DP **śās-ekə* < EIP *śā’ass-ēkka* < Skt. **śahasra-eka-*.

y) The retroflex nasal *ṇ* is confounded with the dental nasal *n* in most environments, but word-final *u* is retained after it as in MoDh *fōnu* < *fōṇu* ‘foam’ << EIP **pena* < Skt. *phen/ṇa-* or, with a neo-geminate, MoDh *fānnu* < *fāṇṇu* ‘beach’ < MiDh ODH **panṇu* < DP **paṇṇə* < EIP **paṇṇaka* < Skt. *paṇṇaka-* ‘water plant’ (?). As the *Thaana* script possesses a peculiar letter for retroflex *ṇ* (cf. §3 below) and a retroflex pronunciation has been preserved in some environments, especially the future suffix *ṇe*,¹⁷ this change must have started after the conception of the new script.

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

¹⁷For the southern dialects cf. Fritz 2002:35.

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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 Brāhmī script, with akṣaras for aspirate stops, long vowels, or most of the sibilants being no longer needed. The Maldivian paṇḍits nevertheless preserved the complete Brāhmī inventory, using the “superfluous” akṣaras 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 akṣaras 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 *b^hūta*- and *b^hūtī*-demons appearing as *b^huta* and *b^hui* in the Landhoo inscription. While the latter may represent the “true” Prakrit outcome **bui* (> Dhivehi *bū*), the former with its intervocalic *-t-* must be regarded as a Sanskritism with “wrong” short *u* (and of course, the aspirated *b^h*- is a Sanskritism in both forms). In a similar way, *asiti* ‘80’ must stand for Skt. *aśīti*, not its Prakrit outcome, because of the *t* being preserved; cf. the Dhivehi equivalent *āhi*. From the Sanskrit inscriptions in *Evēla akuru*,¹⁸ we may mention the compound *vyāgrasarmma* which obviously represents Skt. *vyāg^hra-carma*- ‘tiger skin’ but with the *ā* shortened. In contrast to this, the short *i* of Skt. *citta* ‘mind’ appears as *ī* in the introductory formula *namas samanta’avakṣittavadraṇām* obviously standing for *namas *samantakāyavākcittavajrāṇām* ‘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. *vyāg^hra*- ‘tiger’ can also be seen in the formulaic instigation *binda* ‘smash!’ representing Skt. *b^hinda*, or in *sarva-buta-baṃ-kāra* if this represents *sarva-b^hūta-b^hayaṃ-kara-* ‘causer of fear for all beings’. In contrast to this, the Landhoo inscription exhibits *pisac^ha* for the demon named *piśāca* in Sanskrit, and Skt. *ṣṭ* reflected partly by *ṭṭ* (in *duṭṭa* < *dusṭa* ‘bad’), partly by *ṭṭ^h* (in *cāṣatṭ^hi* < *ṣaṣṣaṣṭi* ‘66’).

c) Apart from cases like *asiti* ~ Skt. *aśīti* ‘80’, *cāṣatṭ^hi* < *ṣaṣṣaṣṭi* ‘66’, or *sarma* < *carma* ‘skin’, the confusion of sibilants manifests itself in the compounds *yasimusalaparasu-pāsāsta* ~ Skt. *asimusalaparāśupāsāhastā* ‘(You who have) sword, pestle, axe and snare in (your) hand!’ and *saḍ-muka*, probably ~ Skt. *ṣaḍ-muk^ha* ‘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).

¹⁸For 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!’¹⁹

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 *lōmāfanu*’s, *fatkoḷu*’s, and one longer inscription.²⁰ The table immediately reveals that the “superfluous” akṣaras for aspirates or “extra” sibilants tend to be given up in the course of time, leaving only *d^h* in continuous usage (at the expense of plain *d*). As a general tendency, we observe that the “secondary” equivalentents (aspirates or “special” sibilants) were preferred when sequences of identical akṣaras were to be avoided in narrow contexts. As a special case, the *t^h*-akṣara developed to be a mere gemination marker in ligatures with a preceding stop, starting from ligatures of *tt^h*. The same is true for the akṣara denoting the velar nasal *ṅ*, which is only attested in ligatures with following consonantal akṣaras, often indicating their gemination in later documents. Another peculiar feature consists in the fact that from the oldest copper-plate grants onward, the *y*-akṣaras were used as equivalentents of the akṣaras 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*-akṣaras were not used promiscuously with those of other sibilants but as equivalentents of *d*-akṣaras; 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 *virāma* 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 *fatkoḷu*’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 *akṣara*’s with inherent *a*-vowel. *Akṣara*’s 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*-akṣaras in certain ligatures. Cf. Gippert to appear for the use of *y*-akṣaras in the Sanskrit inscriptions.

