A Dravidian decipherment Indus script

M.V.Bhaskar and S.K.Venkatesan

We only sketch some brief outlines here. Details will be presented in a separate independent development by M.V.Bhaskar (MVB). This publication is for feedback and further elucidation on the basic decipherment for larger community of enthusiast out there in the world.

Important documents for understanding Indus script is the corpus created by Asko Parbola and Iravadham Mahadevan's concordance work. We also need the Dravidian Etymological Dictionary by Burrow and Emaneau. Please download the two PDFs from Internet Archive and you should be ready. There are two excellent software versions of these PDFs: Iravadham Mahadevan's concordance maintained by Roja Muthiah Research Library and Dravidian Etymological Dictionary maintained by Digital South Asia Library of the Chicago University. Another rich source of conjectures and data is the great work of Bryan Wells: The Archaeology and Epigraphy of Indus Writing, Archaeopress, 2025, who also has an excellent online database.

If you want to write documents with Indus signs then you need Asko Parbola's NFM Indus Script font. This document was written in that font, a lovely gift from MVB to me. Now on to the beautiful discovery of the decipherment.

The decipherment became possible with the arrival of the splendid work by MVB in Sasanam: M.V. பாஸ்கர் (Bhaskar), அன்றைய தலைப்பு செய்திகள் (Yesterday's headlines), சிந்துவெளி நாகரீக சிறப்பு வெளியீடு (Indus Valley Civilization Special Issue), கிருஷ்ணகிரி மாவட்ட வரலாற்று ஆய்வு மைய்யம் (Krishnagiri District History Research Center), சாசனம் (Sasanam), 2025.

This laid down the map that lead to all the linkage between graphics and the text, building this beautiful journey of discovery enabled by M.V. Bhaskar, with whom I have been working for the past several years. My learning in art, Brahmi and Indus Script derived from his interactions.

Numbers

Numbers are treated separately, but they are just like other glyphs, easily welded and affixed to other glyphs, producing a plethora of possibilities.

| M77 Sign 86 | Glyph | Syllable onn-, mu-, muthal- | DED | Description one, primary | Tamil முதல், -ல், ஒண்ணு |
|-----------------------|-----------|--|------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 87 | | ra-, ir-, iru- | 474 | two | ர-, இர்-, இரு- |
| 89 | III | mu-, mun- | 5052 | three | மு–, முன்– |
| 95 | IIII | nal-, -nāl, nalla- | | four | நல்-, நால்-, நல்ல- |
| 96 | | ai- | 2826 | five | -න |

| 108 | IIIII | -ar | 2485 | six | ஆறு |
|-----|---------------|------------------|------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 110 | | elu-, -elu | 910 | seven | ஏழு, எழு |
| | Application o | f above phonemes | | | |
| 112 | 1111 1111 | nalam, munnal | - | Healthy, before | நிலம், முன்னால் |
| 116 | 1111 | nellai | - | rice | நெல்லை |
| 121 | ;;;; ;;;; | nallonal | - | good person | நல்லோனால் |
| 120 | <i>;;;</i> | mumunnonum | - | Three generations back | மும்முன்னோனும், மும்முன்னமும் |
| 119 | <i>;</i> ;; | mum-munnor | - | Two generations back | மும்முன்னோர் |

Clitics

Clitics provide sentence structure (the subject and the object). The reading order is right to left only after the clitics; before that the reading is left to right.

| M77 No. | Glyph | DED | Description | Tamil |
|------------|-------|-----|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| 97 | ī | - | -il, -da, -ta, -in | -ட, -டு, -த, -து, -இல், - இன் |
| 99 | 11 | - | -ra, -ru | -ர, -ரு, -ற, -று |
| 123 | y | - | -yar, -yin | -யர், -யார் |

