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SOME NOTES ON THE PIONEER INDOLOGIST FILIP VESDIN (PAULINUS A SANCTO BARTHOLOMAEO)

Filip Vesdin, also known as Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo, Indologist and comparative philologist, who has produced remarkable works in the pioneer days of Indological studies contributing much to its progress at the very beginning, was, in our opinion, unjustly forgotten by the later generations ¹.

He belongs to the early period of Indology at the end of the eighteenth century (Windisch' « Vorgeschichte der Sanskritphilologie » ²), and is known as the author of the first Sanskrit grammar ever published in Europe and of some other works in which he dealt with a wide range of Indological subjects. Vesdin stands also at the beginning of Comparative Indo-European linguistics which had a brilliant and fruitful development in the nineteenth century. Vesdin made a career characteristic for a young talented man from a poor family belonging to a

2. Cf. Ernst Windisch, Geschichte der Sanskrit-Philologie und indischen Altertumskunde, I, Strassburg, 1917, pp. 1-22 (Grundriss der indo-arischen Philologie und

Altertumskunde, I Bd. 1 Hf. B.).

^{1.} In this paper we would like to renew the memory of this remarkable scholar for some patriotic reasons as well. When Indology began at Zagreb University, some 25 years ago, we collected all the available data on Indian influences and scattered Indological works in the yugoslav cultural and academic tradition, since we were eager to find some roots in the tradition of the newly established academic discipline. Detailed research of the original documents and places connected with the life and the work of Vesdin proved that he, who was known under his monastic name Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo, was of Croatian origin. The church register in Hof am Leithagebirge has this text recorded for the day of his baptism, April the 25, 1748: Die 25 ejusdem baptizatus est Philippus parentum Georgij Vesdin, et consortis ejus Helena. Patrini fuere Simon Ivesicz, et Catharina Medvenicsin. Cf. Jugoslaveni i Indija, Zagreb, 1965. Postava izložbe i redakcija kataloga: Milka Jauk-Pinhak, Davor Kapetanić, Radoslav Katičić, Sveto Petrović i Ivan Slamnig, pp. 28-36; Ivan Slamnig, Filip Vezdin (1748-1806), pionir evropske indologije, in «Kolokvij o kulturnim dodirima jugoslavenskih naroda s Indijom, Rad Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti », 350, pp. 550-54.

national minority in a multinational state like Austria of those days. He was born in Hof in 1748 (Niederösterreich) and received a good education (Grammar and Humaniora in a Jesuit gymnasium in Sopron, now in Hungary, Logic and Metaphysics in a Jesuit academy at Györ, Germ. Raab). In 1768 he entered the Carmelite order in Linz taking the name Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo. In the college of his order in Prague he studied theology till 1773, when he was sent to Rome to the Missionary Seminary of St. Pancratius. From Rome he was sent by Sacra Congregatione de Propaganda Fide to the mission in Malabar. He took his missionary vow and went to Lisbon where he stayed for 13 months and learned Portuguese. He left Europe from Port Orient in France and arrived in July 1776 at Pondichéry where he was received by French missionaries, then went on to Verapoly in November 1776. He was soon appointed vicar and later rector of the Verapolitanean Seminary in Kerala.

Paulinus succeded in making good contacts with the Rajas of Travancore, who at that time had taken Cochin which the Verapolitanean mission also covered. In 1780 Rama Varma (Vesdin recorded him as Rama Varner) became king. For him Vesdin, who visited his palace and stayed there for some time, compiled an English-Portuguese grammar with notes and explanations in Malâyâlam. He made a very good impression on the king, as he already spoke Malâyâlam quite well. P. J. Thomas 4 writes, that Paulinos padri was a great pandit and the most important of all Europeans who came to Kerala. Comparing him with Arnos padri (Hanxleden), Paulinus' predecessor, he says that Arnos padri has written some works in Malâyâlam and knew Sanskrit, but did not write in European languages and is not known in the West. In 1789 Paulinus was called back to Europe, to make his report in Rome. He travelled again on a French ship and landed at Brest. He arrived in the midst of the French revolution, and this new development in the political situation was to influence his stay in Europe and make his return to India practically impossible. But he soon started a remarkable scholarly career. He got to Rome in 1790 and was named professor of Oriental languages at the Missionary Seminary (Seminarium missionum). In the following years he was named a member of several academies (A. Volscorum, A. Neapolitana, A. Caesarea Regalis Patavina)

