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Written Artefacts from the Maldives: 1,500 Years of Mixing Languages and Scripts

Abstract: The archipelago of the Maldives, which extends over *c*. 1,000 km in a north-south direction in the Indian Ocean, looks back on an uninterrupted production of written artefacts since about the sixth century CE. In their entirety, the monuments that have been preserved give a clear picture of the historical development of both the local language, Dhivehi (lit. 'Islanders' [language]'), and the scripts that were used to write it down, as well as the religious and cultural conditions in which the artefacts emerged (Buddhist vs Islamic). At the same time, the religious and cultural setting, which changed considerably with the conversion of the islanders from Buddhism to Islam in the middle of the twelfth century CE, caused a specific interaction of languages and scripts that manifested itself in a remarkable amount of mixing, with more or less impact on the graphical appearance of the artefacts. In the present article, I illustrate the interplay of Dhivehi with the other languages concerned (Sanskrit, Prakrit, Persian, Arabic and, lastly, English) and its reflection in written form based on a few examples.

1 The Buddhist pre-stage: Prakrit vs Sanskrit

The culture of the Maldives was predominantly determined by Buddhism before their inhabitants were converted to Islam in the middle of the twelfth century CE, a fact that is witnessed by a great bulk of archaeological findings throughout the archipelago.[1] Only a very few written artefacts have been preserved from those times which, however, display a principle that would remain typical for Maldivian literacy throughout the centuries, namely, the mixing of languages and, later, scripts.

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1 For a survey of the remnants of Buddhism in the Maldives, see Gippert forthcoming a.

1.1 The Landhoo inscription

The oldest autochthonous written artefact that has been unearthed on the Maldives[2] is a brick-shaped block of coral stone detected on the island of Landhoo, which is inscribed on its four longitudinal faces in a Brāhmī script similar to the varieties used in southern India in about the sixth to eighth centuries. Its contents have been determined to be a *dhāraṇī* spell, i.e. a series of mantras protecting against demons; the stone probably pertained to a Buddhist monastery, not as part of its building construction but as a relic that was enshrined in its stupa.[3] In contrast to comparable *dhāraṇī* spells, such as the *Sitātapatrādhāraṇī*, the language it is written in is not just (Buddhist) Sanskrit; instead, it is a mixture of Sanskrit with a peculiar form of 'Insular' Prakrit, namely, the Middle Indic vernacular that is likely to be the historical ancestor of Dhivehi. In the excerpt of face 1 (Fig. 1) displayed in Table 1, the Sanskrit elements are indicated in red and the Prakrit elements in blue; the words in black in the last line are so-called *bīja* syllables, i.e. interjections that are believed to have magic power in themselves but are not necessarily attributable to one of the two languages. As the Table shows, it is the element *grāha* meaning 'seizing' or 'possession' that is usually spelt in its Sanskrit form (the Insular Prakrit equivalent would have been **gahə* or **gā*), whereas the formula for 'I smash into pieces', *toṭa(ṃ) bʰidāmi*, is rather Prakrit (vs Sanskrit **troṭayaṃ bʰindāmi*), as are most of the names of demons, even when compounded with *grāha*. The name *preta* denoting the evil spirit of a dead person (the Prakrit form would be **peyə*), *nāga* for 'snake' (vs Prakrit **nā*) and *bʰūta* (spelt *bʰuta*), a designation of another type of demon (vs Prakrit **bu(v)ə*) are exceptions to this. Interestingly enough, the latter term contrasts with *bʰui-*, which reflects, in its Prakrit form, the female equivalent of the same demon, in Sanskrit named *bʰūtī-*; and of all demons mentioned here, only this one has survived into modern Dhivehi as a suffix in the name of a fairy, *Santi Mariyam-bu*, which obviously reflects the Christian Saint Mary.[4] Sanskrit forms are also *svāha*, the formulaic greeting 'Hail!' (also occurring in the spelling *svaha* in the inscription), which would be **sahə* (or simply

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2 We leave aside here Roman and other coins of Antiquity that must have been imported by travellers (see, e.g. Forbes 1984).
3 See Gippert 2004 for the first edition of the inscription and further details. In the present treatise, personal and geographical names and other terms that are in everyday use are rendered in the English-based Roman transcription for Dhivehi as it is used on the Maldives; other linguistic elements are transcribed in the system used in Indology.
4 The name was probably introduced into the Maldives by the Portuguese conquerors in the middle of the sixteenth century; see Gippert 2004, 93–94.

*sā) in Prakrit, and *sarva* (here spelt *sarvva*) 'all', whose Prakrit equivalent *sava* (for *savə) appears elsewhere in the text (partly with the spelling *savva*). Whether or not this variation is to be regarded as a case of true bilingualism or if it was just an indication of uncertainty in rendering Sanskrit graphically by speakers of the local Prakrit, must remain open; we should keep in mind, however, that Buddhist Sanskrit was notorious for being 'hybrid', in the sense of being mixed with elements from spoken vernaculars and that in the given case, Sanskrit grammar seems to be ignored at large (e.g. there are no accusative endings).[5]
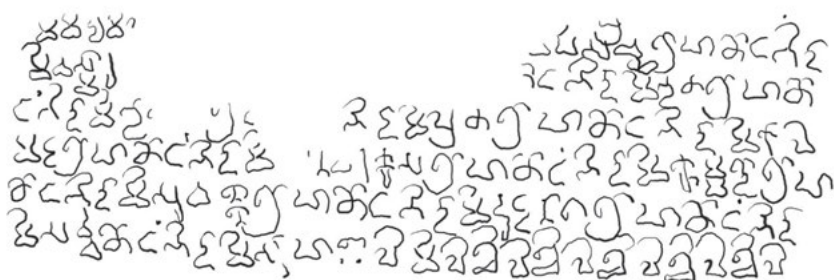
Table 1: The Landhoo inscription, face 1 (excerpt).

pisacchagrāha toṭa bhidāmi	I smash the possession caused by *piśāca*s into pieces.
vasmāra<grāha toṭa bhidāmi>	I smash the possession caused by *apasmāra*s into pieces.
*<***grāha> toṭa bhidāmi*	I smash the possession caused by ??? into pieces.
bhutagrāha toṭaṃ bhidāmi	I smash the possession caused by *bhūta*s into pieces.
bhuigrāh<a toṭa> bhidāmi	I smash the possession caused by *bhūtī*s into pieces.
pretagrāha toṭa bhidāmi	I smash the possession caused by *preta*s into pieces.
kālamaṭṭagrāha toṭaṃ bhidāmi	I smash the possession caused by *akālamṛtyu*(s) into pieces.
*<**>rakkusagrāha toṭaṃ bhidāmi*	I smash the possession caused by ??*rakṣasa*s into pieces.
kummaṇḍagrāha toṭa bhidāmi	I smash the possession caused by *kumbhāṇḍa*s into pieces.
suvaṇṇagrāha toṭa bhidāmi	I smash the possession caused by *suparṇa*(s) into pieces.
duṭṭanāgagrāha toṭaṃ bhidāmi	I smash the possession caused by wicked *nāga*s into pieces.
sarvva toṭaṃ bhidāmi	I smash all (of them) into pieces.
svāha	Hail!
*ili mili khili khili khili khili <****> gili g*li hili hili hi<li hi>li hili hili hili ||*	

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5 See <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/inscription-1-from-landhoo-maldives-ea6c56ddf41c4 320a5c76961bb2958ff> (accessed on 22 July 2023) for a 3D-model of the Landhoo stone, which is registered as MAHS-MDV-COL-001-O-0033 in the database of the 'Maritime Asia Heritage Survey' project (hereafter MAHS; <https://maritimeasiaheritage.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/manuscript-viewer/>; Feener *s.a.*). A similarly inscribed artefact has recently been detected on the same island (registered as MAHS-MDV-COL-029-O-0001 in MAHS); see <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/inscription-2-from-landhoo-maldives-5c7e84b41e274a7a9f676c67c9228af2> (accessed on 22 July 2023) for a 3D-model.

a

b

Figs 1a–b: The Landhoo inscription, face 1; photograph and sketch Jost Gippert, 2003.

