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“AKĀLAKA”: A LEXICAL PHANTOM IN BUDDHIST HYBRID SANSKRIT¹

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Franklin Edgerton's work on Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (BHS) was groundbreaking for its time. With his grammar, dictionary, and reader, published in 1953, he made a strong case for his claim that “BHS is not Sanskrit”. But following their publication, both the grammar and the dictionary were subject to heated debates by scholars of Buddhist texts; some accused Edgerton of being too accepting of words and grammatical forms that were merely scribal errors or borrowings from contemporary vernacular languages, since many of the text editions that he used were based on only a handful of manuscripts, or even on a single fragment. This article will take up the BHS entry on the word “akālaka” and show that all three references cited for it – from the *Divyāvadāna*, the *Mahāvastu*, and the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* – are unreliable. Parallels in other Sanskrit as well as Pali texts reveal that the word is merely the result of scribal error, on the one hand, and mistaken emendations by editors of critical texts, on the other. When these errors were compounded, the word became codified by Edgerton as a dictionary entry – with what seemed like evidence from multiple sources – and was cited by later scholars. This case study raises a number of interesting questions about lexicography, especially of such “hybrid” languages – how can we reliably separate mistakes from “genuine” readings? What does it even mean for a word to be “genuine” or “false”, and how might we re-imagine dictionaries to take into account the uncertainties inherent in their source material?

Keywords: Buddhism, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, *Divyāvadāna*, lexicography, *Mahāvastu*, *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, manuscript studies, Pali, philology, Sanskrit

Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit in hindsight

When Franklin Edgerton (1885–1963) published his Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit grammar, dictionary, and reader in 1953, it was met with equal parts praise and criticism. Over the course of twenty years, he had laboured to prove that the Sanskrit of Northern Buddhist texts was not merely “bad” or “barbaric” Sanskrit, but rather a Middle Indic language that, “increasingly, as time went on, [was] modified in the direction of standard Sanskrit” [Edgerton 1953a, I, 4]. He criticized editors who hyper-corrected Buddhist texts, erasing Middle Indic forms and replacing them with their proper, Classical Sanskrit equivalents. Following Heinrich Lüders (1869–1943), he emphasized again and again that “any non-Sanskritic form presented in the mss. must, in general, be regarded as closer to the original form of the text than a ‘correct’ Sanskrit variant” [Edgerton 1953b, v]. In hindsight, this was a trendsetting perspective that has, over the years, led to the recognition and study of other “hybrid” Sanskrits, such as Epigraphic Hybrid Sanskrit and Gāndhārī Hybrid Sanskrit, and even Buddhist Hybrid Chinese [Salomon 2001; Zhu 2010].

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Perhaps one of the more measured criticisms of Edgerton's Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit project comes from a review by John Brough (1917–1984). While he praised the Grammar and Dictionary as “indispensible” reference works, he also brought into question a number of dictionary entries which he thought were the result of scribal error. While he agreed that editors of Buddhist texts tended to hyper-correct forms of words that did not appear to be proper Sanskrit, he cautioned editors not to “fly to the other extreme” and assume that “anything is possible in Buddhist Sanskrit” [Brough 1954, 375]. Yet, he also tempered his own criticisms, admitting that, in many cases, one could not say with certainty whether or not a “non-Sanskrit” form was a feature of Middle Indic or merely a scribal error; at the very least, the value of Edgerton's work is that he brings these anomalies to light, rather than silently emending them as previous scholars did.

Edgerton's definition of *akālaka*

akālaka, (1) nt. (from **akāla**), *food (delicacies) suitable for eating at other than meal times* (= **akālakḥādyaka**, q.v.): śālīnām odanavidhim akālakam (so Senart em., mss. odanam viditakālakam, or °kārakam) anekavyaṅjana-m-upetaṃ Mv i.306.13 (vs; otherwise Senart); tair °kāni sajjikṛtāni Divy 130.22; (2) adj. (cf. Pali akāla-cīvara), of monks' robes, *provided at extraordinary times*: (akā)lakaiś cīvaraiḥ MPS 40.54 [Edgerton 1953a, II, 2].

