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UNDERLYING LANGUAGES OF EARLY CHINESE TRANSLATIONS OF BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES

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It is widely recognized that quite a few of the extant Mainstream Buddhist Sutras, Vinaya texts as well as early Mahāyāna Buddhist works, written in (Buddhist) Sanskrit, were originally transmitted in Middle Indic and later, 'translated' gradually into (Buddhist) Sanskrit. Such (Buddhist) Sanskrit texts are, in other words, the result of constant Sanskritization, wrong back-formations, additions and interpolations over the centuries. This means that when we attempt to reconstruct earlier and more original features or trace the transmission of Buddhist texts, if we limit ourselves *only* to extant Sanskrit manuscripts, most of which date from the eleventh century onwards,¹ the explanatory value of such studies is rather limited. Chinese translations, on the other hand, particularly those which were made from the second to the sixth century, thus antedating many of extant Sanskrit manuscripts, may provide substantial clues to the origin and development of Buddhist scriptures.² In order to achieve better research results on such

¹ Except for some fragmentary manuscripts from Afghanistan and Central Asia, dating probably from the first or second century onwards and bundles of manuscripts of a limited number of texts from Gilgit, dating presumably from the sixth century onwards, the majority of Sanskrit manuscripts date from the eleventh century onwards, mainly from Nepal and Tibet.

² When a certain text was translated into Chinese more than once and such translations are extant to us, we are also able to trace the development of the text. For this purpose, it is particularly of great advantage that the Chinese

themes, however, we need to base ourselves on critical comparisons of Chinese, Sanskrit and/or Tibetan versions.

1. Transliterations

Amongst the early Chinese translations of the Buddhist scriptures, there are quite a few which are supposed to have contained Middle Indic word-forms or those of Central Asian languages.

For example, the transliteration *Milè* 彌勒 (MC. mjie⁴[mjie:⁴] lək),³ paralleling Skt. *Maitreya*, which can be found from the earliest Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures translated by *Zhī Lòujiāchèn* 支婁迦讖 or Lokakṣema (fl. ca. 170–190 C.E.), is not based on the Sanskrit form but instead goes with Tocharian *Maitrāk*, *Metrak*⁴ or Bactrian *Mētraga-*.

Sà 薩 (MC. sāt-) in a transliteration of Skt. *tathāgata*, *dāsà-ā-jīé* 但薩阿竭 (MC. tāt sāt- ʔâ gjot[gjät]) which repeatedly appears in the earliest Chinese translations of the Mahāyāna texts translated by Lokakṣema,⁵ indicates presumably that *-th-* had developed into [z] and was then written as *-s-*, which is characteristic of the North-

translations are usually provided with translators' names, which can be dated, though these may not always be correct.

³ Square brackets indicate alternative reconstructions. On the notational system of Middle Chinese reconstructions used in this article see *Abbreviations*.

⁴ Cf. Bailey 1946:780; Ji Xianlin 1998:57f.

⁵ Lokakṣema: *Dàoxíng Bōrě jīng* 道行般若經 (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*), T.8, no. 224: 429a27, 429c14, etc.; *Wénshūshìlì wèn púsà shǔ jīng* 文殊師利問菩薩署經 (*Mañjuśrī-paripṛchāsūtra*), T.14, no. 458:435b6,b16,etc.; *do. Āshéshìwáng jīng* 阿闍世王經 (*Ajātaśa-trukauṣṭyavinodanasūtra*), T.15, no. 626:391c3,392a21,etc.; *do. Dùnzhēntuólúo suōwèn rúlái sānmèi jīng* 佉真陀羅所問如來三昧經 (*Drumakinnararāja-paripṛchāsūtra*), T.15, no. 624: 348c19,351b8,etc.; *do. Bānzhōu sānmèi jīng* 般舟三昧經 (*Pratyutpannasamādhisūtra*) T.13, no. 418:906a2,911a3. This transliteration is sporadically found also in other earlier translations; e.g.: Dharmarakṣa (*Zhū Fǎhù* 竺法護; ca.233-311): *Āshùdá púsà jīng* 阿術達菩薩經 (*Aśokadatta-vyākaraṇa*) T.12, no.337:84b7,c1,etc.; *Wújíbǎo sānmèi jīng* 無極寶三昧經 T.15, no. 636:508c11,511b11,etc.; *Ān Fǎqīn* 安法欽 (from *Ānxī* 安息 or Parthia or Bukhara) *Dàoshénzú wújíbiànhuà jīng* 道神足無極變化經, T.17, no. 816:805c24, 813c6, etc.