1.2 Inscribed statues

In contrast to the inscription from Landhoo, which, as we have seen, can be regarded as being mostly in Prakrit, two inscribed artefacts from a few centuries later (*c.* ninth to tenth centuries CE) must be considered as being basically composed in Sanskrit. Both these artefacts are shaped as multifaced statues with features that are typical for the so-called *Vajrayāna* Buddhism; their inscriptions, which are applied across the surface, are written in a much more 'cursive' script than that of Landhoo, resembling that of medieval Sinhalese and, thus, obviously representing an antecedent of the so-called *Dives akuru* script that was used for Dhivehi until the eighteenth century.[6] Even though the shape of the two statues and the arrangement of the inscriptions is totally different (Figs

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6 See Mohamed 1999 and 2004 and Gippert 2013 for details as to the script and its development.

2a–b), they have been proven to contain the same text, namely, a mantra addressing Yamāntaka, the 'destroyer of death' in *Vajrayāna* belief, which is also known from other sources.[7]
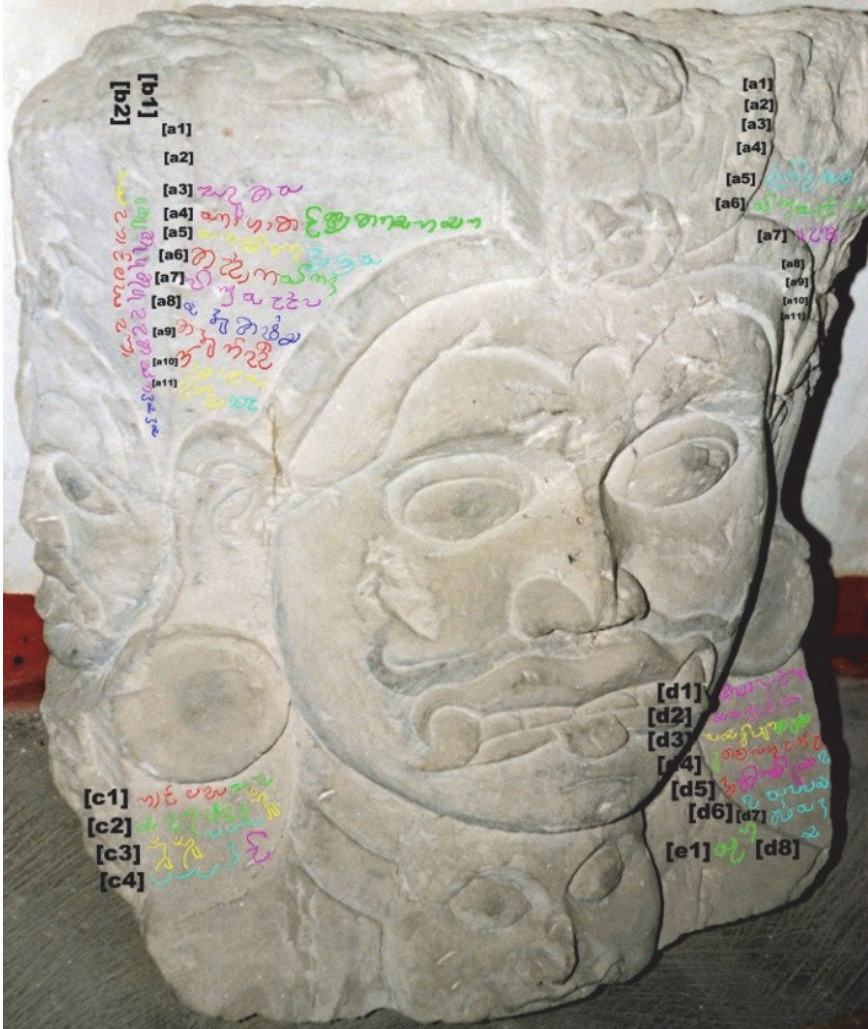

Fig. 2a: Statue with Sanskrit inscriptions; photograph and markings Jost Gippert, 1993.

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7 These are the *Guhyasamājatantra* (Chap. 14) and the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Chaps 1 and 52); the mantra also exists in Chinese and Tibetan translations. See Gippert 2013–2014 for further details.
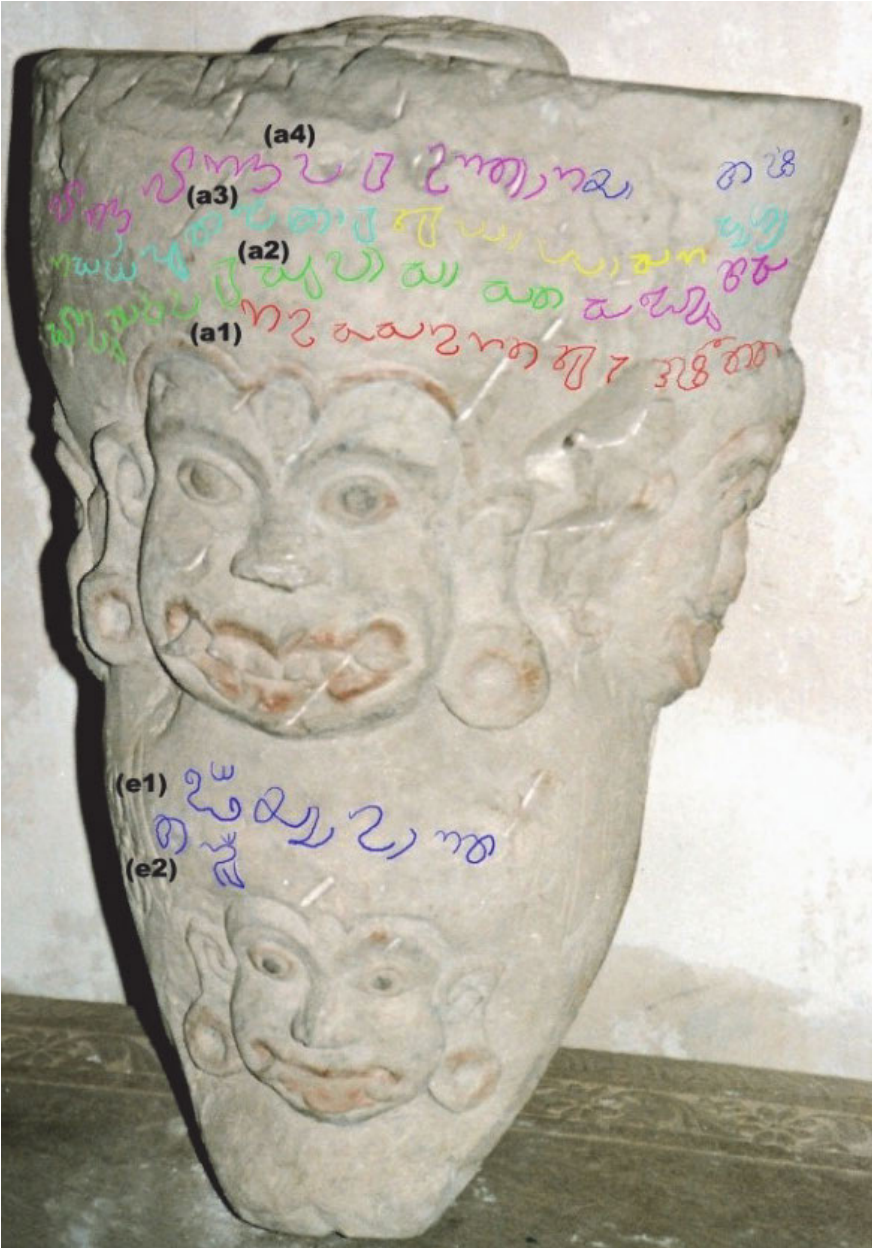
Fig. 2b: Statue with Sanskrit inscriptions; photograph and markings Jost Gippert, 1993.

