

INDUS SIGNS *AND* GRAFFITI MARKS OF TAMIL NADU

A Morphological Study

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Mohenjadaro_0285_a



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Kodumanal_G-1305

Indus Valley Civilization (IVC), also known as Harappan Civilization, thrived in a wider geographical area covering the Indian subcontinent, literally occupying more than the combined areas of its contemporary Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilisations. The excavations conducted in major urban centres such as Harappa, Mohenjadaro, Dholavira, Lothal, Kalibangan, Rakhigarhi and several other small rural settlements provided ample evidences to reconstruct various aspects of this civilisation. Based on material evidences and scientific dates, the cultural phases of IVC have been briefly designated as Pre-Harappan (ca.3500-3000 BCE), Early Harappan (ca.3000-2500 BCE), Mature Harappan (ca.2500--1900 BCE) and Late Harappan (ca.1900-1300 BCE).

The usage of script, seals, advanced metallurgy, excellent artistic ceramic technology, well-planned grid pattern-based settlement, fortified cities, multi-storied houses with indoor bathrooms and courtyards, underground drainage system symbolizing hygienic sanitation system, sophisticated public architectural monuments reflected in the form of Great Bath, granaries, dockyard, and the standardized weights, resource mobilization from internal and external trade, diversified agricultural activities, domestication of cattle, boat building technology, etc., all suggest a well-established and structured civilization. To date, the cultural life of the Indus people is being reconstructed exclusively based on material culture. The non-decipherment of the Indus script prevents scholars from providing a complete picture of the Harappan culture whereas other scripts encountered in contemporary civilizations were deciphered in a more satisfying manner to portray a better picture of the society.



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GRAFFITI YIELDING SITES IN TAMIL NADU



INDUS SCRIPT

As the evidence demonstrates, the IVC maintained a well-developed writing system and is represented in multiple artefacts including seals, sealings, amulets, ceramics and metal objects. Nearly 4000 specimens were documented carrying around 450 standardized signs (Mahadevan 419 signs and Asko Parpola 386 signs) in the seals and sealings representing mostly animals, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures. B. Wells in his updated sign list listed 695 signs and the Interactive Corpus of Indus Texts (ICIT) database contains 3898 inscribed artefacts having 4791 texts (with one to three-sided). Out of 4791 texts, 3723 texts of them are complete with 13556 signs. Most of the Indus texts are in brief carrying 4-5 signs, the sign board from Dholavira carries 10 and the longest text carries 26 signs. The analysis of the text represented in the sealing such as the cramping at the left end of the line in need of space, overflow of the last sign or signs to the right end of the second line, and overlapping of the sign led to the conclusion that the direction of writing is right to left. However, the contemporary non-Indus scripts or signs documented as graffiti marks were written from right to left or left to right are not well demonstrated.

Regarding the language of the Indus Script scholars such as Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Father Heras, Yri Valentinovich Knorozov, Walter Fairervis, Iravatham Mahadevan, Kamil Zvelebil, Krishnamurti and Asko Parpola hold the view that the Indus scripts carry proto-Dravidian. whereas S.R.Rao, M.V.N. Krishna Rao and John E. Mitchiner hold the view that the language of Indus script is a Indo-European In contrast to these two hypotheses, Michael Witzel, Steve Farmer and Richard Sproat emphasise that Indus signs do not carry any language rather they are mere symbols. Bahata Ansumali Mukhopadhyay suggests that Indus signs represent different content-morphemes and functional morphemes rather than phonograms.