^{3.} Hof is the most Croatian place in this part of Austria. In the Vesdin family house people is still speaking Croatian, and his picture is hanging on the wall. There is a strong community feeling among Croats living in Austria, although younger generations have taken German names. Ten years ago the priest was a Czech who said that he came to Hof to serve among the Slavonic population. Hof is very much like Croat Panonian villages, and Croats are still living there in contact with Croats in Burgenland, and sharing the same traditions with them. Church books show mutual marriages and people from one province having godparents in the other.

^{4.} Cf. P. J. Thomas, *Malâyâlasâhityavum Kristyanikelum*, I, pp. 109-16 (The Christians and the Malâyâlam Literature).

and was even elected a member of the Institute of Sciences in Paris. He also published a series of books and essays on Indological and comparative subjects. When in 1798 the French entered Rome, he was obliged to leave the town, as he got into open conflict with the revolutionary authorities. Spitefully he called himself « non-cittadino » (non-citizen).

Therefore he had to leave Rome and fled to Vienna. Two years later Paulinus was back in Rome. In 1803 Paulinus was appointed head of the Seminary of St. Pancratius. He died in January 1806 of pneumonia. There is another version of his death saying that he died « di crepacuore » (of sorrow) having been reprimanded by the pope whom he blamed because of pope's opportunism towards the French.

Paulinus is very much appreciated in the Carmelite order and in the palace of the Propaganda Fide his portrait is among those of the most famous missionaries. He is also known in his native country, which praises him as an Austrian and as « vir per orbem terrarum celebratus, hujus oppiduli nec non Austriae totius decus et gloria » ⁵.

After his return from India Paulinus published intensively and produced an impressive number of books, some of which have provoked passionate reactions by the learned public. The first was in 1790 Sidharubam seu grammatica samscrdamica⁶, which was the first Sanskrit grammar⁷ ever published.

Vesdin's adversaries affirmed that he simply published the manuscript grammar of the German Jesuit Johann Ernest Hanxleden, who was a missionary in Malabar from 1699 to 1732, when he died and was buried in Trichur. Hanxleden had learned Sanskrit from two brahmans in Trichur⁸ and had compiled a grammar written in Latin and a dictionary both of which Vesdin brought to Europe, so that one

^{5.} From the inscription on the house where he was born, made in 1845. Cf. Prof. Leopold Wetzl, Der österreichische Karmelit Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo, Persönlichkeit und Werk, Wien, 1936, p. 70.

^{6.} Sidharubam seu grammatica Ŝamscrdamica cui accedit dissertatio historicocritica in linguam Samscrdamicam vulgo dictam in qua huius linguae existentia, origo, praestantia, antiquitas, extensio, maternitas ostenditur, libri aliqui ea exarati critice recensentur, et simul aliquae antiquissimae gentilium orationes liturgicae paucis attinguntur et explicantur. « S. or the Sanskrit grammar with an introductory historico-critical dissertation on S. language in which is shown its position, origin, excellence, antiquity, extension, primarility, some books written in it are critically reviewed and also several very old liturgical sermons are in few words described and explained », Romae, 1790 (p. 79. Approbatio, has the year 1791).

7. Cf. M. Mueller, Praelectiones de Scientia Linguae, Leipzig, 1863, p. 116:

^{7.} Cf. M. Mueller, Praelectiones de Scientia Linguae, Leipzig, 1863, p. 116: « Primus qui introduxit studium Samscrdamicum in Europa erat Carmelitanus monachus Germanus sub nomine Fr. Paulini a Sancto Bartholomaeo qui edidit Romae 1790 primam grammaticam Samscrdamicam...». Cf. also Th. Benfey, Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft und orientalischen Philologie in Deutschland seit dem Anfang des 19. Jh. mit einem Rückblick auf die früheren Zeiten, München, 1869, p. 325 f.