At first glance, this dictionary entry seems to be well-supported; it is not an “isolated anomaly” [Brough 1954, 363], since it appears in three different texts. In fact, in this case we are not dealing with a non-Sanskrit form at all. As Edgerton explains, he has also included, in his dictionary, “technical terms of Buddhist religion” as well as meanings of standard Sanskrit words which do not appear in other texts [Edgerton 1953a, I, 9]. But a close examination of each of its three sources will show that the citations for *akālaka* are deceiving; in the final analysis, *akālaka* turns out to be merely the phantom of a word – the result of a potent mix of scribal and editorial errors.

Akālaka in the *Mahāvastu*

In the *Mahāvastu*, the word *akālaka* appears in the story of Mālinī, describing the food that she serves to a group of Buddhist monks. In the edition of Émile Senart (1847–1928), the verse reads:

śālīnām odanavidhim akālakam anekavyaṅjanam upetaṃ |
svahastam upanāmayate yathā bhadantāna abhiroce || [Senart 1882, 306].

The first peculiarity of Edgerton's understanding of this verse is the meaning that he assigns to *akālaka* here – “food (delicacies) suitable for eating at other than meal times”. This interpretation is at odds with Senart, who reads it as *akāḷaka*, meaning “sans mélange d'aucun grain noir” [Senart 1882, 601]; J. J. Jones (1892–1957), similarly, translates this verse as

To please these noble men Mālinī with her own hands served them gruel of rice made without admixture of black grain, and seasoned with various condiments [Jones 1949, 255].

Edgerton, on the other hand, seems to have taken the meaning of *akālaka* from the *Divyāvadāna* and applied it here. But even leaving aside the meaning of the word, there are serious textual problems with this verse. As Edgerton himself points out, the word *akālaka* itself is due to an emendation by Senart; it does not appear in the manuscripts, which read *odanam viditakālakam*. Admittedly, this seems to be an error, but a much lighter emendation would make much better sense here – the word *vicitakālaka* is well-attested in Pali, again meaning “with the black grains removed” [Rhys Davis & Stede 1922, 40; 1924, 74]. In fact, the *Milindapañha* contains a very similar parallel passage, *sālīnam odanam vicitakālakam anekasūpaṃ anekavyaṅjanam ti* [Trenckner 1880, 16], again describing the food served to Buddhist monks. Read in this way, the meaning of the verse is unchanged, but the word *akālaka* entirely disappears.

Akālaka in the Divyāvadāna

Of the three citations given for the word *akālaka*, the one from the *Divyāvadāna* is the sole case for which there is a material basis, i.e., it is present in manuscripts rather than being an emendation by the editor of a critical edition. On the contrary, in this case, an emendation would have been welcome.

The word appears at the end of the story of Meṇḍhaka, again in the context of food. As Edgerton notes, *akālaka* in this context seems to refer to *akālakhādyaka*, food suitable to be eaten outside of meal times. But when read in context, it looks suspiciously like a scribal error:

Bhagavan kim akāle kalpate | Bhagavān āha | ghr̥taguḍaśarkarāpānakāni ceti | tato Meṇḍhakena gr̥hapatinā śilpina āhūyoktāḥ | bhavanto ‘kālakhādyakāni śīghraṃ sajjīkuruteti | tair akālakāni sajjīkṛtāni | [Cowell & Neil 1886, 130].

As translated by Andy Rotman, this passage reads:

“Blessed One”, he said, “when isn’t the proper time for eating, what is permissible to eat”? “Clarified butter, molasses, sugar, and beverages”, the Blessed One said. Then the householder Meṇḍhaka sent for cooks and said, “Quickly, prepare for the Blessed One those foods that can be eaten when the proper time for eating has passed”. So they prepared foods that could be eaten when the proper time for eating had passed [Rotman 2008, 233].

It is clear that *akālakāni* and *akālakhādyakāni* mean the same thing here; in fact, it looks as if *akālakāni* is simply a copying mistake for *akālakhādyakāni*, with two akṣaras missing in the middle. However, no variant readings are given in the critical apparatus, so we would assume that all manuscripts read *akālakāni*; this can be further corroborated by checking this passage in BnF Sanscrit 53, a manuscript that E. B. Cowell & R. A. Neil did not use in their edition because it was too similar to the other manuscripts in their possession.