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Skt.	Dhiv.	PI	SI	L1-3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	F1	F2
<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	𑀀	𑀁	𑀂	𑀃	𑀄	𑀅				
<i>ka</i>	} <i>ka</i>	𑀆	𑀇	𑀈	𑀉	𑀊	𑀋	𑀌	𑀍	𑀎	𑀏
<i>k^ha</i>		𑀐									
<i>ga</i>	} <i>ga</i>	𑀒	𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖	𑀗	𑀘	𑀙	𑀚	𑀛
<i>g^ha</i>		𑀜									
<i>na</i>	(<i>na</i>) (gem.)			𑀞	𑀟	𑀠	𑀡	𑀢	𑀣	𑀤	𑀥
<i>ca</i>	} <i>ha, sa</i>	𑀦		𑀧	𑀨						
<i>c^ha</i>		𑀩									
<i>ja</i>	} <i>da</i>	𑀫		𑀬	𑀭						
<i>j^ha</i>		𑀮									
<i>ṅa</i>	(<i>nya</i>)			𑀯							
<i>ta</i>	} <i>ta</i>	𑀱	𑀲	𑀳	𑀴	𑀵	𑀶	𑀷	𑀸	𑀹	𑀺
<i>t^ha</i>		𑀻									
<i>da</i>	} <i>da</i>	𑀼		𑀽	𑀾	𑀿	𑁀	𑁁	𑁂	𑁃	𑁄
<i>d^ha</i>		𑁅									
<i>ṇa</i>	<i>ṇa</i>	𑁆	𑁇	𑁈	𑁉	𑁊	𑁋	𑁌	𑁍	𑁎	𑁏
<i>ta</i>	<i>ta</i>	𑁐	𑁑	𑁒	𑁓	𑁔	𑁕	𑁖	𑁗	𑁘	𑁙
<i>t^ha</i>	(gem.)	𑁚	𑁛	𑁜	𑁝	𑁞	𑁟	𑁠	𑁡	𑁢	𑁣
<i>da</i>	} <i>da</i>	𑁤	𑁥	𑁦	𑁧	𑁨	𑁩	𑁪	𑁫	𑁬	𑁭
<i>d^ha</i>		𑁮									
<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>	𑁯	𑁰	𑁱	𑁲	𑁳	𑁴	𑁵	𑁶	𑁷	𑁸
<i>pa</i>	} <i>pa</i>	𑁹	𑁺	𑁻	𑁼	𑁽	𑁾	𑁿	𑂀	𑂁	𑂂
<i>p^ha</i>		𑂃									
<i>ba</i>	} <i>ba</i>	𑂄	𑂅	𑂆	𑂇	𑂈	𑂉	𑂊	𑂋	𑂌	𑂍
<i>b^ha</i>		𑂎									
<i>ma</i>	<i>ma</i>	𑂏	𑂐	𑂑	𑂒	𑂓	𑂔	𑂕	𑂖	𑂗	𑂘

Table 1.

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Skt.	Dhiv.	PI	SI	L1-3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	F1	F2
ya	(y)a	𑌕	𑌖	𑌗	𑌘	𑌙	𑌚	𑌛	𑌜	𑌝	𑌞
ra	ra	𑌏	𑌐	𑌑	𑌒	𑌓	𑌔	𑌕	𑌖	𑌗	𑌘
la	la	𑌧	𑌨	𑌩	𑌪	𑌫	𑌬	𑌭	𑌮	𑌯	𑌰
va	va	𑌱	𑌲	𑌳	𑌴	𑌵	𑌶	𑌷	𑌸	𑌹	𑌺
śa	} ha, sa			𑌻	𑌼	𑌽	𑌾	𑌿			
ṣa		𑌻	𑌼	𑌽	𑌾	𑌿					
sa		𑌻	𑌼	𑌽	𑌾	𑌿	𑌻	𑌼	𑌽	𑌾	𑌿
ha		𑌻	𑌼	𑌽	𑌾	𑌿	𑌻	𑌼	𑌽	𑌾	𑌿
ḷa	ḷa	𑌻	𑌼	𑌽	𑌾	𑌿	𑌻	𑌼	𑌽	𑌾	𑌿
za											