^{8.} Cf. Sidharubam p. 15: « ... universitatis Triciur in Malabaria, quae hodiedum florentissima est... ».

copy of Hanxleden's manuscripts is stored together with Vesdin's manuscripts in the National Library in Rome. Vesdin made use of them for his own writings. He often mentioned this fact, citing from Hanxleden, especially from his dictionary. But he denies having published Hanxleden's work as his own in his *De manuscriptis codicibus indicis R. P. Joan. Ernesti Hanxleden Epistola* (Vienna, 1799). The correspondences, Paulinus said, are due to the fact that both grammars are based on the same Indian grammatical sources. For Paulinus Hanxleden is a great authority and «linguae Samscrdamicae peritissimus vir » 9. *Sidharubam* has not influenced Sanskrit studies much.

It has since been honoured as a pioneer work, but the interest it provoked at the time of its publication was not as great as one could expect. There are several reasons for this. It is a work with many shortcomings. Paulinus was acquainted only with the Southern Indian tradition. He knew Malâyâlam and so he used Grantham for recording Sanskrit, as it was used by the brahmans in Kerala. It includes some differences in the pronunciation of Sanskrit sounds (voiced consonants for voiceless). To make it even more impracticable, he didn't introduce any transcription of the Grantham parts in the portion of the grammatical description. This has made the task of learning a new and very difficult language through an unknown and strange script even more difficult. Rome, where the book appeared was quite isolated from the learned centers in Western Europe, where Indology as well as other Oriental disciplines were gaining ground at that time on a very large scale. It seems as if the time was not yet ripe for such a new contribution to the knowledge of the epoch, and the response was modest. But the work already shows some of the scholarly interests and qualities of its author and his true temperament. Vesdin is first of all an author who likes to synthesize and to summarize, adding his own contribution, his conclusion, and his personal touch to the knowledge which he has acquired from the older authorities. Sidharubam contains a long introductory essay on Sanskrit language Dissertatio historico-critica in linguam Samscrdamicam 10, beginning with the explanations of the word Sanskrit and its transcriptions by different authors, enumerating Indian scripts and giving reasons for his choice of Grantham. Vesdin discusses the position of Sanskrit in India and compares it with Latin in Europe 11. He was fully aware of the difficulties caused by inconsistent transcriptions of Sanskrit words and he recommended establishing a system

^{9.} There are still earlier manuscript grammars of Sanskrit, the oldest one having been written by Heinrich Roth S. J. (1620-62). His manuscript which was long considered lost, has been found in Rome. Cf. Richard Hauschild, Der Missionar P. Heinrich Roth aus Dillingen und die erste europäische Sanskrit Grammatik, Berlin, 1972 (Sitzungsberichte der Sachsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philol.hist. Kl. Bd. 115, p. 6).

^{10.} Cf. Sidharubam pp. 3-77. 11. Cf. Sidharubam p. 9.

of fixed phonetic values for Sanskrit sounds 12. In 1804 Paulinus published a new and enlarged version entitled Vyacarana 13. This is a much better adapted grammar, which tries to improve the obvious short-comings of the Sidharubam. Most people held that the most important work of Paulinus was his Systema brahmanicum 14, which was the first systematic and encyclopaedic work on the religious and social structure of the brahmanical India written on the basis of the autochthonous Indian sources. Vesdin named his sources the main one of them being the Amarakośa, which he called by the author's name Amarasimha. Later, in 1798, Vesdin published the first part of it, De Coelo, for which he used three manuscripts, one of them the «codex chartaceus a R.P.I.E. Hanxleden ex codicibus Brahmanum Academicae Triciurensis incredibili studio et solertia descriptus » 15. In addition he enumerated the epics Magha, Bhagavadam, Ramayanam, Yudhishdira, Samhavam, Puranam as his sources. Systema is divided into three parts: Liturgy (where sacrifices, the cult of lingam, expiations, pilgrimages, creation myths, etc. are dealt with); Mythology (which actually is religion because it treats the Indian gods, animal cults and even possible connections and correspondences with other religions); Social structure (on the caste system and the division of occupations, agriculture, administration, army, currencies). The text was followed by 32 illustrations taken from the Borgia's Museum in Velletri 16.

The data concerning Indian religious life and beliefs, which Paulinus collected and could explain, belong to the living Hindu tradition. He was very eager to find possible connections with the old religious traditions of other people of the ancient world — Greek, Roman and even Christian. This seems to have been his most intense personal interest. At the same time we are struck by the almost complete lack of any reliable data on the Vedic subjects — texts, mythology or cult —

^{12.} Cf. Sidharubam p. 11.