Kalibangan-0150

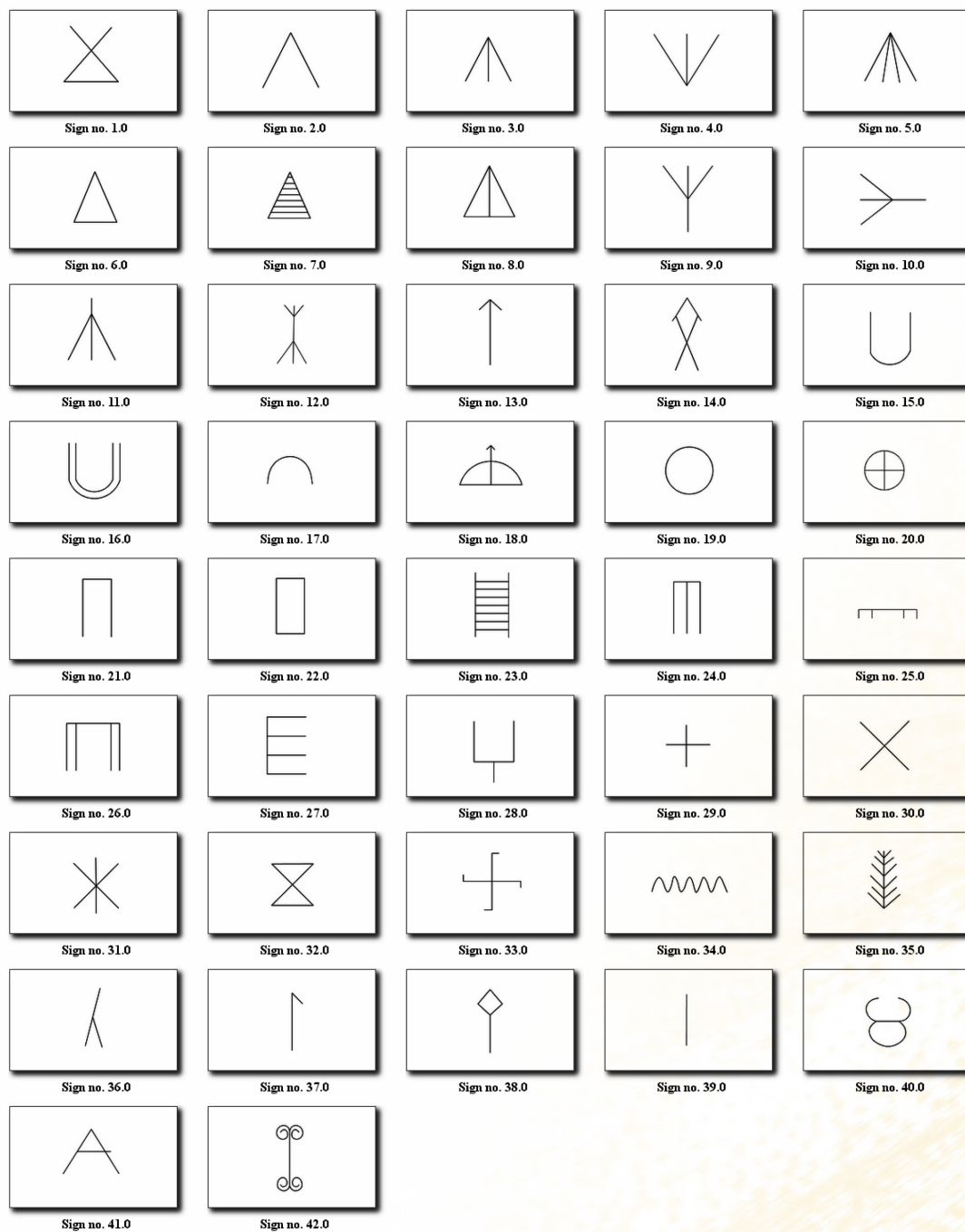


Kodumanal-0402



Kalibangan_189_A

BASIC SIGNS



NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES OF BASE SIGNS AND SUB SIGNS