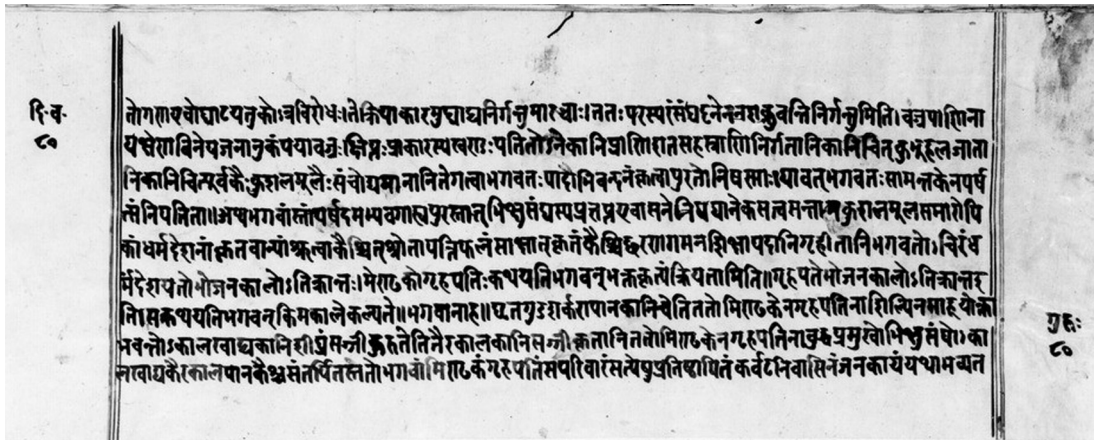


Figure 1: BnF Sanscrit 53, 80v. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.
In the edition of Cowell & Neil, this is manuscript E, which was not collated beyond “the first few pages” [Cowell & Neil 1866, vi]. The word appears on line 8.
See: [Li 2022] for a description of the manuscript

But, as Cowell & Neil admit, all of their manuscript witnesses are modern copies of a single 17th century manuscript from Nepal; thus, their variant readings can only reflect more or less accurate transcriptions of that one source [Cowell & Neil 1886, vii]. It wasn’t until 1947 that an independent witness for this passage was published, as part of a series of editions of the Gilgit manuscripts. The story of Meṇḍhaka is told in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*:

bhagavan kim akāle kalpate | [bhagavān āha] | ghr̥taṃ guḍaṃ śarkarāḥ pānakāni ceti | tato meṇḍhakena² gr̥hapatinā śilpina āhūyoktāḥ | bhagavanto ‘kālakhādyakāni śīghraṃ sajjīkuruteti | tair api kathitam³ | akālakhādyakāni⁴ sajjīkṛtāni | [Dutt 1947, 247–248].

As expected, the word *akālakāni* does not appear here at all; instead, the text reads *akālakhādyakāni*, as in the sentence that precedes it. The Gilgit manuscripts were known to Edgerton, who used Volume III (in which this story appears) and parts of Volume IV for his dictionary, abbreviated as MSV for Mūla-Sarvāstivāda-Vinaya [Edgerton 1953a, II, xxvi], but he does not mention them in the entry on *akālaka* nor the one on *akālakhādyaka*. Similarly, P. L. Vaidya (1891–1978), in his re-edition of the *Divyāvadāna*, which he admits to be “more or less a reprint in Devanāgarī script of the one edited in Roman script by E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neil” [Vaidya 1959, vii], also accepts *akālaka* without question, although he did correct and emend other passages. For Vaidya, *akālaka* had already been reified as a word in Edgerton’s dictionary, which seemed to provide additional citations for it; in fact, in a glossary at the end of the *Divyāvadāna*, he omits page and line references to the text because they were already published in the dictionary. Predictably, his glossary echoes Edgerton in defining *akālaka* as “food permitted to be eaten at odd hours” [Vaidya 1959, 561].