^{13.} Vyacarana seu locupletissima Samscrdamicae linguae institutio, in usum fidei praeconum in India orientali, et per virorum litteratorum in Europa adornata a P. Paulino a S.B., Carmelita discalceato, Collegii urbani S. Congr. de Prop. Fide studiorum Praefecto, S. Congr. Indicis consultore, Mission. OO. Syndico, Academiarum Veliternae, R. Neapolitanae, Caesareo-regiae Patavinae socio, et Galliae scientiarum Instituto correspondente, Romae, 1804). V. or the most complete treatise on the Sanskrit language for the use of the messangers of the faith in the East Indies and of literate men in Europe adorned by P. a S.B., the barefoot Carmelite, scholarly prefect at the College Urbanum of the S. Congregation for the promotion of the faith, head of the Oriental missions, member of the Academies of Velletri, Naples, Padua and Correspondent of the French Institute of sciences.

^{14.} Systema brahmanicum liturgicum mythologicum civile ex monumentis indicis Musei Borgiani Velitris, dissertationibus historico-criticis illustravit, P. a S.B., Romae, 1791.

^{15.} Cf. Amarasimha p. VI.

^{16.} Cardinal Borgia was the patron of Paulinus to whom he dedicated some of his works. The Museum in Velletri does not exist any more and its holdings have been taken over by the Vatican Library.

in the whole of his books. He even entered into a dispute with « quelques Anglais » 17 insisting that Veda means « loi sacrée » and not « livre sacré » as they insisted 18. The Sâmaveda, for instance, was described by him as « loi de bonté, de douceur, qui défend de tuer les animaux, et commande qu'on mette un frein à ses sens et qu'on pratique des oeuvres de bonté » 19. Systema was translated into German (Gotha, 1797) by the wellknown author and voyager Johann Reinhold Forster 20, who intervened much in the text and affirmed that Vesdin's language and style were too complicated so that he had to find better expression for many places.

Viaggio alle Indie orientali 21 was Paulinus' most popular book, translated first into German by Forster, the same who has « remade » Systema 22. Vesdin was not much pleased by this translation, saying it was « mutilated and corrupted » 23. From German it was translated into English in 1800 by William Johnston. A French translation was made by some Marchena 24 from the Italian original. It contains Forster's notes and a commentary by Anquetil Duperron, full of criticism and irony. Anquetil said that he was in «open war » with the missionaries, but as the work translated could be useful « à ma patrie », he undertook the task of taking part in its publication. He invested much time in this task preparing one whole volume of notes which was published as a third volume of the French translation 25.

Anquetil felt that he was more experienced about India than was Paulinus, because he had more travelled there and knew the Northern provinces as well. Vesdin, on the contrary, affirmed that the North of

^{17.} Cf. Voyage aux Indes orientales II, p. 222 f., these are « Mm. Wilkins, Jones et le P. Marc della Tomba ». Cf. also Voyage II, p. 78.

^{18.} Cf. Voyage II, p. 223. 19. Cf. Voyage II, p. 224, and Vyacarana p. 278 N.: « Hinc Samaveda, lex lenitatis inter Indos celebris, de non occidendo... Haec est Indicae Philosophiae summa,

^{20.} Darstellung der brahmanisch-indischen Götterlehre, Religionsbräuche und bürgerlichen Verfassung. Nach dem Lateinischen Werke des Vaters Paulinus a S.B. bearbeitet.

^{21.} Viaggio alle Indie orientali umiliato alla santità di N. S. papa Pio sesto pontefice massimo, Roma, 1796.

^{22.} Des Fra Paolino da San Bartolomeo Reise nach Ostindien. Aus dem Französischen. Mit Anmerk. von Johann Reinhold Forster, Berlin, 1798, p. V: « Dieses Buch empfiehlt sich besonders auch dadurch, dass der Verfasser die gewöhnliche Tamulische oder Malabarische Sprache versteht, und was noch mehr wert ist, sogar die schwere Samscredan-Sprache so gut kennt, dass er eine Grammatik derselben schreiben konnte. Dabei liest er auch Französisch und Englisch, ja, wie man aus einigen Zitaten sieht, sogar Deutsch ».