In contrast to the Landhoo inscription, the Sanskrit wording is here aimed at being at least grammatically correct (with adequately formed genitives, accusatives and vocatives); however, the spoken vernacular shimmers through everywhere in the form of spelling inconsistencies that are caused by the reduced phonological inventory of spoken Dhivehi. Sanskrit *vyāghracarma-* 'tiger's skin', for example, appears in both inscriptions as *vyagrasarmma*, the imperative *chinda* 'break!' as *sinda* or *ṣinda*, and *vajra*, the 'thunderbolt', whose name underlies the given Buddhist tradition, as *vadra*.[8]

2 Islamisation and the arrival of Persian and Arabic

Even after the conversion of the Maldives to Islam in the middle of the twelfth century, the influence of Sanskrit on the islands remained notable. This can be well illustrated with the first written artefacts that have been preserved from this time (end of the twelfth century), namely, sets of copperplates documenting the kings' endowments for newly constructed mosques. These documents (usually styled *lōmāfānu*, i.e. 'great excellency of copper' in the Maldives) are generally written in an early form of Dhivehi, in a script (sometimes called *Evēla akuru*)[9] which clearly continues that of the Buddhist statues. Regarding the self-introduction of the king, however, they usually contain a seal that is written in a *Nāgarī*-type script, with the language being Sanskrit (albeit with graphical distortions); this is true, for example, for the so-called *Isdū lōmāfānu*, which was issued by a king named Gaganāditya for the island of Isdhoo in Haddunmathi (or Laamu) Atoll in *c.* 1194 CE (see Figs 3 and 4). The seal reads *sva-sti śrī ga-gʰa-nā-dī-tʰṭʰa de-va-s'-ya dā-nāṃ*, rendering *svasti śrī gaganāditya devasya dānam* 'Hail! Grant of the brilliant God (-like) Gaganāditya'. In a similar way, the king's signature on the last plate of the set was written in Nāgarī script, as visible in Fig. 5, where we read *āṃ-dī-nta śrī mahā-rā-c'* as a rendering of *āditya śrī mahārāja* 'Brilliant great-king Āditya'.

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8 See Gippert 2013, 90–91, for the relation between Dhivehi phonology and *Dives akuru* script.
9 The term was coined 'provisionally' by Henry Bell (1940, 166); it means 'script of that time' or 'of yore'.

Fig. 3: First plate of the *Isdū lōmāfānu* with king's seal; photograph Jost Gippert, 2002.

Fig. 4: King's seal on the first plate of the *Isdū lōmāfānu* (enlarged); photograph Jost Gippert, 2002.

Fig. 5: King's signature on the last plate of the *Isdū lōmāfānu* (line 1); photograph Jost Gippert, 2002.

However, the use of Sanskrit terms in these documents is not restricted to seals and signatures. As a matter of fact, the grants abound in Sanskritisms, even where they are written in the local script, thus, being indistinguishable from Dhivehi words proper. This is not only true for most of the names mentioned in

them, at least those of kings, which, like *gaganāditya* 'sun of the heaven',[10] reflect purely Sanskrit formations. The co-occurrence of Dhivehi and Sanskrit elements is illustrated in Table 2, which shows the content of the first plate of the *Isdū lōmāfānu*, with Sanskrit elements in red and those of Dhivehi in blue; note that, in some cases, the Sanskrit genitive ending *-sya* is attached to a Dhivehi word form (*rasunu-sia* and *rasun-sya* 'of the king', quasi Sanskrit *rājanasya, with Dhivehi *rasun-* representing the historical outcome of the Sanskrit *n*-stem *rājan-*). Besides names, it is typically invocations and titles, but also numbers, such as *ekaviṅśatī* (for *ekaviṃśati*) 'twenty-one' (the modern Dhivehi equivalent would be *ekāvīs*, 'twenty' alone would be *vihi*)[11] or *panṣatriṅśati* (for *pañcatriṃśati*) 'thirty-five' (vs Dhivehi *tirīs fas*) that are in Sanskrit.[12]

Table 2: Beginning of the *Isdū lōmāfānu* with Sanskrit elements in red.

svasti śrī ṣomavaṅśa ādipati	Hail! When the lord of the brilliant Moon Dynasty,
śrī manābaruṇa mārasun	the brilliant *mahārāja* Mānābharaṇa,
puṇa dese reda vuṇa dai	after of his reigning over all the country
ekaviṅśatī avurodun ikit vī kalu	had passed twenty one years,
reda opun side	had left his reign,
mi rasunusia beni	(and) this king's younger brother,
svasti śrī tribuvana ādītya mārasun	hail! the brilliant *mahārāja* Tribhuvanāditya,
reda vuṇa dʰai	after of his reigning
panṣatriṅśati avurodun ikit vī kal	had passed thirty-five years,
mi rasunsya malu …	(and) this king's nephew …

At the same time, the conversion of the islands introduced new terms that were related to the Islamic faith and not readily available in either Dhivehi or Sanskrit. These are typically Arabic or Persian words concerning mosques and people associated with them; on plate 13r of the *Isdū lōmāfānu*,[13] for example, we

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10 See Gippert 2003, 34 with n. 13.

11 See Fritz 2002, vol. 1, 114.

12 There is no established transliteration system for Old and Middle Dhivehi texts written in *Evēla* and *Dives akuru*. The transcriptions provided here and in the following tables are simplified to warrant readability.

13 An excellent image of the plate can be found on the MAHS website (Feener *s.a.*) under the designation MAHS-MDV-COL-001-O-0024 - Isdhoo Loamafaanu (MLE-NMM-MS1) as page 34 (image 35). Unfortunately, the images of the *lōmāfānu* plates are arranged in disorder there.

find *masudid⁽ʰ⁾u* 'mosque' representing the Arabic *masǧid*, *mālimu* 'Qur'an teacher' ~ the Arabic *muʿallim*, and *mūdimu* 'muezzin' ~ the Arabic *muʾaḏḏin*. As these examples show, the Arabic terms were adapted to Dhivehi phonetically and grammatically (e.g. by adding the dative ending *aṭa* as in *masudidʰaṭa* 'to the mosque') and could, thus, be written in the local script; their integration is illustrated in Table 3 where the Arabic elements are marked in green.

Table 3: Text of plate 13 (recto) of the *Isdū lōmāfānu* with Arabic elements in green.

śrī isuduvu masudidu	For the mosque of brilliant Isdū
ṣāna pangeāi	reed for thatching the roof,
veṭṭelāi sadakā saḍulāi	oil for the lamps, alms rice,
mālim mūdimun kana bogaāi	the food share for the teacher (and) the muezzin,
mi emme kamakemmaṭa māruvai	and measures for providing all these things
masudidʰaṭa dinu	were allotted to the mosque.
mālimu iduna ge bimaṭa	For the ground of the house of the teacher
vaṭai sia bamai koṭṭakāi	a parcel of a hundred fathoms and a parcel of
vaṭai panasu bamai koṭṭakāi	fifty fathoms and for the housing of the
mūdimu idinaṭa vaṭai sia bamai koṭṭāi	muezzin, a parcel of a hundred fathoms
mi de dʰarunaṭa ... dinu	were allotted to these two ... people.

On the other hand, even for religious concepts, Sanskrit terms that are likely to have been associated with Buddhist thought previously continued to be used. A striking example is provided by a second copperplate grant issued by King Gaganāditya in 1194, the so-called *Gamu lōmāfānu*, which concerns a mosque on Gan, another island of Haddunmati (or Laamu) Atoll. Unfortunately, this grant, which comprises a lengthy account of the Creation and the life of Muḥammad,[14] is not as well preserved as its counterpart from Isdhoo (see Figs 6a–b showing the remnants of plates 2 and 3); however, the remarkable interplay of Sanskrit words such as *devatā* 'deity' (also in *ekadevatā-* 'one deity'), *uttʰara svargga ḷoka-* (for *uttara-svarga-loka*) 'the place of utmost heaven', *narakā-* (for *naraka-*) 'hell', *ādītya-* (for *āditya*) 'sun', *pṛtthivi loka* (for *pṛtʰivī loka-*) 'the place of earth' or *sind* (for *sindʰu*) 'Indus, Panjab' with Arabic terms such as *rahimat-* (for *raḥmaᵗ*) 'mercy' and *kautar* (for *kauṭar*) 'abundance' (here denoting a river in