western Prakrit, namely Gāndhārī,⁶ or that the translator read *-th-* in this way.⁷

In the oldest Chinese translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, namely the *Dàoxíng Bōrě jīng* 道行般若經 (T.8, no. 224; 179 C.E.) by the same translator, we find transliterations like *shōuhē* 首呵 (ibid.:435a12; *Śubhā* > **Śuha*), *bōlìduōxiūhē* 波栗多修呵 (ibid.:435a13; *Parittaśubha* > **śuha*), *shōuhējīā* 首訶迦 (ibid.:439c25; *Śubhakṛtsna* > **Śuhaka-*), *ābōmóshōuhē* 阿波摩首訶 (ibid.:439c24; *Apramāṇaśubha* > **Apamā(ṇa)śuha*) in which *hē* 呵 and *hē* 訶 (both MC. *xā*) probably reflect the Middle Indic development *-bh-* > *-h-*. Also, *hé* 愬 (MC. *Juâ*), *hé* 和 (MC. *Juâ*), *huán* 洹 (MC. *Juân*) in *òuhéjūshèluó* 漚愬拘舍羅 (ibid.:433c7 etc. *upāyakauśalya* > **uvā(ya)k^o*), *bōyēhétí* 波耶和提 (ibid.:431a1; *Prajāpati* > **Pajāvati* or **Payāvati*), *héyíluóhuán* 和夷羅洹 (ibid.:455b28; *Vajrapāṇi* > **Vajiravāṇi*) probably reflect the Middle Indic development *-p-* > *-v-*.

Also, in the oldest Chinese translation of the Larger *Sukhāvativyūhasūtra*, namely the *Dà Āmítuó jīng* 大阿彌陀經 (T.12, no. 362) by the same translator,⁸ we find several transliterations that may indicate Middle Indic developments in the underlying Indic text, e.g. *tíhējíeluó* 提愬竭羅 (ibid.: 300b21; *Dīpaṃkara* > **Dīvagara*), *xūmótí* 須摩題 (ibid.:303b18; *Sukhāvati* > **Suhāmātī* or **Su'āmadī*).

⁶ Cf. Brough 1962:§43; von Hinüber 2001:§173; Norman 1991 (=Norman 1994):61, §5.5. In Dharmarakṣa's translation of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (T.8, no. 222, *Guāngzàn jīng* 光讚經), we find transliterations *duōājīé* 多阿 (a scribal error for 呵?) 竭 (ibid.:148c), *duōhējíé* 多呵竭 (ibid.:150c24,v.1.) and *duōhējíé* 多訶竭 (ibid.:151a28), corresponding to Skt. *tathāgata*, all of which show the development *-th-* > *-h-* which is common in Middle Indic dialects except for Gāndhārī.

⁷ The same development is seen also in the transliteration *mísíluó* 彌私羅 (MC. *mjie⁴* [mjie:⁴] si lâ), corresponding to Skt. *Mithila*, found in Dharmayaśas' translation of the *Dirghāgama* (T.1, no. 1:149a20; 413 C.E.).

⁸ Concerning the attribution, see Harrison 1998:556-557 and Harrison 2002:179-181.

From these examples cited above, we may assume that the underlying texts of these Chinese translations by Lokakṣema contained Middle Indic forms.⁹

In an old, anonymous Chinese translation of the *Devadatta*-chapter of the Lotus Sutra (T.9, no. 265, translated in the Western Jin period [265-316]), we find a transliteration *bàoxiūluólán* 抱休羅蘭 (MC. pâu: xjəu lâ lân; *ibid.*:197a12), paralleling Skt. *Prabhūtaratna* (> **Prahūtaratana* > **Prahūtaradana* >¹⁰ **Pahū(la)ralan(a)ʔ*), in which *xiū* 休 (MC. xjəu) indicates that the Middle Indic development *-bh-* > *-h-* had occurred in the underlying text.