^{23.} Cf. De antiquitate et affinitate linguae Zendicae... p. XVI. 24. In the title marked by M***. Cf. Wetzl, op. cit., p. 85.

^{25.} This volume also contains the notes taken from Forster's German version and the subsequent notes by Silvestre de Sacy, who was invited to finish the work for publication, as Anquetil died in 1805, and de Sacy was « son confrère et son ami, qu'il avait chargé de l'exécution de ses dernières volontés », cf. Voyage I, p. IV.

India has much lost from the old Sanskrit tradition being overrun by Muslims. The Voyage is not just a record of his travel but a real compendium of geographical, historical and cultural data on India, as Paulinus had come to know it. It has added much to the problems described in his earlier writings on the religious teachings and practices, social groups and behaviour, languages and their relations, question of the scripts, and comparative studies. Vesdin never abandoned a very passioned and polemic tone and his books were a real provocation for many of his learned contemporaries. The Voyage is full of more or less polite attacks directed against some of them, but mostly against Anquetil and the English Indologists from Calcutta 26. Vesdin has properly understood the position of Sanskrit among the Indian vernaculars, but he has never recognized any structural difference between Sanskrit and Malâyâlam, which he knew, it seems, even better than Sanskrit. There is not a trace of doubt about their mutual relationship. Vesdin even wrote poetry and prose in Malâyâlam with a quantity of Sanskrit words. Anquetil mostly attacked Vesdin for his comparative work and showed sometimes no mercy. « Instead of wasting his time by writing 20, 30 or 100 pages which do not prove anything or very little, instead of comparing 100 or 200 words from different langages, the missionary would do better if he published for the learned public a good and complete translation of Amarasimha or the dictionary of Hanxleden or Biscoping » 27. But, at the end of the third volume, when he obviously felt tired, he added a touching conclusion in which he tried to make an effort of reconciliation with Vesdin who now became a « savant Missionnaire ». « It is amusing to see two almost "impotentes" old men who end their lives in giving their last breaths for the progress of Indian literature, whereas thousands of strong, fresh and well nourished young men, after a good rest in their beds go to make a tour of India just to amass rupies » 28. Except for numerous details in which they didn't agree there was a fundamental understanding concerning the basic position of Sanskrit studies of their time. « Nous sommes à l'égard du samskretam ce qu'était l'Europe à l'époque de la prise de Constantinople et à celle de la réforme de Luther » 29

We have already said that Vesdin had shown a strong inclination for comparative studies in the field of linguistics and the religious and mythological correspondences between India and other countries of the ancient world. De antiquitate et affinitate linguae Zendicae, Samscrda-

^{26.} Cf. Voyage II, pp. 204 and 207, where he tried to prove that Grantham is the most appropriate script for Sanskrit and that Sanskrit originally was recorded just in this script. Cf. also Voyage II, pp. 81-3, with arguments against Jones on the age of the Dharmaśastras.

^{27.} Cf. Voyage III, p. 342. Cf. also Voyage III, p. 390, where Anquetil blames Paulinus for the Sidharubam without transcription.

^{28.} Cf. Voyage III, p. 508. N. 29. Cf. Voyage III, p. 505.

micae et Germanicae dissertatio (1798) is the first methodical study on the kinship of Indo-European languages, where Paulinus demonstrated a profound knowledge of the earlier theoris of the origins and relationships of languages. The idea that languages were related was coming into its own at that time. William Jones, the famous contemporary of Paulinus, made a classical formulation about the kinship of Greek, Latin and Sanskrit in a lecture in 1786 30, but, sais Paulinus, « nulla suae assertionis produxisset documenta » 31. Vesdin has listed concrete linguistic forms of Sanskrit, Avestan and German (sometimes even Gothic) in direct comparison. Although he failed in many instances to choose the right items, it was the only exact method by which one ever can prove linguistic relationship, i.e. by listing cognate forms with recurrent phonetic correspondences. The linguistic affinity is better proved if there are historically possible and logical proofs of past contacts and periods of common life. So he searched for such proofs. For Sanskrit and Zend he found the land of common past in Bactriana of the classical Greek and Roman writers which he cited as an argumentation. Paulinus made it a principle of his comparative method to find for every language examples as ancient as possible, « and the common words found in several languages, we must assign them to that early period of the common stay of these peoples in the Sennar field and to their original contacts of mutual relations which existed before these peoples spread, because these common words do not mean sciences and commercial affairs nor any unusual things, but what is basic to human needs » 32. This still is the basic semantic feature of common words.