Akālaka in the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra

Edgerton’s second definition for *akālaka*, “of monks’ robes, provided at extraordinary times”, occurs in Ernst Waldschmidt’s edition of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, and it is the most speculative citation of them all. As in Senart’s *Divyāvadāna*, it is an editorial emendation, but in this case the manuscript has a lacuna; the passage has been restored based mainly on a Tibetan parallel.

anyatīrthikaparivrājakā āgaccheyur yady ākāṅkṣey(uḥ svākhyāte dharma)vinaye pravrajyāṃ upasampadam bhikṣubhāvaṃ tata enān bhikṣavaś caturō māsā(n upādhyāyenākā) lakaiś cīvaraiḥ parivāsaitavyaṃ manyeyuḥ | [Waldschmidt 1951b, 384].

These words are spoken by the Buddha, as part of his last instructions to the Saṅgha before his death. Here, he lays out the process of accepting followers from other religious schools who wish to take up Buddhist ordination: there is a probationary period of four months, during which the candidate receives monk’s robes from his teacher. Waldschmidt (1897–1985) has restored the lacuna here as *upādhyāyenākālakaiś cīvaraiḥ*, “with monks’ robes provided at extraordinary times by the teacher”. The word *upādhyāyena* has been back-translated from the Tibetan *mkhan pos*, and it is further supported by the Chinese 親教師 [SAT Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō 2018, 1451, 398c19]. On the other hand, as Waldschmidt admits, there is no evidence for *akālakaiś* in either version; rather, he has inferred it from the common term *akālacīvara*.

But again, in this case, we can propose a better emendation based on a Pali parallel. The *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinayaṭṭhaka* contains a similar section on the ordination of people from other religions, which contains a very similar instruction:

sace bhikkhave aññatitthiyapubbo naggo āgacchati, upajjhāyamūlakam cīvaram pariyesitabham [Oldenberg 1879, 71].

As the Buddha says, if someone from another religious sect comes seeking Buddhist ordination, and he is naked, then he should be given monk’s robes from his teacher (*upajjhāyamūlakam cīvaram*) – that is, it is his teacher or preceptor’s responsibility to furnish the new recruit with robes [Rhys Davids & Oldenberg 1881, 190; Cone 2001, 446]. This seems to be a much better way to restore the text in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, to read *upādhyāyamūlakaiś cīvaraiḥ* rather than *upādhyāyenākālakaiś cīvaraiḥ*, since it agrees with both the Tibetan and Chinese versions and, additionally, has support from a Pali parallel. Again, read in this way, the word *akālaka* disappears; in fact, it never existed except as an imagined restoration of a damaged manuscript.

Updating the entry for *akālaka*

Based on the evidence cited above, we can provide an updated definition of the word *akālaka*, foregrounding the single case for which there is material evidence, and then discussing the two cases which are editorial emendations:

akālaka, probably scribal error for **akālakhādyaka**: tair akālakāni sajjīkṛtāni Divy 130.22 (cf. akālakhādyakāni sajjīkṛtāni MSV iii.248.3); wrong emendation for **vicitakālaka**: aśālīnām odanavidhim akālakam (so Senart em., mss. odanam viditakālakam, or kārakam) anekavyañjana-m-upetaṃ Mv i.306.13 (vs; otherwise Senart); probably wrong emendation for **mūlaka**: (upādhyāyenākā)lakaiś cīvaraiḥ MPS 40.54 (probably upādhyāyamūlakaiś cīvaraiḥ, cf. Pali upajjhāya-mūlaka).

Leaving aside the emendations, we can further quantify our certainty for the word *akālaka* by creating a *stemma codicum* for the story of Meṇḍhaka, including both the *Divyāvadāna* and the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, the two texts in which the story is attested.