Here, I will also quote examples from a non-Mahāyāna text. An early Chinese translation of a Vinaya text, namely *Bínàiyē* 鼻奈耶 (T.24, no. 1464), translated by Zhú Fóniàn 竺佛念 in 383 C.E., probably belonging to the Sarvāstivāda school, is noteworthy not only for the study of Middle Chinese, as it contains many vernacularisms such as *pó* 婆, functioning as a final particle at the end of questions — a precedent of *mó* 磨, *me* 麼 later on, but also for our present theme, because transliterations found there indicate that its original text contained many Middle Indic forms. For example, *pútí* 菩提 (*ibid.*:852b10; MC. buo diei), corresponding to Skt. *bhavati*, is probably a transliteration of Middle Indic *bhoti* or *bhodi* (= Gāndhārī). Also, it is reasonable to assert that *sùhē* 宿呵 (*ibid.*:870a20; MC. sj3u- xâ), corresponding to Skt. *Śubha*, is a transliteration of Middle Indic *Śuha* or *Suha*.

⁹ There are cases where Lokakṣema incorrectly translated Sanskrit words, being influenced by his knowledge of Middle Indic. For example, while following the translator before him, *Ān Shìgāo* 安世高, he transliterated Skt. *dhyāna* ('meditation') as *chán* 禪 (QYS. *ʒjān*) (e.g. T.8, no. 224:440b11, 440c6, 448a23, etc.), he incorrectly rendered *prthag-jana* ('common people') as *xīdàidéchán* 悉逮得禪 ('[one who] has completely attained *dhyāna* 禪') (*ibid.*:428c7-8), *dàidéchánjùzú* 逮得禪具足 ('[one who] has attained *dhyāna* 禪 and accomplished it') (*ibid.*:428c10) and *dàidéchánzhě* 逮得禪者 ('one who has attained *dhyāna* 禪') (*ibid.*:454b-13), all of which show that he confused Skt. *jana* ('people') with the Middle Indic forms of Skt. *dhyāna* ('meditation'), such as Pā. *jhāna*, Pkt. *jhāṇa*, Gāndhārī *jana*, *jana*.

¹⁰ For *-d-* > *-l-*, see Von Hinüber 2001:§2000.

The list of Chinese transliterations that arguably reflect Middle Indic forms in underlying Indic texts will certainly increase greatly when we investigate all the Chinese translations systematically.

However, if some transliterations that presuppose Middle Indic forms are found in a certain Chinese translation, we cannot assume immediately that the whole text was written in Middle Indic. Before reaching any conclusion concerning the underlying language of a particular translation, we need a systematic and all-inclusive investigation of the whole text. For example, the Chinese translation of the *Dirghāgama* (T.1, no. 1, *Cháng Āhán jīng* 長阿含經; translated by Dharmayaśas sometime between 410 to 413 C.E.) was cited repeatedly as having been translated from a Gāndhārī original, after Friedrich Weller and Ernst Waldschmidt had examined only a small portion of the text and H. W. Bailey and John Brough had presented only those transliterations that agree with Gāndhārī features. By analyzing the newly composed transliterations — around five hundred in all — found within this translation, I have concluded, however, that its original text was a mixture of elements of Sanskritization, Prakrit, and local dialects as well as Gāndhārī (Karashima 1994) as follows:

(1) *Gāndhārī*

(a) *mísiluó* 彌私羅 (T.1, no. 1:149a20; MC. mjie si lâ; Skt. *Mithila*) indicates the development *-th-* > *-s-*.

(b) *míshā* 彌沙 (ibid.:80b20; MC. mjie şa BHS. *Misrikā*) indicates the development *-śr-* > *-ş* (*ş*).