In De antiquitate... Latin is used only to translate the items in question. Later Paulinus courageously introduced Latin as an object of comparison in his work De latini sermonis origine et cum orientalibus linguis connectione dissertatio (1802). « Both of the Oriental languages — he says, meaning Sanskrit and Zend — especially Sanskrit harmonize so well, so exactly with Latin words, and even so similarly do they conjugate verbs that hardly are two eggs more similar to one another » 33. He concludes that Indians and Latins must have been one people and he calles their common language « unus primordialis Samscrdamicus sermo » 34.

A serious progress in the research of Indian literature and textual tradition was unthinkable without a detailed study of manuscripts collected by travellers, missionaries and scholars. In this field also Vesdin has given his contribution with two works, « die man am Besten als

^{30.} Cf. Windisch, op. cit., p. 24.

^{31.} Cf. De antiquitate... p. XVIII, n. 15. 32. Cf. De antiquitate... p. XXXVI.

^{33.} Cf. De Latini sermonis... p. 9.

^{34.} Cf. De Latini sermonis... p. 10.

ausführlich kommentierte Handschriftenkataloge bezeichnen kann » 35. These are Examen historico-criticum codicum Indicorum Bibliothecae Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide (Romae, 1792) with the description of 36 Indian books and manuscripts, and Musei Borgiani Velitris codices manuscripti Avenses, Peguani, Siamici, Malabarici, Indostani, animadversionibus historico-criticis castigati et illustrati, accedunt monumenta inedita et cosmogonia Indico-Tibetana (Romae, 1793), where are described for the first time the Buddhist manuscripts from Indo-China. In the Examen he has even established some rules for the critical elaboration of the manuscripts (ex quibus veri et sinceri codices dignosci possint) 36.

It would be much easier to evaluate the true value of Vesdin's scientific contribution to Indology if all his writing were published. It is important to mention that he has left a number of works in manuscripts 37, which are stored in Rome, in the National library and in the

Library of the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide.

It is beyond doubt that Paulinus can be very severely judged when compared with later Indologists. Many of his statements are wrong and in many respects he can appear inexperienced and unreliable. But it is sure that his work represents an important part of the progress of Indology in its early period, and that it must be evaluated only in this context. It seems to be true what Ernst Windisch wrote on Paulinus 38: «Können wir den Paulinus auch noch nicht zu den eigentlichen Philologen rechnen, so kommt er diesen doch näher als irgend einer seiner Vorgänger. Unvollkommenen Philologen begegnen wir auch in der Zeit nach ihm noch oft genug».

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- Grammatica Siro-Caldaica, scripta in Malabar, 1784.

^{35.} Cf. Heinz Bechert, Erfassung von Handschriftenbeständen aus dem indischen Kulturraum aus der Arbeit des Seminars für Indologie und Buddhismuskunde und ihrer Vorgeschichte, Universität Göttingen, Informationen, Juni 1977, pp. 6 and 8.

^{36.} Cf. Examen... pp. 23-54.

^{37.} Cf. some titles of unpublished works: - Miscellanea Indico-Malabarica.

⁻ Grammatica Anglo-Lusitana in lingua Malabarica, composita et dedicata anno 1784 Regi Travancori, Rama Varner.

⁻ Grammatica Malabarica in lingua Anglo-Lusitana, composita in Shatisjatti,

⁻ Bibliotheca Indica, referens CCCXIII codices Indicos Manuscriptos.

Elementa linguae Sanscritae. - Alphabetum Syro-Caldaicum.

⁻ Exercitia in lingua Syro-Caldaica.

⁻ Lexicon breve linguae Caldaicae.

⁻ Grammatica Tamulica. - Grammatica Grandonica.

Dictionnarium Latino-Persicum.

^{38.} Cf. Windisch, op. cit., p. 22.