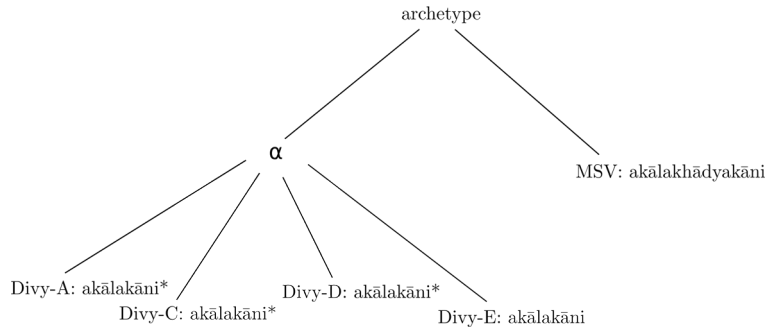


Figure 2: Stemma codicum of the story of Meṇḍhaka, attested in the *Divyāvadāna* and the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*

On the right side of the stemma, the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, edited from a single manuscript, reads *akālakhādyakāni*. On the left side of the stemma are the three manuscript witnesses used to edit the *Divyāvadāna* – A, C, & D⁵ – which are here presumed to read *akālakāni*, since no variant readings are given. Manuscript E, not used in the edition, has been confirmed to read *akālakāni*. But all four manuscripts descend from a single Nepalese witness, α. Thus, according to the “majority principle” [Trovato 2017, 59ff], both readings have an equal 50 % chance of being the one from the archetype, at least from a purely stemmatic point of view. We can also consider the frequency of these two terms within the corpus, but in this case it does not provide much information; in the edition of the *Divyāvadāna*, *akālaka* occurs only once, and *akālakhādyaka* twice; in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, *akālakhādyaka* occurs three times. Neither word is found in any other text. Even so, this paucity of evidence is a good indicator of how careful we should be in adopting *akālaka* as a word, at least until more attestations are found.

Toward uncertain dictionaries

A few years after his dictionary was published, Edgerton found himself vigorously defending his work against his critics, who thought that some of the word forms that he presented as Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit were simply “false readings” [Nobel 1953, 8]; he replied, “I have simply recorded what I found, in the mss. (not emendations!) and editions (with due regard to critical apparatuses when they exist)” [Edgerton 1957a, 188]. Yet, in this case, he does not seem to have followed his own principles – only one of the occurrences of *akālaka* is a manuscript reading, while the other two are, in fact, editorial emendations. If Edgerton had stuck closer to the manuscript evidence, then his dictionary entry for *akālaka* would have been much closer to reality.

Brough suggested that scholars find a middle path between two extremes – hyper-correction of Middle Indic forms, on the one hand, and over-reliance on manuscript readings,

on the other. Replying to his critics, Edgerton himself had tried to temper his reputation for relying too much on manuscripts, arguing that his statement about accepting “any” non-Sanskritic form found in manuscripts had been misinterpreted – he did not advocate “keeping all manuscript errors in any edited text”, nor did he believe it worthwhile to record all orthographic variants found in manuscripts [Edgerton 1957b, 232]. But, *pace* Brough, perhaps Edgerton’s approach was not extreme enough. When an editor silently emends what are perceived as “errors” or insignificant variants in a text, it creates even more uncertainty than before; one can never be sure what the manuscripts actually read. Moreover, a seemingly wrong form might be confirmed later by newly found manuscripts, but one would never know unless those forms were recorded in the first place. Thus, while Edgerton criticized Waldschmidt’s emendations in his edition of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, he was able to use Waldschmidt’s careful and detailed diplomatic transcription of the manuscript fragments to re-edit a part of the text for his *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Reader*, restoring the orthography and word forms of the original [Edgerton 1953b, 34ff].

This type of critical edition, which also includes diplomatic transcriptions of its sources, seems to be the ideal solution to the problem of editorial hyper-correction. Certainly, a critical apparatus also serves this function, but within an apparatus the variant readings have already been silently emended – the original orthography and the punctuation of the manuscripts are already lost. But diplomatic transcriptions make it easy for future scholars to compare the critical text – the editor’s hypothesis – with the material evidence from which it derives, and perhaps revisit some of the features of the manuscripts that have been edited away. Moreover, these transcribed manuscripts become invaluable material for dictionaries, especially in the case of languages like Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, for which much of the evidence was erased by overzealous editing. Who knows what dictionaries we might create in the future? Brough, in his review of Edgerton’s dictionary, dismissed manuscript readings that seemed to be influenced by Newari – since the scribes were Nepalese – because they did not provide “evidence for the forms of the original texts” [Brough 1954, 355]; on the other hand, they may provide vital evidence for the interface between Buddhist Sanskrit and Classical Newari, perhaps yet another hybrid language. In the same vein, even if *akālaka* is just a scribal error, it was an error that was transmitted in at least four manuscripts; did the readers of these manuscripts understand and accept it as a word? Did they then use it in later medieval commentaries, in Sanskrit or Newari? By automatically correcting what are deemed to be mistakes, textual scholars are missing out on the history of the transmission of the text and the evolution of its language; this is precisely what Edgerton, in his Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit project, strove to help us understand.