Table 1 (continued).

a) Akṣaras for aspirates mostly occur in contrast with their “plain” equivalents. Thus we find *k^h* after *k* in the island name *Kakalōs* appearing as *kak^halōs* throughout in L2 (vs. *kakalōs* in L4); *g^h* after *g* in the king’s name *Gaganāditya* (Skt. ‘Sun of the Heaven(s)’) spelled *gag^hanāditya* (or *dītī^ha*) throughout in the *lōmāfanu*’s (L1-3); *masdidu*, the older loan for ‘mosque’ (< Arab. *masǧid*, vs. later *miskit*) often spelt *mas(u)did^hu*, sometimes also *mas(u)d^hidu* (L2 and L3); *Dambidū*, the name of an island reflecting Skt. *Jambudvīpa*, often spelled *dabud^huvu* or *d^habuduvu* (L3) besides *dabuduvu* (L1-3) and *jabuduv-* (L1, L3); the name of the caliph *Abūbakr* spelled *abūb^hakarū* (L2); or *baibat-* ‘rice portion’ (Skt. *bhagabhakta-*) spelled *baib^hat-* alongside *baibat-* (L2, L3). Such constellations may also extend over word-boundaries as in the case of *kāpurun* ‘infidels’ (pl., < Arabic *kāfir*) once spelled *k^hāpurun* after the participle *kī* ‘speaking’ in L2; the participle *tibi* ‘being’ spelled *t^hibi/i* after *matī* ‘above’ in L1 and *ṣeriyātu* ‘sharia (law)’ in L2; or even, with a change of the stop involved, in *sadulu* ‘rice’ (MoDh. *haṅḍū*)²² once spelled *sad^hulu* after *sadakā* ‘alms’ (Arab. *ṣadaqa*) in L2. Mere variation may also be the reason for *tibi* sometimes being spelled *tib^hi* (L1-4).

The use of the aspirate akṣaras in geminates may be regarded as a special outcome of the variation tendency, combinations such as *tt^h* alternating with “plain” *tt* without any discernible rule in cases like *utt^hara* vs. *uttara* ‘northern’ (Sanskritism, vs. “pure”

²²The relationship with Skt. *tanḍula-* is unclear.

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of enemies’ ~ Skt. *śatrubhāya*),²⁴ and *catru-* (in *catru-saṅgrasa* L4 vs. *satru-saṅgraha* L5 ‘seizing of enemies’ ~ Skt. **śatrusamgraha*),²⁵ while the MoDh term is *haturu*.²⁶ The Skt. epithet *cakravarti-* ‘emperor’ appears as *śakkravartī* in L4 and *sakryavartī* in L5, and the name of the *Sumeru* mountain, as *sumeru* in L5 but *ṣumeru* in L4.²⁷ The equivalent of Skt. *dis-* ‘direction’ appears in locative and ablative forms as *dise* (L1–3), *diṣe* (L1) *d^(h)ihe* (L4), and *disen* (L1, L3), *diṣen* (L3), *d^(h)iḥen* (L4); correspondingly, we have a locative *dese* (L1–3 and L5) alongside an ablative *decen* (L4) of Skt. *deśa* ‘land’.²⁸ For the interchangeability of *d* with *j* cf. the name of the *Buddha* which usually appears as *bud^(h)u* (L1, L2 etc.) but also as *b^(h)ujāi* (comitative) in L2 vs. “regular” *budāi* (L1, L2). The most complex permutation is found in an unexplained term which occurs in the spellings *ujic^(h)isu* (L4) and *ud^(h)isahi* (L5) in connection with the *Sumeru* mountain and *sūrya-raśmi-* ‘sun-beam’ (*śūryāiraśmi* L4; *sūryainrasumi* L5).²⁹