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14 See Gippert 2003, 37–40 for details. Images of the *Gamu lōmāfānu* can be found on the MAHS website under the designation MAHS-MDV-COL-001-O-0026 - Gan Loamafaanu (MLE-NMM-MS3).

paradise),[15] and names such as *ṣaur* 'Syria' (Arabic *sūriya*), *erāk* 'Iraq' (ʾ*Irāq*), *bābʰil* 'Babylon' (*bābil*), *pārīṣ* 'Persia' (*fāris*) and *dadʰīrā* 'Mesopotamia' (*ğazīra*) can be taken for certain. A peculiar trait of the *Gamu lōmāfānu*, not attested elsewhere in historical documents of Dhivehi, are the listings of Islamic paradises (beginning with [*dā*]*ralu salāmu* for Arabic *dār al-salām* 'House of Peace') and hells (beginning with *sairu* for Arabic *saʾīr* 'flaming fire'), as illustrated in Table 4. Note that only one of the geographical names involved, *jabuduv* for *Jambudvīpa* '(southern) India', appears in a local form (the modern Dhivehi equivalent would be *dambidū*).[16]

The picture becomes even more colourful if we consider that some Islamic terms are not of Arabic but of Persian origin. This is true, for example, of the word for the 'prophet', *petāmbaru*, which obviously represents a dialectal variant of Persian *pay(ġ)āmbar*[17] 'messenger' and which is used in the *Gamu lōmāfānu* for both the founder of Islam, Muḥammad, and his (biblical) predecessors; other Persian terms that occur regularly are *roda* 'fasting' (for Persian *rōza*, today *rūze*) and *namādu* 'prayer' (Persian *namāz*), as well as a second denomination of mosques, *miskitu*, which must reflect Early New Persian *mazgit* 'id.' and which substitutes *masudid(h)u* after the first copperplate grants.[18] In addition, the text contains a few elements that have retained a Prakrit shape. These are higher numbers, such as *eklakka* '100,000' (cf. Sanskrit *eka-lakṣa*), *ṣauvīsu* 'twenty-four' (cf. Sanskrit *catur-viṃśa(ti)*), and *ṣāḷīsu* 'forty' (cf. Sanskrit *catvāriṃśa(ti)*), contrasting with *cāśra* '1,000' which probably represents Sanskrit *sahasra-* directly (vs Prakrit *səhassə > Dhivehi *sāsu > *hās*). Persian elements are indicated in violet and Prakrit ones in orange in Table 5.

Fig. 6a: *Gamu lōmāfānu*, plate 2; photograph Jost Gippert, 2002.

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15 For this use see the Qur'an, *Surah* 108.1.

16 See Gippert 2003 and 2015, for further details as to the *Gamu lōmāfānu*.

17 See Gippert 2003, 42, for details.

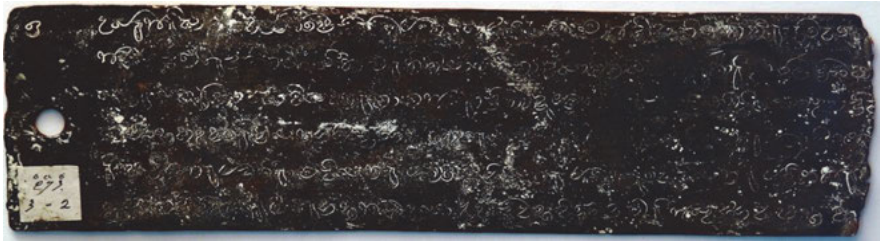**18** See Gippert 2003, 41–42 and forthcoming b for further details.

Fig. 6b: *Gamu lōmāfānu*, plate 3; photograph Jost Gippert, 2002.

Table 4: *Gamu lōmāfānu*, plate 2 (excerpt).

... *ekadevatāinge rahimatun upe[dduvi ...]*	... [crea]ted by the mercy of the one deity ...
... *devatāinaṭa ga]t birun ...]*	... [by fear gai]ned towards the deity ...
... *pen ve kekuṇi dumu seduṇu ...*	... made of steam emerging from boiled water ...
... *[dā]ralu salāmu dāralu karālu dāralu damālu dāralu kuludu dannatalu adin dannatalu na[īmu ...]*	... *dār al-salām* 'House of Peace', *dār al-qarār* 'House of Steadfastness', *dār al-ğamāl* 'House of Beauty', *dār al-ḫuld* 'House of Eternity', *ğannat al-ʿadan* 'Paradise of Eden', *ğannat al-na[ʿīm* 'Paradise of Happiness' ...]
... *usu ran risi maṇikkatun şeduṇu raṭu uttʰara svargga ḷokaen ...*	... from utmost heaven, a land made from gold, silver and jewels ...
... *sairu sakaru şāvvā mi sat narakāen ādītya mulu koṭu şadān pṛttʰivi loka upaduv[ai ...*	... *al-saʿīr* 'flaming fire', *saqar* 'hell', *al-hāwiyaᵗ* 'depth, nethermost hell', from these seven hells, making the sun first (lit. as the root), creat[ing] the earth ...
... *svarggai kautar eviana gagu svarggai*	... in heaven and the river named *Kauṯar* in heaven,
şaur eviana raṭu erāk eviana raṭu bābʰil evi[ana raṭu ...	the land named *Syria*, the land named *Iraq*, [the land nam]ed *Babylon*, ...
... *pā]rīş eviana raṭu dadʰīrā eviana raṭu sind eviana raṭu jabuduv eviana raṭu mitak ra[ṭu ...*	... the land named *[Per]sia*, the land named *Mesopotamia*, the land named Panjab, the land named India (Jambudvīpa), all these lands ...

Table 5: *Gamu lōmāfānu*, plates 2–3 (excerpt).

… upaduva]i prāṇa dī mīn aṛddʰa aṅgain śauā upaduvai mi de mapirīn svargga vaṣai …	… creati]ng (Adam), giving him breath, creating Eve from his half body, lodging this couple of man-and-woman (lit. mother-and-man) in heaven …
… ādamu petāmbarun suktra bīdain ṣauā baḍun upan genīn dari ve dunie mīsun ve vī	… the children born from Adam the prophet's sperm drop by the womb of Eve having become mankind on earth,
mi ādamu petāmbarun ādi koṭu paṭai eklakka ṣauvīsu cāśra petāmbarun upede dʰunien nivana gat pase	after 124,000 prophets had been created with this Adam the prophet as the first, (and after they had) departed (again) from the world,
upan mahammadu petāmubarun ṣāḷīsu āvurodun	in the fortieth year of Muḥammad the prophet, born after them,
mi petāmbarun kraṭa dabarīlu aisu buṇe gosu	Gabriel coming to this prophet, talking to him and going away (again),
mi dabarailāi mīkailai mi de malāikatun peṇe	this Gabriel and Michael, the two angels, appearing (again),
burāk eviana asu puṭe mahammadu petāmbarun aruvai	causing Muḥammad the prophet to mount the back of the horse named Burāq,
baitalu magadeṣaṭa gene gosu …	taking him to Jerusalem (Bait-al Maqdis) …

3 Mixing *Dives akuru* with Arabic script

More than a hundred years after these copperplate grants were issued, the first artefacts that are inscribed in Arabic script appear on the Maldives. Leaving aside building and funeral inscriptions that are written in Arabic all over,[19] the most relevant monuments for our investigation are those where Arabic writing appears along with Dhivehi. The first such artefact that has been preserved is a copperplate grant of the year 758 AH (1356–1357 CE), which is about the endowment of a mosque named *Boḍugalu* ('big rock') in the islands' capital, Male.[20] There is still a clear distinction between the Arabic and Dhivehi elements in this document in that its first plate, comprising a *Shahāda* formula, the seal of King Ğalāl ad-dīn bin Ṣalāḥ ad-dīn (r. 1306–1341), and a few lines summarising the construction of the mosque, is all in Arabic, while the remaining plates are all in Dhivehi.[21] In later decrees,

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19 See Kalus and Guillot 2005; Gippert forthcoming c, § 2.2.