Learn through pun

Following are an indication of the pun that abounds in Indus script, which is termed as the "rebus principle". Of course, it only makes sense if your language is close to ancient Dravidian. For deeper understanding you may have to refer to some of the sign values below this in the section on "Syllabic development". We only sketch a few, but the Indus script syllabary abounds in such pun. They are also termed as rebus principle.

| M77 Sign 298 | Glyph | Syllable valai = vala+ai | DED - | Description) = vala+5 | Tamil ഖல+ഇ=ഖலെ |
|---------------------|------------------|---|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| | "valai". "vala" | sis is "vala" (curved is curve, as well as " is is further explaine | right", which | fits well with desc | cription of right |
| 62 | (�) | valai-kanni | - | vālai fish | வாளை மீன் |
| | The fish "vālai' | ' is known as the sha | rk fish that h | as sharp teeth. A ni | ice tooth is |

drawn at the top to elucidate the learning. This explains that the parenthesis sign (299, 287) carry the phonetic value "valai".valai-kanni)P ஏரி வாளை 295 eri-valai 902 Another sharp (மீன்) tooth fish A fresh water fish, Wallago attu, also known "eri-valai", a pun again on the word with rebus equation: "vālai" ≈ "valai". The prefix "eri" comes from "two" or "iru", leading to one more rebus equation: "iru" ≈ "eri". (**₽**♦) 63 kanni-pori-valai Trapping of கன்னி-பொறிbirds ഖതെ This learning tablet defines the phonetic value of fish as "kanni" and the bird as "puri" by defining it through a polysyllabic pun as "kanni-pori" with a parenthetic "valai". The "kanni-pori" in Tamil is "trapping". 64 ···(众) கன்னி-பொறிvalai-kanni The clitic ഖலെ reverses reading order The clitic sign 64 reverses the reading order to the right of it. This learning script defines that. (i)° 376 teeth பல்லு pal A teeth is indicated by the protruding teeth effect, just like in the fish teeth. \$ 57 irumpu 486 இரும்பு iron Now we have triple pun: iru-pu (two insects) = erumpu (ant) = irumpu (iron) (1) கொட்டு 181 2065, 2064 pour (sting) kottu We can see pincler claws of crab are indicated to show "sting" and "pour" are homophones in Dravidian "kottu".

Syllabic development

We outline from top to bottom how the syllabary is slowly developed from simple to complex glyphs. Happy journey!

| M77 Sig 1 | gn Glyph | Syllable an | DED 131, 132 | Description person | Tamil அன் |
|---------------------|----------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| | 大大 | an(n)-an | 131, 132 | brother | அண்ணன் |
| 2 | 太 | kavalan | 1417,1416 | security guard | காவலன் |
| 25 | 刈 | mudalvan | 4950 | chief | முதல்வன் |
| 26 | 洲 | nal-mudalvan | - | good chief | நல்முதல் வ ன் |
| 3 | * | ath-an | 142 | husband | அத்தான் |
| 4 | ₹ | natt-an | 3638 | country man | நாட்டான் |
| 5 | 霁 | natt-ar-an | 3638 | country rules | நாட்டாரன் |
| 6 | * | val(i)-an | 5276 | skilled man | வலியன் |