(c) *āshibō* 阿濕波 (ibid.:34b22; MC. ʔa śj3p pwâ; Skt. *Aśmaka*) and *jīpīluóshèbō* 加毘羅攝波 (ibid.:80a20; MC. ka bji lâ śjāp pwâ; Skt. *Kambalāśvatara*) indicate the developments *-śm-* > *-śv-* > *-śp-* and *-śv-* > *-śp-*. *bōduō* 鉢多 (ibid.:2b4; MC. pwât tâ; Skt. *aśvattha*), *ābō* 阿波 (ibid.:33a22; ʔa pwâ; Skt. *Aśmaka*), *pībōmì* 毘波蜜 (ibid.:79c26; MC. bji pwâ mjiet; Skt. *Vīśvāmītra*), *ābānnílóu* 阿般泥樓 (ibid.:139b6; ʔa pwân niei l3u; Skt. *Aśvakarṇa*), *bōnèibèi* 波內卑 (ibid.:70c17; MC. pwâ nw3i-[n3p] pjie; Skt. *pāṇisvara*) and *yēshèbēinu* 耶舍卑窠 (ibid.:80b12; MC. jia śja- pjie n3u; Skt. *yaśasvinaḥ*) also indicate the developments *-śm-* > *-śv-* > *-śp-* and -

śv- > -śp- (the sibilant ś is not transcribed in these transliterations¹¹).¹²

(2) *Non-Gāndhārī Middle Indic features*

(a) *shùchéntuólúo* 樹臣陀羅 (ibid.:115c18; MC. źju- źjen [< gji3n] dâ lâ; Skt. *Yugandhara*) indicates the development *y-* > *j-* which is common in non-Gāndhārī Middle Indic.

(b) *pílóuluó* 毗樓羅 (ibid.:80a10; MC. bji l3u lâ; Pa. *Vitūṭa*), *jiūluótántóu* 究羅檀頭 (ibid.:96c20; kj3u- lâ dān d3u; Pā. *Kūṭadanta*), *bōlí* 波梨 (ibid.:67c9; MC. pwâ lji; Pā. *Pāṭika*) etc. indicate the development *-t-* > *-d-* > *-l-* (> *-l-*) which is also common in non-Gāndhārī Middle Indic.

(c) *xī* 醯 (MC. xiei) in *bēilíxibì* 草犁醯陞 (ibid.:80b8; MC. piei lji xiei bieii; Skt. *prthivī*), *āxīwùduō* 阿醯物多 (ibid.:23a24; MC. ʔa xiei mjw3t tâ; Skt. **adhimuktaka*) indicates the development *-th-*, *-dh-* > *-h-* which is common in non-Gāndhārī Middle Indic, while the dental aspirates regularly become [z] or *-s-* in the intervocalic position in Gāndhārī.

(3) *Local dialects*

nàtóu 那頭 (ibid.:80a19; MC. nâ d3u; Skt. *nāgo*) indicates that the intervocalic *-g-* was replaced by *-d-*. On the contrary, *nàqié* 那伽 (ibid.:34c10; MC. nâ gja; Skt. *Nādika*) indicates the replacement of *-d-* by *-g-*. These two transliterations seem to indicate that both *g* and *d* were used sporadically as glide consonants in the underlying language of the Chinese *Dirghāgama*, similar in usage to *g* and *t* (pronounced as [d]) in Khotanese: e.g. Skt. *nāga* > Kho.

¹¹ The same treatment is seen in the case of the ancient transliteration of *jībīn* 闍賓 (MC. kjāi- pjien) = Gāndhārī *Kāśpīra* < *Kāśmīra*; cf. Karashima 1997:48-49.

¹² *póyēlóu* 婆耶樓 (T.1, no. 1:13a15,34b11; MC. bwâ jia l3u; Skt. *Upacāru*), *fānmónà* 梵摩那 (ibid.:21a19; MC. bjwǝm- mwâ nâ; BHS. *Upamāna*, Pā. *Upavāna*), *pónántuó* 婆難陀 (ibid.:127b7; MC. bwâ nān dâ; Skt. *Upananda*), *bánántuó* 拔難陀 (ibid.:28c14; MC. bwāt nān dâ; Skt. *do.*) and *bánántuó* 跋難陀 (ibid.:127c29; MC. *do.*; Skt. *do.*) indicate the development *upa-* > *(u)va-*, which is rare in other Middle Indic dialects (cf. Pischel 1900:§155), but does occur in the Gāndhārī Dharmapada (Brough 1962:§35), in the Niya Kharoṣṭhī documents (Burrow 1937:118 word-index) and in Khotanese (cf. Konow 1932:15,30). Brough, therefore, related the underlying language of the Chinese *Dirghāgama* with Gāndhārī (Brough 1965:608-609 = Brough 1996:303-304). However, *upa-* remains as such or becomes *uva-* in the newly published British Library Kharoṣṭhī fragments.