S. NO	BASE SIGN	BASE SIGN AND ITS VARIANTS	BASE SIGN AS COMPOSITES	TOTAL NUMBER OF VARIANTS	TOTAL NUMBER OF COMPOSITES	TOTAL
1	1.0	1.1 – 1.39	1.1C-1.124C	39	124	164
2	2.0	2.1 – 2.37	2.1C- 2.179C	37	179	217
3	3.0	3.1 – 3.27	3.1C – 3.105C	27	105	133
4	4.0	4.1-4.3	4.1C-4.19C	3	19	23
5	5.0	5.1-5.16	5.1C-5.35C	16	35	52
6	6.0	6.1-6.9	6.1C-6.40C	9	40	50
7	7.0	7.1-7.4	7.1C-7.32C	4	32	37
8	8.0	8.1-8.5	8.1C-8.7C	5	7	13
9	9.0	9.1-9.6	9.1C-9.42C	6	42	49
10	10.0	10.1-10.4	10.1C-10.5C	4	5	10
11	11.0	11.1-11.12	11.1C-11.59C	12	59	72
12	12.0	12.1-12.3	12.1C-12.3C	3	3	7
13	13.0	13.1-13.35	13.1C-13.66C	35	66	102
14	14.0	14.1-14.15	14.1C-14.16C	15	16	32
15	15.0	15.1-15.9	15.1C-15.83C	9	83	93
16	16.0	16.1-16.7	16.1C-16.58C	8	58	67
17	17.0	17.1-17.16	17.1C-17.41C	16	41	58
18	18.0	18.1-18.10	18.1C-18.5C	10	5	16
19	19.0	19.1-19.6	19.1C-19.28C	6	28	35
20	20.0	20.1-20.6	0	6	0	7
21	21.0	21.1-21.11	21.1C-21.38C	11	38	50
22	22.0	22.1-22.16	22.1C-22.35C	16	35	52
23	23.0	23.1-23.4	23.1C-23.38C	4	38	43
24	24.0	24.1-2.9	24.1C-24.20C	9	20	30
25	25.0	25.1-25.8	25.1C-25.21C	8	21	30
26	26.0	26.1-26.5	26.1C-26.10C	5	10	16
27	27.0	27.1-27.6	27.1C-27.2C	6	2	9
28	28.0	28.1-28.12	28.1C-28.26C	12	26	39
29	29.0	29.1-29.24	29.1C-29.22C	24	22	47
30	30.0	30.1-30.19	30.1C-30.70C	19	70	90
31	31.0	31.1-31.14	31.1C-31.15C	14	15	30
32	32.0	32.1-32.10	32.1C-32.20C	10	20	31
33	33.0	33.1-33.17	33.1C-33.15C	17	15	33
34	34.0	34.1-34.6	34.1C-34.59C	6	59	66
35	35.0	35.1-35.18	35.1C-35.18C	18	18	37
36	36.0	36.1-36.23	36.1C-36.51C	23	51	75
37	37.0	37.1-37.27	37.1C-37.40C	27	40	68
38	38.0	38.1-38.15	38.1C-38.21C	15	21	37
39	39.0	39.1-39.18	39.1C-39.22C	18	22	41
40	40.0	40.1	40.1C-40.3C	1	3	5
41	41.0	41.1-41.7	41.1C-41.20C	7	20	28
42	42.0	42.1-42.4	42.1C-42.8C	4	8	13
			Total	544	1521	2107



“Out of 42 base signs and their variants, nearly 60% of them found their parallels in the Indus script. Quite interestingly, more than 90% of the graffiti marks of South India and the graffiti marks of the Indus Valley Civilization had parallels.”

INDUS SCRIPT AND GRAFFITI MARKS

All the recognisable scratches engraved on the ceramics in south India and to some extent on Indus ceramics were designated as graffiti. The one engraved on seals and other metal objects of the IVC is designated as a script. Quite interestingly, the signs engraved on the seal were called as script whereas the signs engraved on ceramics were called as graffiti. Though both the signs were written by the same people, still they were respectively differentiated and documented as script and graffiti. However, the extensive comparative study of graffiti marks and Indus scripts evidently suggests that both are undeciphered signs.

The project entitled ‘Documentation and Digitization of Graffiti and Tamil (Tamil-Brahmi) Inscribed Potsherds of Tamil Nadu’ by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology plays a crucial role in this regard. The datasets from the same suggest that 15184 graffiti-bearing potsherds have been reported so far from 140 sites in Tamil Nadu and nearly 14165 sherds were documented. Out of which nearly 2107 signs have been morphologically categorized within a group of 42 base signs, 544 variants and 1521 composites. Any additional strokes added to the base signs are considered as variants of base signs. A group of signs containing more than one base sign are considered as composite sign.

Several signs encountered in Tamil Nadu had exact parallels in the Indus scripts. Likewise, some signs had near parallels. These signs probably evolved from the base signs. Out of 42 base signs and their variants, nearly 60% of them found their parallels in the Indus script. Quite interestingly, more than 90% of the graffiti marks of South India and the graffiti marks of the Indus Valley Civilization had parallels. Thus, the exact shapes and their variants found both independently and in composite forms vividly indicate that they were not accidental. It is believed that the Indus script or signs would have not disappeared without any traces rather they would have transformed or evolved into different forms. The present comparative study is more of a morphological approach rather than any linguistics.