20 See *Mālēge Miskitta'* 1980, 91–93 as to the mosque.

21 See Gippert forthcoming c, § 2.1 for further details.

however, we begin to meet with Arabic elements that are inserted, in right-to-left directed Arabic script, into a Dhivehi context, in its turn, written in left-to-right *Dives akuru*. The first specimen of this type of mixed-script document is a copper-plate grant of similar appearance to the *Boḍugalu lōmāfānu*; unfortunately only one plate has been preserved of this grant, containing neither a date nor the name of the issuing king (or queen).[22] We find here, integrated into the text passage that explains the ruler's purposes, two quotations of God and the Prophet that are taken from the Qur'an and the Ḥadīth, respectively; the context reads (cf. Fig. 7):

> Causing for (every) Muslim king, royal prince, queen, high-born noble-man (or) noble-lady, minister, mandatee, or other person whosoever who intends to maintain this sacred parcel of land as a sacred parcel (by saying) '*God the Almighty said, "May the curse of God be on the unjust"*', the nine-fold blessing that is there for all persons who are well-intentioned towards Muslims, (and by saying) '*The Prophet – may God's prayers and peace be upon him – said, "None of you becomes a true believer until he likes for his brother what he likes for himself"*', in this way, Muḥammad the commander-in-chief ...[23]

Fig. 7: *Lōmāfānu* (single plate) with insertions in Arabic (highlighted) in lines 1–2 and 4–5; Bell 1930, pl. I A.

While the Arabic elements of this grant are still full sentences in their own right, later documents exhibit the tendency towards shorter phrases or even individual words in Arabic script being inserted into the Dhivehi context. This is true, first of all, for two further fragments of copperplate grants that are undated. In one of them, also consisting of only one plate (see Fig. 8), we meet, within a series of taxes that were levied for a newly endowed mosque, the expression *qalam govibai* denot-

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22 The fragment is only known via Bell 1930, 541–552 with pl. I; its present whereabouts are unknown.

23 For a first translation see Bell 1930, 543, where the Arabic elements are omitted, however. The Arabic quotations are قَالَ اللهُ تَعَالَىٰ أَلَا لَعْنَتُ اللهِ عَلَىٰ اَلظَّالِمِين (see *Surah* 7.44 and 11.19 of the Qur'an) and قَالَ اَلنَبِيَّ صَلَّىْ اللهِ عَلَيْهِ وَ سَلَّمَ لَا يُوْ مِنْ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّىْ يُحِبُّ لِأَخِيْهِ مَا يُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِهِ (Ḥadīth 183).

ing a tax for registrars and registration, with *qalam* 'scriptor(ium)' written in Arabic (قلم).[24] The other one, of which only half a plate has survived (see Fig. 9), contains two instances of the Arabic title *al-ġāzī* 'conqueror, warlord', once associated with King Ibrahim (III, r. 1585–1609 CE), son of Muhammad Boḍu Takurufānu (r. 1573–1585 CE) who liberated the Maldives from the short Portuguese rule (1558–1573), and once, with his uncle Ali Katīb Takuru, the latter's brother.[25]
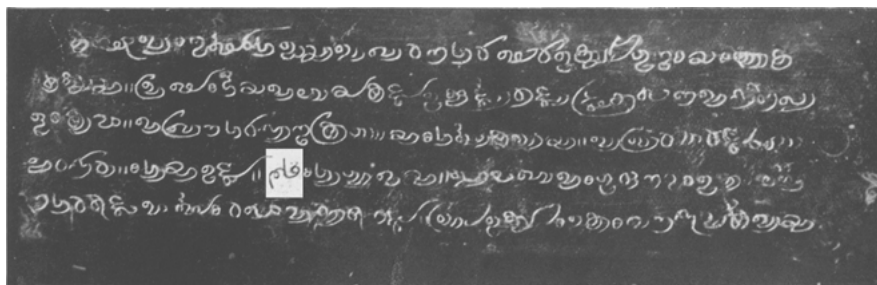

Fig. 8: Arabic *qalam* (highlighted) in a Dhivehi copperplate grant (fragment); Bell 1930, pl. II B.

Fig. 9: Arabic *al-ġāzī* (highlighted) in a Dhivehi copperplate grant (fragment); Bell 1930, pl. III A.

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24 See Bell 1930, 557–560 with pl. II for a first account. The other taxes in question are *ras boli* 'royal cowries', *rahu rā* 'toddy tax', *goi mas* 'fish tax' and *pālabba* 'tree tax'; in contrast to Bell, who takes *qalam* and *govibai* as two distinct taxes ('Tax Collector's Fee' and 'Cultivation Tax'), the two terms are taken together here as they are demarked as constituting a phrase by a double vertical stroke (*daṇḍa*) preceding and following them.

25 See Bell 1930, 560–567 with pl. III for a first account. According to Bell's reconstructions, about fourteen characters (*akṣara*s) per line must have been lost with the right half of the plate.

3.1 Paper documents

Even though the change of writing directions must have caused severe problems for writers here and there, the practice of inserting Arabic words in Arabic script into Dhivehi contexts written in *Dives akuru* continued for at least two centuries, in all kinds of written artefacts that were produced, beginning with the first charters on paper which replaced the copperplate grants from the end of the sixteenth century onwards.[26] A typical example of such charters, which are usually called *fatkoḷu* (lit. 'leaflet'),[27] is a document issued in 1108 AH (1696 CE) by King Muḥammad son of Ḥāǧǧī ʿAlī Tukkala (r. 1692–1701) concerning the renewal of the mosque on Gan island that had been the object of the *Gamu lōmāfānu* some centuries before. The Arabic elements in this voluminous *fatkoḷu* (cf. Fig. 10) comprise, firstly, the king's seal, attached at the top of the leaf, then the *basmala* (introductory formula 'In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful', بِسْمِ اَللّٰهِ اَلرَّحْمٰنِ اَلرَّحِيمِ), and five and a half lines of continuous Arabic text (prayers quoted from the Qur'an and the Ḥadīth) with the name of God and other important words highlighted in red ink. Arabic elements usually also appear in red ink in the Dhivehi text that follows from line 6 onwards; the words and phrases concerned range from the name and designations of the Prophet, *muḥammad* (combined with Dhivehi *petāmbaru* 'prophet' in line 40), *rasūl-allāh* (lit. 'messenger of God') and *sulṭān-al- anbiyā* (lit. 'king of prophets', in line 10), via names of other persons such as *al-sulṭān muḥammad* (referring to the issuing king in line 28), *al-sulṭān iskandar ibrāhīm* (referring to King Ibrahim Iskandar I, r. 1648–1687, in lines 27 and 32), a vizier named *ḥāǧǧī muḥammad*, and the scribe, *muḥammad ḫaṭīb* (in line 49), references to the Qur'an (*ḥaqq qur'ānā*, lit. 'truth of the Qur'an', in line 10 and simply *qur'ān* combined with Dhivehi *pot* 'book' in line 44), the Kaaba (*kaʿbat-ullāh* in line 45), the Hijra (*hiǧra-* in line 11), and other terms that pertain to Muslim thought (e.g. *raḥmat* 'mercy' in line 40, *ṯiqalain* 'the two species of genies and men' in line 9, and *ṣalawāt* 'prayer rituals' in line 35), up to mere abstract nouns (e.g. *manfaʿa* 'benefit' in line 34 and *qabūl* 'acceptance', combined with Dhivehi *kuravvai* 'making' to form a complex verb meaning 'accept' in line 19). In several cases, the Arabic terms are equipped with Dhivehi endings, in turn, written in *Dives akuru* (and

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26 The oldest paper document that has been preserved can be dated to *c.* 1580 CE; it concerns the endowment of a mosque on the island of Kolhufushi in Mulaku atoll and was issued by Muḥammad Boḍu Takurufānu (see Bell 1940, 187–190 with pl. L).