c) The interchangeability of *y*-akṣaras with plain “vocalic” akṣaras is documented from the Sanskrit inscriptions on. Thus we find, within L2, the word *avurodun* ‘year(s)’ (originally pl.; Skt. *saṃvatsara*, borrowed from a non-Insular Prakrit) spelled with both *a-* and *y*-akṣaras side by side, without any context condition discernible (e.g. *nuvavana avurodun* vs. *nuvavana (y)avurodun* ‘ninth year’). In a similar way, the word *alā* ‘servant’ (definite form) appears as *alā* and *(y)alā* side by side in the *fatkolū* of A.H. 1058, and *uturu* ‘northern’ (< Skt. *uttara-*) as *uturu* and *(y)uturu* side by side in L4. It seems that only *ya* occurs after *-i*-akṣaras as in *dī(y)asin* (< Skt. **udaka-sīma-*) ‘water limit’ (L3; in F4 we read *d^(h)yabin* with a ligature); however, plain *e* and *u* may follow *i* as in *liev-* ‘writing’ (causative, Skt. *lik^(h)āpaya-*; 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

²⁴ Attested in the Mahābhārata (7.145.43a and elsewhere).

²⁵ Cf. *śatru-nigraham* in the Rāmāyana (4.26.22a). Note the hypercorrect spelling with *-s-* instead of *-h-* in L4.

²⁶ Cf. Fritz 2002:66 n. 251.

²⁷ Both times compounded with *mand^(h)āra*, i.e. Skt. *mandara-*, the name of another mountain; cf. the compound *sumerumalayamandarasadṛṣī-* in the Divyāvadāna (8.68.2).

²⁸ For sibilants in Arabic loanwords cf. Gippert 2004b:190–1.

²⁹ It is a mere guess to see a case form of *udīcī* ‘northern’ here (*udīcīsu* loc.pl.?).

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(and has been observed before)³⁰ that the first nine characters of the *Thaana* “alphabet” reflect the Arabic (or, rather, Persian) digits from 1 to 9; cf. Table 2:

<i>Thaana</i> character	ހ	ށ	ނ	ރ	ބ	ޅ	ކ	ވ	މ
Sound value	<i>h</i>	<i>ś</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>ʔ</i>	<i>w</i>
Persian digit	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩
Numeric value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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 akṣaras, a full set of one-digit numeric signs including zero, and at least two of the *lōmāfanu*’s (L₁ and L₃) provide attestations for them.³¹ Comparing the digits as appearing in L₃ with the *Thaana* characters from *m* to *ḍ* as illustrated in Table 3, it is clear that the seventh item of the list was meant to be the character standing for retroflex *ṇ*, ޞ, which is obsolete today; it was later replaced by palatal *ṇ̄*, ސ, which is an obvious modification of the character for plain *n*, ރ, with an additional tail.

<i>Thaana</i> character	މ	ފ	ދ	ޅ	ޅ	ޅ	ޅ/ޅ	ސ	ޅ
Sound value	<i>m</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>ṇ/ṇ̄</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>ḍ</i>
<i>Dives akuru</i> digit	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩
Numeric value	1	2	3	4	5	6 ³²	7	8	9

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* ޅ which consists of the *f*-character ފ with an additional diacritic dot.³³ It is also obvious for *j* ސ and *c* ރ which are built upon *d* ދ and *t* ޅ with the same additional tail as in *ṇ̄*. The same tail can further be seen in *z* ޅ and *ṭ* ޅ if they rely upon *r* ރ and *b* ބ. In the case of *r* and *z*, this may be a calque of the Arabic script where the latter is derived from the former (with a dot, cf. ر vs. ز), while the formation of *ṭ* 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*, ޅ, no such

³⁰ Cf. Gippert 1992:29–31.

³¹ Mostly in numbering the individual plates of the copper plate grant.

³² Note that the digit ‘6’ occurs in mirrored form, too (٦).

³³ Many other characters are used with diacritic dots in the transcription of Arabic words; cf. Fritz 2002:45.

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

<i>Thaana</i> character	ހ	ބ	ޅ	ކ	އ	ވ
Sound value	z	t	y	p	j	c
Source character	س	و	ا	م	ن	و
Sound value	r	b	ʔ	f	d	t

Table 4.

All this leaves the question open how the alphabetic sequence came about or, in other words, why *b* 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* ޅ, there is a certain similarity with the corresponding Arabic letter (*wāf*, و). The rationale behind the *Thaana* “alphabet” thus remains enigmatic.

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