nāta; Skt. *ākāśa* > Kho. *ātāśa*, *āgāśa*; Skt. $\sqrt{puṣ}$ > Kho. *pāga*, *patā*.¹³

2. Translations

The Middle Indic features of underlying languages were also reflected in translations. Here, I shall cite some instances from the Chinese translation of the *Dirghāgama*:¹⁴

(a) *-k-* > *-g-*: the translation *yǔshè* 雨舍 (ibid.:107b6; 'house of rain') and *yǔshè* 禹 (read 雨)舍 (ibid.:11a9; 'do'), corresponding to BHS. *Varṣākāra* (Pā. *Vassakāra*), indicate that the translator(s) interpreted this Indic word as *varṣa* ('rain') + *āgāra* ('house'). On the contrary, *huācóng* 花叢 (ibid.:81b14; 'flower-thicket'), corresponding to Skt. *āgāra* ('house'), indicates that the translator(s) confused *āgāra* with Skt. *ākāra* ('multitude').¹⁵

(b) *-c-* > *-y-* < *-j-*: *fāndòng* 梵動 (ibid.:94a12; 'the moving of *Brahma*'), *fǎdòng* 法動 (ibid.:94a12; 'the moving of the Law') and *jiàndòng* 見動 (ibid.:94a12; 'the moving of views'), corresponding to Pā. *brahma-jāla* ('the supreme net'), *dhamma-jāla* ('the net of Dhamma') and *diṭṭhi-jāla* ('the net of views'), respectively, indicate that the translator(s) confused *-jāla* ('net') with *-cāla* ('moving'), both of which may have become *-yāla* in the underlying language, as is common in Middle Indic, including Gāndhārī.

(c) *-p-* > *-v-* > *-m-*: *yànmán* 焰鬘 (ibid.:31b23; 'Wreath of Flames'), corresponding to Skt. *Jyotipāla* (Pā. *Jotipāla*; 'Guard of Light'), indicates that *-pāla* ('guard') had become *-māla* (= *mālā* 'wreath, garland') in the underlying language.

(d) *-bh-* > *-h-*: *dāngjìngshùn* 當敬順 (ibid.:81b15; 'should obey respectfully'), corresponding to Skt. *ārabhadhvaṃ* (Pā. *ārabhatha*; 'exert yourselves'), indicates that this word had become **ārahaha* or **ārahadha* (< Pā. *ārabhatha*) in the underlying language and the translator(s) took it as having been derived from \sqrt{arh} ('to deserve [praise]').

¹³ Cf. Bailey 1946:783; Emmerick 1981:188-189, 204.

¹⁴ Cf. Karashima 1994:42f.

¹⁵ Cf. Brough 1962:xxiii,213.

(e) *-sv-* / *-sm-*: the word Skt. *Ābhāsvara* (Pā. *Ābhassara*; 'shining, radiant'; the name of a class of gods) is a derivative of the root *ā√bhās*, with the suffix *vara* added to it, although it was often interpreted incorrectly as a compound of Skt. *ābhā* ('light') + *svara* ('sound') in the Buddhist tradition. Following this incorrect interpretation, translators prior to Xuánzàng 玄奘 regularly rendered it as *guāngyīntiān* 光音天 ('[gods in] the Bright Sound heaven').¹⁶ In the Chinese *Dīrghāgama*, this word was usually rendered as such (ibid.:37b29, 64a11, 90b22, 115b3, etc.), but it was also translated as *guāngniàntiān* 光念天 ('[gods in] the Bright Recollecting heaven'; ibid.:132c28,138b28) and explained as "[...] because they remember light occurred in the past, they are called '(gods in) the Bright Recollecting heaven'" (ibid.:138b28; *yǐniànqiánhuǒ guānggù míng guāngniàntiān* 以念前火光故名光念天) in the *Lokaprajñapti* part of the text. The translation *guāngniàntiān* 光念天 indicates the confusion between *svara* ('sound') and *smara* ('memory, remembrance'), which may have become identical in Middle Indic: *svara* (Gāndhārī), **spara* (Gāndhārī) or (*s*)*sara* (Prakrit, Pāli).