There are already some lexicographical projects that take this diplomatic approach – the online *Dictionary of Gāndhārī* [Baums & Glass 2020] links its dictionary entries to diplomatic transcriptions from the corpus of Gāndhārī texts, as well as images of the objects or manuscripts where available. Why not do this for Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, or even Classical Sanskrit? With texts that are represented by multiple witnesses, an indication of the reliability of a given lexical item could be provided by a *stemma codicum*, as well as by the frequency of that term within the corpus. Regrettably, there are at present not many “critical diplomatic editions” [Li 2017; 2020] of Sanskrit texts, which include diplomatic transcriptions of manuscripts; this fact should not be an impediment, but rather a call to action.

¹ This article forms part of the outcome of the *Texts Surrounding Texts* project, jointly funded by the ANR and the DFG (FRAL 2018).

² Klaus Wille reads *miṇḍhakena* here, based on the facsimile edition [Wille 2020].

³ The facsimile edition omits *api kathitam* [Vira & Chandra 1974, 771].

⁴ *khāḍya* is unclear in the facsimile edition, and it occurs at the end of a folio; the next folio begins with *kāni* [Vira & Chandra 1974, 771–772].

⁵ Manuscript B, described as “very incorrect”, was “more or less neglected after the early stories” [Cowell & Neil 1886, v–vi].

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Ч. Лі

“Акалака” (akāḷaka): лексичний фантом у буддійському гібридному санскриті

Праця Франкліна Еджертона про буддійський гібридний санскрит свого часу була новаторською. У граматиці, словнику та хрестоматії, виданих 1953 року, Ф. Еджертон навів вагомі аргументи на користь свого твердження про те, що «“буддійський гібридний санскрит” не є санскритом». Але після оприлюднення граматики й словника вони стали предметом гарячих дебатів серед дослідників буддійських текстів. Дехто звинувачував Еджертона в тому, що він занадто серйозно сприймав ті слова та граматичні форми, які були тільки помилками переписувача або запозиченнями з тодішніх народних мов, оскільки багато з використаних ним видань текстів базувалися лише на кількох рукописах або навіть на одному фрагменті.

У цій статті розглянуто слово akāḷaka, яке фігурує в “Словнику буддійського гібридного санскриту” Еджертона, та показано, що всі три наведені для нього посилання – на “Дів’явадану” (divyāvadāna), “Магавасту” (mahāvastu) та “Магапарінірвана-сутру” (mahāparinirvāṇasūtra) – є ненадійними. Паралелі в інших санскритських і палійських текстах свідчать, що це слово є лише наслідком помилки писаря, з одного боку, і помилкових виправлень, зроблених редакторами критичних текстів, – з іншого. Коли помилки поєдналися, Еджертон кодифікував це слово як словникову статтю, навівши в ній “докази” (як здавалося) з кількох джерел, і його згодом цитували інші вчені.

Це тематичне дослідження порушує низку цікавих питань щодо лексикографії, зокрема лексикографії таких “гібридних” мов. Як можна надійно відокремити помилки від “справжнього” прочитання? І взагалі, що таке “справжнє слово” й “несправжнє слово” і як ми можемо переосмислити словники, щоб урахувати невизначеність, притаманну їхньому вихідному матеріалу?

Ключові слова: буддизм, буддійський гібридний санскрит, “Дів’явадана”, дослідження рукописів, лексикографія, “Магавасту”, “Магапарінірвана-сутра”, палі, санскрит, філологія

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