| 8 次 valai-velan, valaiyan 5288 animal trapper ωροωικί 12 ψ vuravan 688 worke, farmer ωμοωί 13 ψ vuraval 688 worke, farmer ωμοωί 14 Φ per-uravan 688 working, parmer ωμοωί 15 Φ uravur 688 working, parmer ωμοωί 35 Φ valaiyan 5288 trapper ωροωιωά 41 Φ kirān 1621 poor Φμοτά 42 Φ pallan 3986a mahout ωδοωιωό 55 Φ pol 4550 flower, insect ψ (ψ &θ) 57 Φ pol 4550 flower, insect ψ (ψ &θ) 410 8 nāna 3639 ane prów 415 8 nāna 3639 ane prów 299 (ida, idai 449 hip, left pul pul< | 7 | * | vel-an | 5368 | lance fighter | ි ඛනන් |
|--|-----|----------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| 12 | | | | | lance fighter | |
| 13 | | | - | | * * | |
| 14 | | | | | • | • |
| 15 | | | • | | _ | • |
| Summing town Su | | | • | | _ | · · |
| Second | 15 | 0/\0 | uṛavur | 000 | <u> </u> | <u></u> தரிவி) |
| 41 | 25 | | valaivan | E200 | _ | ഖതരാധത് |
| 42 | | | • | | = = | |
| 54 β pu 4345 flower, insect y (gɨðɨ) 55 β pol 4550 flowering GLmɨð, Gurnɨðaŋ 374 - -n 1159b, 3621, night, bug gɔ fyam², (шлɨð, [шлɨð], (шлɨð, gɨn, gɨðɨ) 410 8 nān 3639 me prɨmɨ 415 8 nanan 3639 a name pɨdɨŋan, (шлɨði, (шлɨði) 449 hip, left gl, gəm² 299 (ida, idai 449 hip, left gl, gəm² 301 (idayan 5288 animal trapper auən asənə 287) vala-, valai 5313, 5314 bent, trap, right auən asənə 293 vala, vala 5304 strong, fertile auən asənə 336 U vu 5304 strong, fertile auən asənə 336 U vur 752 town auən 342 Ü vur 752 town auən 358 | | | = | | - | 9 |
| 55 | | | • | | | |
| 374 \$\begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc | | | = | | | |
| 1908 1909 | | | - | | • | • |
| 415 8 | 3/4 | | -n | | night, bug | |
| 415 8 | 410 | 8 | nān | 3639 | me | நான் |
| 1 | | | nanan | 3639 | a name | நண்ணன் |
| 301 | | (| | | | இட-, இடை |
| Perdsman Perdsm | | (| | | | |
| Part | | | y - | | , | |
| 293 | 287 |) | vala-, valai | 5313, 5314 | bent, trap, right | ഖര, ഖണ് |
| | 293 |) | | | | வலை வேலன், |
| 328 | | | J | | * * | வலையன் |
| ? U vala, vala 5304 strong, fertile வல-, வள- 336 U valan 5276 skillful person வலன் 32 XU vuvan person between உவன் 342 V vur 752 town ஊர் 347 V vellore - hunter's town வேலூர் 358 V chevur - bronze worker's செவ்வூர் 344 V ur-ar - important sign with clitics ஊரில் with clitics 343 V ur-il - important sign with clitics ஊரில் with clitics 373 O pa 3805, 4016, 4124 sun, pot பகல், பள்ளம், பானை 391 ® pallā 3986a teeth, many பல், பல 392 III® nal-pallar (nalla-palla- palla- iru) good mahout நல் பல்லர் (யானை) 392 tha,thā 2946, 3188, earthen pot த (தண்டி), தவளை 3110 tru) tāvu 3177 jump, luxuriant தாவு, தவணை | 328 | U | vu | 651, 761 | , | ഖ, <u>ഉ,</u> ഉ <u>ണ</u> |
| 336 | | U | | | | ഖல-, ഖണ- |
| 32 | 336 | W | | | _ | ഖலன் |
| two two two 342 U vur 752 town 2mj 2mj | | | | | - | உவன் |
| 342 | | | | | • | |