The examples cited above may demonstrate that earlier Chinese translations, ranging from the second to the sixth century of the Common Era, preserve older or different forms than Sanskrit manuscripts, most of which date from the eleventh century onwards. Therefore, for the study of the origination and development of Buddhist scriptures, these earlier Chinese translations are indeed primary and indispensable sources.

3. *Mistranslations due to the translators' confusion of Middle Indic and Sanskrit*

On the other hand, those who try to read early Chinese translations critically should also have a knowledge of Middle Indic in addition to Sanskrit, because mistranslations caused by the translators' confusion of Middle Indic and Sanskrit, are quite

¹⁶ Xuánzàng translated it as *jíguāngjìngtiān* 極光淨天 ('the Extremely Bright and Clean Heaven').

common in these texts.¹⁷ For example, when we compare the newly discovered Sanskrit *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* with its oldest Chinese translation by Zhī Qiān 支謙, *Wéimójié jīng* 維摩詰經 by name (T.14, no. 474), we discover immediately the translator frequently mixed up Middle Indic and Sanskrit. In the list of Bodhisattvas at the beginning of this sutra, he translated *Devarāja* as *dēngwáng* 燈王 (ibid.:519b12; 'King of Lamp') that indicates he confused Skt. *deva* ('heaven') with Pkt. *diva*, Gāndhārī *diva* (< Skt. *dīpa* 'lamp'). In the same list, he rendered Skt. *jālin* ('having net') as *shuǐ* 水 ('water'): *bǎoshuǐ* 寶 (read *dì* 帝) 水 (ibid.:519b11; *Indrajālin*), *shuǐguāng* 水光 (ibid.; *Jālinīprabha*), *fànshuǐ* 梵水 (ibid.:519b16; *Brahmajālin*), which indicates that he misunderstood *jālin*, which is a derivative of *jāla* ('net'), as having been derived from Skt. *jala* ('water'). Also, he translated *Anikṣiptadhura* as *búzhìyuǎn* 不置遠 (ibid.:519b15; 'Not Place in the Distance'), which indicates he confused Skt. *dhura* ('burden') with Skt. *dūra* ('distant'). Also, in his translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, *Dà Míngdù jīng* 大明度經 by name (T.8, no. 225), he mistranslated *ābhā* ('light') as *shuǐ* 水 ('water'): *shuǐxíngtiān* 水行天 (ibid.:485a12; Skt. *Ābhā*), *wúliàng shuǐtiān* 無量水天 (ibid.:485a12; BHS. *Apramāṇābhā*), *shuǐyīntiān* 水音天 (ibid.:485a12; BHS. *Ābhāsvara*), which indicates that he confused *ābhā* ('light') with Gāndhārī **ava* < Skt. *āpas* (fem. pl.; cf. Pā. *āpa*, *āpo*; 'water'). In the Chinese *Dirghāgama*, translated by Dharmayaśas, we find a case, where *pāvaka* ('fire') was translated as *huǐ'è* 穢惡 ('filth, evil'): *rú zhònghuǐ'è jù fēngchuí èliúyǎn* 如眾穢惡聚風吹惡流演 (T.1, no. 1:7c17; *prabhūtabhākṣasya hi pāvakasya samīritam vāyuvaśād yathārciḥ*), which indicates that the translator(s) confused *pāvaka* with *pāpaka* ('bad, sinful'), both of which may have become **pāvaga* (or **pāvaya*) in Middle Indic.

¹⁷ For mistranslations found in Dharmarakṣa's translation of the Lotus Sutra, see Karashima 1992 and Boucher 1998.

Abbreviations

BHS.	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
Kho.	Khotanese
MC.	Middle Chinese reconstruction. In this paper, the Middle Chinese forms reconstructed by Karlgren (1954) and revised by F. K. Li (1971:4-7; 1974-1975:224-227), are used. The following further notational changes, made by Coblin (1983:41), are also adopted here. (1) .- will be written as ʔ-; (2) ě will be written as e.
Pā	Pāli
Pkt.	Prakrit
Skt.	Sanskrit

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