27 The *Maritime Asia Heritage Survey* website (Feener *s.a.*) displays about fifty Dhivehi charters in *Dives akuru* script; an immense increase of material in comparison with Bell's list of eleven specimens (Bell 1940, 187).

usually not in red); this is the case, for example, of *rasūl-allāh* and *kaʿbat-ullāh*, which are followed by the genitive ending *-ge* (lines 10–11 and 45), *manfaʿa* (line 34) with the ablative ending *-in* ('from the benefit') or *ǧāhil* 'ignorant (person)' with the indefinite suffix *-aku* (line 44). However, the Dhivehi endings could also be integrated into the Arabic spelling, as in the case of *hiǧrain* (line 11) with the ablative ending *-in* ('from the Hijra') or in *mu'min musulmanaku* 'a Muslim believer' with the indefinite suffix *-aku* (line 41). In contrast to this, Arabic terms are sometimes rendered in *Dives akuru*; this is true, for example, of the name of Medina spelt *mad^hīnayaṭ* with a dative ending in line 11, *rasūl* 'messenger, prophet' appearing with the comitative suffix *-ayi* in line 46, and *insī* 'human (being)' occurring in the form *insīnayi* with a plural ending and the comitative suffix in line 9, contrasting with *ǧinī-nayi* 'genies' where the word stem is written in Arabic. Beyond this, Sanskrit terms also continue to be used (in a spelling strongly influenced by Dhivehi pronunciation); this is especially true of the long list of epithets with which the kings used to be ornated.[28] The interplay of all these elements is illustrated with some excerpts of the document in Table 6.

Table 6: The *Gamu fatkoḷu* of 1696 CE (excerpts).

… *sulṭān-al-anbiyā' eve nan d^hevvai : ḥaqq-qur'ānā d^hī poṇuvvi kau rasūl-allāhu-ge pānun' mad^hīnayaṭ voḍigat hiǧrain*	… from the *Hijra* that (our) lord, (his) majesty the *Messenger of God* undertook to Medina, sent out (by God) who had given him the name *King of Prophets* and bestowed on him the *truth of Qur'an,*
ekusāstura ekusatt^ha aṭvana ahar etere :	in the 1108th year,
svastī srīmata mahāsrī purasituru aud^hāna srīkula ramvahāaud^hakīriti katt^hiri bvana mahārad^hum vid^hāḷīn :	(I), Hail! the Maharaja of the world, glorious, with great splendour, excessively bright, a *kshatriya* of a brilliant race, with a great golden fame of power, have ordered:
… *mage red^hali kurana hataruvana averud^hu* …	… in the fourth year of my reign …
… *srīkula ramvahāaud^hakīriti katt^hiri bvana mahārad^hunge katt^hiri mud^higesvuman mi pat lievvumuge hudd^hayi vid^hāḷu bahayi nikume al-wazīr hāǧǧī muḥammadu d^hoṭimenayi aḷā kī hid^hu muḥammad ḥaṭīb aḷā lī ::*	… After the Maharaja of the world, a *kshatriya* of brilliant race, with a great golden fame of power had left with the command to write down this document with the *kshatriya*'s seal, and (his) subject, *the vizier Muḥammad* Doṭimena had read it, (his) subject *Muḥammad the scribe* wrote it down.

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28 Geiger (1919, 176) and Bell (1940, 67) apply the Sinhalese term *biruda* < Skt. *viruca*. Given the distortion of the Sanskrit terms over the centuries, these epithets are not always restorable.
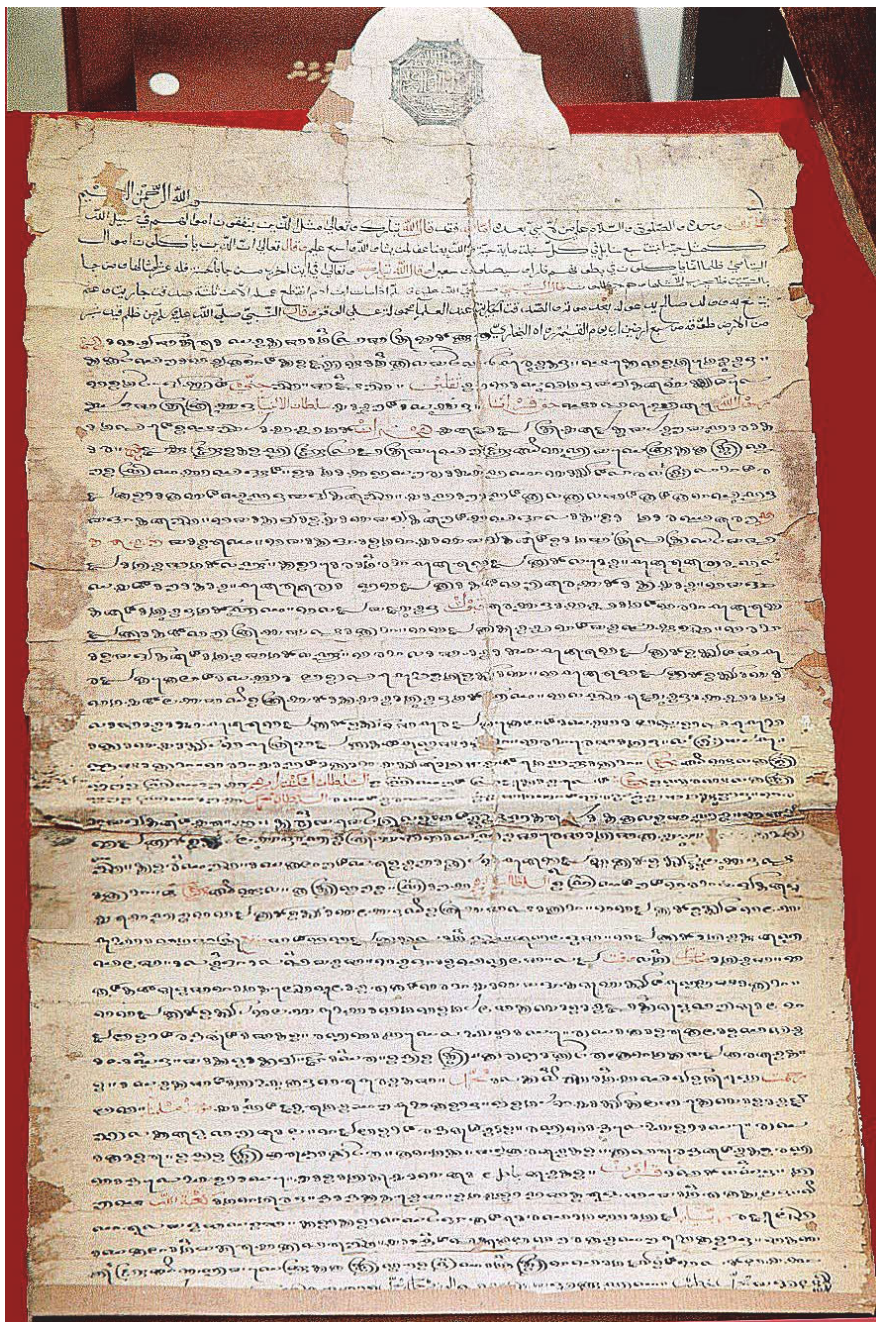
Fig. 10: The *Gamu fatkoḷu* of 1696 CE; photograph Jost Gippert, 1992.

3.2 Charters on wood and stone

The extensive mixture of Dhivehi text with Arabic elements in official documents is not restricted to paper charters. It is especially two inscriptions on wood that deserve our interest for the period in question. As a matter of fact, the two inscriptions, both dated to the year 1062 ᴀʜ (1652 ᴄᴇ), are probably copies of charters that also existed on paper; they concern the endowment of mosques by King Ibrahim Iskandar I, in quite the same wording as what we find in *fatkoḷus*. One of them is engraved in five longitudinal lines on a beam of about 3 m length (Fig. 11 may give an idea of its size), which was used in the construction of the so-called 'Old Mosque'[29] of the Galolhu quarter of Male until its demolition in about 1980; it is today preserved in the National Museum in Male.

Fig. 11: Endowment inscription of the Galolhu Old Mosque (total); photograph Jost Gippert, 1993.