Kalibangan-292A



Kodumanal_TNSDA-G-0580



Rojdi-325A



Mohenjodaro_0148_A



Kodumanal_TNSDA-G-0780



Mohenjodaro_0148_Flipped



Harappa-1482A



Karur-G-0150



Kalibangan-460A



Kalibangan-180A



Keedali_ASI-G-0023



Rojdi-129A



Mohenjodaro_0052_A



Kilnamandi-G-0011



Mohenjodaro_0052_a



Harappa_0071_A



Karur_G_0143



Harappa_0071_a



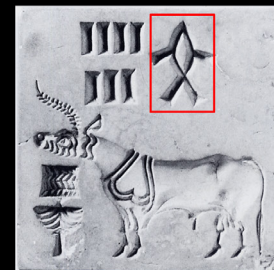
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Keeladi ASI_G_0020



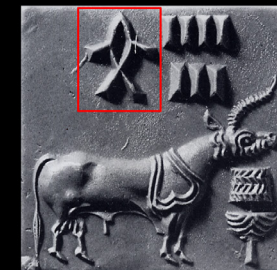
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Harappa_0009_A



Kodumanal TU-PU_G_0346



Harappa_0009_a



Harappa_0093_A



Kodumanal_TU-PU-G_0299



Harappa_0093_a



Harappa_0006_A



Kodumanal_TNSDA-G-0523



Harappa_0006_a



Mohenjodaro_0272_A



Kodumanal_TNSDA_G_0385



Mohenjodaro_0472_a



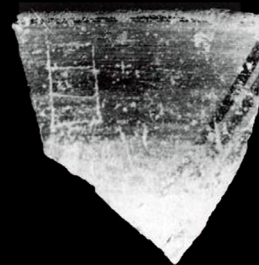
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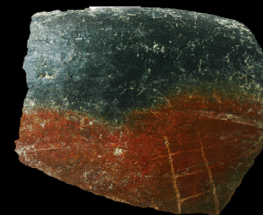
Thulukarpatti_G_3985



Mohenjodaro_0321_a



Rajdi-347 A



Teriruvelli_G_0072



Harappa-1487 A



Harappa_0174_A



Thulukarpatti_G_1092



Harappa_0215_A



Mohenjodaro_0615_A



Thulukarpatti_G_0576



Harappa-1488 A



Mohenjadaro_0751_A



Vallanadu Agaram_G_0298



Mohenjadaro_0751_a



Indus Valley Seal

The Indus seals and artefacts were reported in the cultural zones of Mesopotamian civilization. In India, several resource zones met the needs or demands of the Indus communities by supplying food products, raw materials and finished goods. But, one hardly gets any Indus material in these supply zones. Indus traders might have had intensive direct commercial contacts with the Mesopotamians and the balance of trade must have been in favour of Indus traders. The non-availability of Mesopotamian artefacts in Indus sites suggests that trade might have been handled by Indus traders and the balance of trade must be in favour of IVC traders. The commercial benefit led to the settlements of Harappans in the West. Such a situation might have not prevailed in other parts of India leading to the absence of Harappan artefacts or settlements in supply zones. The occurrences of identical graffiti marks in South India suggest a kind of cultural contact. One needs more material evidences and tangible data to support or strengthen the view. The recent chronometric dates indicate that when the Indus Valley experienced the Copper Age, South India experienced the Iron Age. In this sense, the Iron Age of South India and the Copper Age of Indus are contemporary. If both are contemporary, there is a possibility of cultural exchanges either through direct or intermediate zones. The existence of identical graffiti marks could be understood or explained under this prescription. The occurrence of a large number of carnelian and agate beads and high-tin bronze objects particularly from Iron Age graves gives a clue for the contacts as carnelian, agate, copper and tin have to come from the north or elsewhere. Besides the semiprecious stones and copper, a few more cultural items are required to prove them convincingly. The documentation of graffiti-inscribed potsherds is one such item that needs close attention. Future explorations, excavations, scientific investigations and historical linguistic analysis may give a better picture of these thought-provoking cultural and linguistic issues.