In the excerpt of line 4 shown in Figs 12a–b, we see the combination of Arabic ʿ*imārat* 'construction' with Dhivehi *kuḷaimaṭ*, the verbal noun 'making' in the dative used to express a purpose; the sentence reads: *mi dʰanāru huṭi galoḷu emve aḷutakun mi danāru ʿimārat kuḷaimaṭ adʰai dʰannavai gat hidʰu* 'when (I) received the information that all subjects of Galolhu where this building stands desired to construct this building'. The construction is dated to Friday, 11 Ramadan of the fifth regnal year of the king, with both the month name, *ramaḍān*, and the Dhivehi word for 'month', *mahu*, written in Arabic (*mahāradʰunge pasuvana averudʰu ramaḍān mahu egāra vī hukuru dʰā*); the date equals 16 August 1652.

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29 Bā Miskit, also known under the names Kuṇḍikoi-Miskit and Masjid al-Hadith.
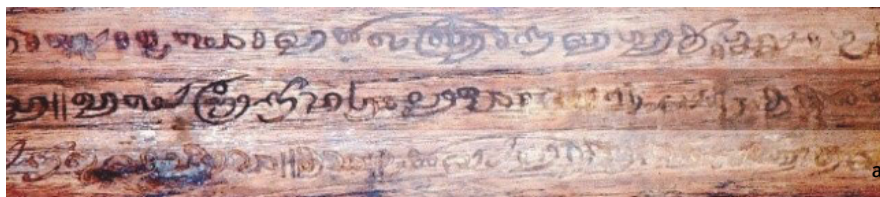
Figs 12a–b: Same, excerpt with line 4 highlighted; photographs Jost Gippert, 1993.

The second '*fatkoḷu* on wood' is a large rectangular board measuring 1.7 × 0.54 m; its eighteen-line inscription attests the endowment of a mosque on the island of Gan in the southernmost atoll, Aḍḍū (or Seenu), on the 23 Muharram of the same year, a Friday as well, corresponding to 5 January 1652. This inscription is peculiar in that it begins with a lengthy account of the Creation and the life of Muḥammad, as in the *Gamu lōmāfānu*; in addition, it provides important information on the circumstances of the conversion of the Maldives to Islam.[30] The board, today also kept in the National Museum in Male, was probably exposed in the mosque concerned as long as it existed.[31]

During the construction of mosques, *fatkoḷu*-like endowment acts were sometimes also engraved in the building material itself. This is true, for example, of the *Dives akuru* inscription that was applied to the four inner walls of the so-called 'Middle Mosque' (*Medu Miskit*) in Male, which provides details concerning both the construction of the mosque and its properties. Here, we read, among others, the Arabic words ʿ*āda*ᵗ 'custom' (with the ablative ending -*in* added in *Dives akuru*), *miḥrāb* 'niche for praying' (once with the comitative

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30 See Gippert 2003 and forthcoming b for further details.
31 See Bell 1940, 190 according to whom the board was still 'in the possession of the inhabitants of Gan Island' in his times.

ending -*āi*, written in *Dives akuru* together with the stem-final *b*), Ḥadīth and *ziyārat* ('shrine').[32]

3.3 Funerary inscriptions

A considerable number of artefacts written in *Dives akuru* with Arabic insertions consist of epitaphs which, however, are less numerous than the bulk of funerary inscriptions that are all in Arabic. It is usually datings (by *Hijri* year and month), personal names, and mentions of God and the Prophet that are written in Arabic in the mixed inscriptions. Of the sixteen such inscriptions that have been recorded for the big cemetery of the Friday Mosque in Male,[33] three are undecipherable today due to erosion caused by the maritime climate; the other ones are datable between 1662 and 1782 CE. The outer appearance of the Dhivehi script is partly similar to that of the contemporary charters, as in the case of the gravestone of a certain Ḥussain Boḍu Doṭimena Kiṇagepānu, son of Wazīr Muḥammad Pāmuladeri Maṇikupānu, who died in the night of Monday, 6 Dhu al-Hijja 1178 AH, corresponding to 27 May 1765 CE (see Fig. 13); its textual content is illustrated in Table 7.[34] In a few cases, however, the script on the gravestones is extremely ornamental, thus, reminiscent of Arabic calligraphy. This is true, for example, of the epitaph of a certain Ḥussain Āmin (?) Kilagepānu, grandson (?) of ʿUmar Rannabaderi Kilage, who died on Friday, 18 Jumada al-awwal 1089 AH, corresponding to 8 July 1678 CE (see Fig. 14).[35] As far as it can be ascertained, its text is displayed in Table 8.[36]

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32 A reproduction of the inscription is published in *Mālē Hukuru Miskit* 1984, 173–180; an edition of the text in a *Thaana* transcription in the same book, 97 and 165–168.

33 Epitaphs with mixed inscriptions are also found in graveyards on other islands of the archipelago; they are especially numerous in the Koagannu graveyard on Hulhumeedhoo island (Seenu atoll).

34 See *Mālē Hukuru Miskit* 1984, 372 (group XIII, no. 142).

35 See *Mālē Hukuru Miskit* 1984, 346 (group IV, no. 9).

36 See Gippert forthcoming c, § 3.1, for further information on Maldivian funerary inscriptions.

Fig. 13: Gravestone of 1765; photograph Jost Gippert, 1993.

Table 7: Epitaph of 1765 CE.

*hiğrain mitakvana ave/rud^hu sanat 1178 gai ḍū-al-ḥiğğa mahu ha	rean vvī angāra vīle rei	hataruvana sāʿatu al-sulṭān	al-ġāzī ḥassan ʿizz-al-dīn	sirīk^hula raṅmība kattri bvana	mahārad^hunaṭu ek kihun upan	mī rad^hunme diapurasūtā vi al-wazīr muḥammadu pāmu-lad^heri mani/kupānaṭ	me upan ḥussayn boḍu d^hoṭimenāyi ki/ṇagepānu	purautt^ha vi	kamu had^hān :*	This is to memorise that in the year 1178 after Hijra, in the month of *Ḍū'l-ḥiğga*, in the fourth hour of the sixth night which dawned into Tuesday, passed away Ḥussain Boḍu Doṭimena Kiṇagepānu, born from the same womb as the Maharaja of the world, Sultan al-Ġāzī Ḥassan ʿIzz al-dīn, a kshatriya of brilliant race with golden elephants, and born to the vizier Muḥammad Pāmuladeri Manikupānu by whom was begotten this same king.

Fig. 14: Gravestone of 1678; photograph Jost Gippert, 1993.

Table 8: Epitaph of 1678 CE.

*hiğrain	ekusas|tura	uṇavai|vana ahar eture	svastī srīma|ta mahāsirīkula ra|mvība kattri ba|vana maṣārad^hunge	ektirīsvana	aharu ğumād al-awwal mahu	hukuru aṭāra vi|ḷe rei mi rad^huna ek-|kihun upan ʿumar rannaba|ḍīri kilagon upan	koṭari kalegepānuge	d^hi kamanāpānu	baḍun upan ḥussayn	āminnāi kilage|pānu mi d^hva|ḥu me purauta	vedd^hye kamu had^hā|naṭ līpanti*	This had to be written down to memorise that in the 1089th year after Hijra, in the 31st year of Hail! the glorious Maharaja of the world, a kshatriya of very brilliant race, with golden elephants, in the month of *Ğumād al-awwal*, in the night dawning into Friday, the 18th, on this day passed away Ḥussain Āmin Kilagepānu, born from the womb of Kamanāpānu, the daughter of Koṭari Kalegepānu who was born to ʿUmar Rannabaḍeri Kilage, born from the same womb as that king.

4 The Invention of *Thaana*

With the replacement of *Dives akuru* by a newly invented right-to-left directed script in the eighteenth century, the problem of inserting Arabic elements into a Dhivehi context was solved for the Maldivian scribes. Curiously enough, the new *Thaana* script was not based on Arabic letters but on digits: as shown in Table 9, nine characters derive from the Arabic or, rather, Persian digits for 1 to 9, nine further characters from the inherited digits of *Dives akuru*.[37] Considering that in Arabic, numbers are written against the regular script direction, the use of the digits for the purpose of representing consonants in a right-to-left directed script is perplexing. This is all the more true since the ratio of the assignment of sound values to the digits is still unknown. Nevertheless, the influence of Arabic writing habits is clear from another characteristic: *Thaana* uses the Arabic vocalisation marks as far as possible for the assignment of vowels (including *sukūn*, the circle-shaped mark denoting the absence of a vowel). The interplay of *Thaana* and Arabic script is illustrated in Fig. 15 and Table 10 with a page from the *Rādavaḷi*, a chronicle covering the time from Creation up to the eighteenth century;[38] note that the inherited digits are used for denoting numbers, not the Arabic ones, and that both the Arabic names and the numbers are usually in red ink.

Table 9: The development of *Thaana* characters.

Thaana character	ر	سر	سر	ڪ	ٮٮ	ىر	ٮ	ٮ	و
Sound value	h	ś	n	r	b	ḷ	k	ʾ	w
Persian digit	١	٢	٣	۴	۵	۶	٧	٨	٩
Numeric value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Thaana character	ح	ڤ	حر	ٯ	ٮ	ک	ڠ / ݧ	ـس	غ
Sound value	m	F	d	t	l	g	ñ / ṇ	s	ḍ
Dives akuru digit	꣡	3	꣡	꣡	꣡	꣡	꣡	꣡	꣡
Numeric value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

37 See Gippert 2013, 96–98, for more details.
38 The present copy of the chronicle (styled 'C' in Bell 1940, 200) was published in facsimile in *Rādavaḷi* 1979, 2; fragments of two further copies ('A' and 'B', the latter in *Dives akuru* script), which were partially edited by Bell (1940, 198–200 with plates N and O), do not contain the passage in question.
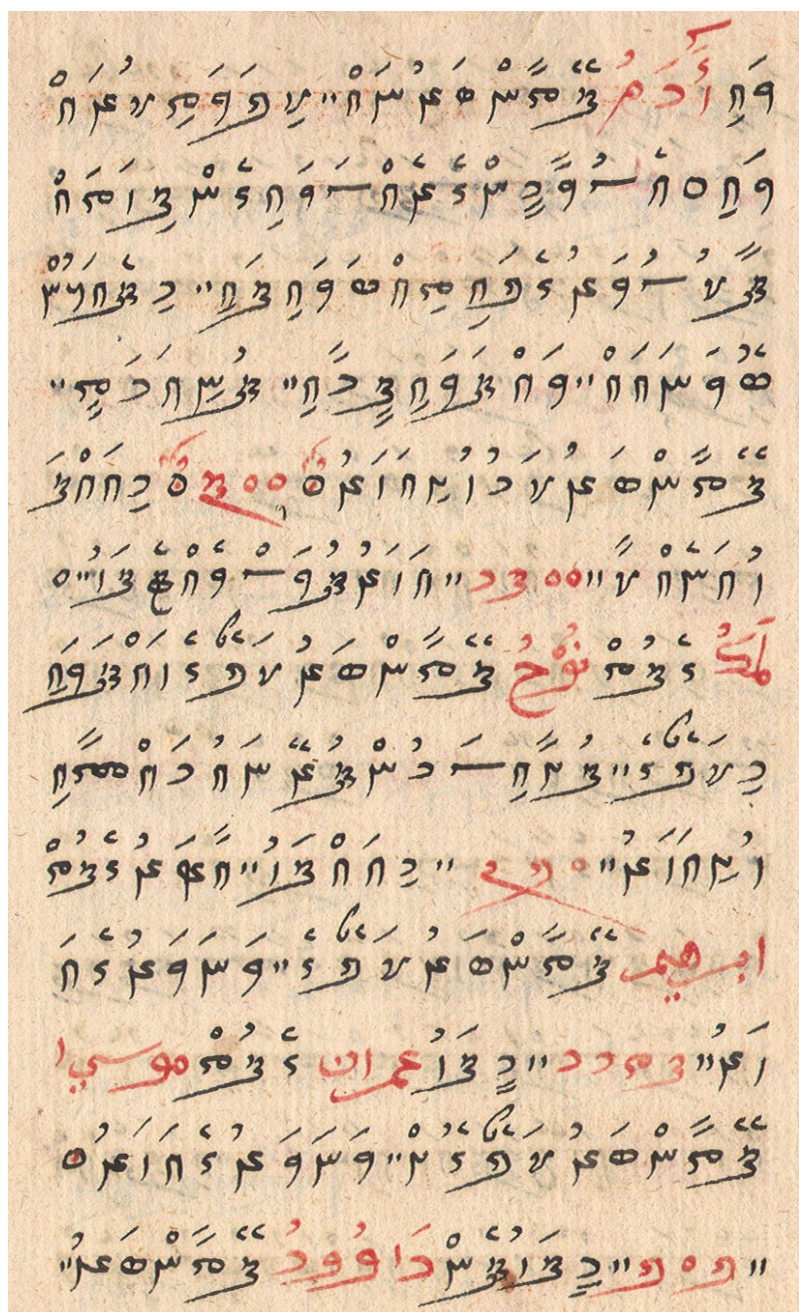
Fig. 15: *Rādavaḷi* 'C', page 2; Mohamed 2004, 5, Fig. 5.

Table 10: *Rādavaḷi* 'C', (excerpt).

...'*ādamu fētānbaruna' : kulavati kura'/vai 'e suvāmīnge re'sava'igenfi hata' | dāku suvaruge la'i ti'bava'ifa'i : mi de 'aḷun | bovana'a' : va'dava'ifī mā'i : duni'a matī : | fētānbarukamu huśi 'aharu . 300 .*	... after having made her (Eve) a family member of the prophet Adam, having entrusted (?) her to him as (her) husband, He (God) lodged them for seven days in heaven and (then) caused these two servants to enter earth; the years of his (Adam's) prophethood in the world (were) 300.
mi'a' fahu | 'ane'ka : 1200 : 'aharu duvas ve'je fahu . | lamakuge fut nūḥu fētānbaru kalōge ha'dava'i | mi kalōge : fuśā'i samundurē na'u ma'cā' i | huśi 'aharu : 950 :	When after this another 1200 years had seen the light, He created the noble prophet Nūḥ (Noah), son of Lamech; the years this nobleman passed in a boat on the ocean after having embarked (were) 950.
mi'a' fahu : 'āzaruge fut |'ibrāhīm fētānbaru kalōge : vanavaruge 'a/haru : 1142 :	After this, the years of the lifetime of the noble prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham), son of Azar, (were) 1142.
mī fahu 'imrānge fut mūsā | fētānbaru kalōgoś' : vanavaruge 'aharu . 505 .	After this, the years of the lifetime of the noble prophet Mūsā (Moses), son of Imrān (Amram), (were) 505.
mī fahu den dāwūdu fētānbaru : ...	After this then, of the prophet Dāwūd (David) ...

5 Outlook

Dhivehi has witnessed a strong influence of another foreign language, namely, English, since the nineteenth century, and especially from 1887 to 1965 when the Maldives were a British protectorate. Indeed, there was an attempt to introduce Latin script for Dhivehi, based on English orthographical premises; however, this 'Male Latin' was only officially used for two years (1976–1978), and only a few written artefacts from that period have survived (see Fig. 16 showing a metal plate with a Roman inscription from the grave of a certain Ali Didi on Hithadhoo island). In contrast to Arabic, it has remained rather uncommon to insert English words in Latin script in a Dhivehi context, which would, of course, bring about the problem of mixing script directions again; instead, English elements are usually entered in a *Thaana* transcription today, as in the online news headlines illustrated in Table 11;[39] the only Dhivehi elements in this text are, except for nominal endings, the auxiliary verbs *vumun* in *fe'il-vumun*

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39 Mihaaru, 9 May 2023 (<https://mihaaru.com/news/121098>, accessed 9 January 2024).

'by failure', lit. 'by be(com)ing fail', and *kuri* in *saspeṇḍ-kuri* 'suspended', lit. 'suspend-made'. As a Dhivehi word, we might also count *ra'īs* 'president'; this, however, is a loan from Arabic.

Table 11: News headline.

*ra'īs*ge	*seki'uriṭī*	*fe'il-vumun*	*saspeṇḍ*	*kuri*	Promotion for officer suspended for Presiden-
ofisara' promōšan					tial security failure.

Fig. 16: Grave inscription in 'Male Latin'; photograph Jost Gippert, 1999.

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