| 347 \(\text{V} \) chevur | 342 | ${f U}$ | vur | 752 | | ஊர் |
| S58 \bar{\bar{\bar{\bar{\bar{\bar{\bar{ | 347 | ٣ | vellore | _ | hunter's town | வேலூர் |
| 1 | 358 | ₽ | chevur | _ | bronze worker's | செவ்வூர் |
| 343 | | | | | town | |
| 343 | 344 | " " | ur-ar | - | important sign | ஊரார் |
| Sample | | | | | with clitics | |
| 373 | 343 | IJ | ur-il | - | important sign | ஊரில் |
| 4124 375 ① pal, pala 3986a teeth, many பல், பல 391 இ pallā 3986a, 1045 elephant பல்லா (யானை) 392 ௶இ nal-pallar (nalla-palla- good mahout தல் பல்லர் iru) 216 ⋉ tha,thā 2946, 3188, earthen pot த (தண்டி), தவளை 3110 ? ※ tāvu 3177 jump, luxuriant தாவு, தவளை | | | | | with clitics | |
| 375 ① pal, pala 3986a teeth, many பல், பல 391 இ pallā 3986a, 1045 elephant பல்லா (யானை) 392 யி nal-pallar (nalla-palla- good mahout நல் பல்லர் iru) 2946, 3188, earthen pot த (தண்டி), தவளை 3110 ? 以 tāvu 3177 jump, luxuriant தாவு, தவளை | 373 | \circ | pa | 3805, 4016, | sun, pot | பகல், பள்ளம், பானை |
| 391 இ pallā 3986a, 1045 elephant பல்லா (யானை) 392 யூல் nal-pallar (nalla-palla- good mahout தல் பல்லர் iru) 216 🔀 tha,thā 2946, 3188, earthen pot த (தண்டி-), தவளை 3110 ? 🛱 tāvu 3177 jump, luxuriant தாவு, தவளை | | _ | | | | |
| 392 ill® nal-pallar (nalla-palla- good mahout தல் பல்லர் iru) 216 🖟 tha,thā 2946, 3188, earthen pot த (தண்டி-), தவளை 3110 ? 🛱 tāvu 3177 jump, luxuriant தாவு, தவளை | | | pal, pala | 3986a | • | |
| iru) 216 🖟 tha,thā 2946, 3188, earthen pot த (தண்டி), தவளை 3110 ? 🕱 tāvu 3177 jump, luxuriant தாவு, தவளை | | | pallā | 3986a, 1045 | - | |
| 216 K tha,thā 2946, 3188, earthen pot த (தண்டி), தவளை 3110 ? 🖔 tāvu 3177 jump, luxuriant தாவு, தவளை | 392 | ¦ ⊕ ¦ | nal-pallar (nalla-palla | | good mahout | நல் பல்லர் |
| 3110 ? 🌣 tāvu 3177 jump, luxuriant தாவு, தவளை | | | | | | |
| ? 🌣 tāvu 3177 jump, luxuriant தாவு, தவளை | 216 | × | tha,thā | | earthen pot | த (தண்டி), தவளை |
| J 17 | 2 | \sim | , - | | . 1 | |
| | | | | | • • | |
| 222 💢 thalu 3105 beat, crush தள்ளு | | | | | | . • |
| 223 🖔 mumutha - grand-parent மும்முத ? 📈 tar, tari 3178 bow down தாழு, தாழி | | | | | - | |
| ? 📈 taṛ, taṛi 3178 bow down தாழு, தாழி | | | | | | |
| 2 M than 2100 are10 grain | | | | | | * |
| ? 🌣 thān 3196 oneself தான் | | | | | | · · |
| 36 🂢 than 3045 cold, water தண் (தண்ணீர்) | | | - | | • | |
| 36 🂢 than 3045 cold, water தண் (தண்ணீர்) ? 🍥 pān 4068 song, melody பாண் | 31 | ∧⊎ | barian | 4000 | tallili Dard | பாணை, பாருபணை |
| | ? | ☆ | thān | 3196 | oneself | தான் |
| | 36 | | than | 3045 | cold, water | · · |
| 36 🂢 than 3045 cold, water தண் (தண்ணீர்) | ? | | pān | 4068 | song, melody | பாண் |
| 36 🂢 than 3045 cold, water தண் (தண்ணீர்) ? © pān 4068 song, melody பாண் | 31 | ‡ ® | pāṇan | 4068 | tamil bard | பாணன், பாடுபவன் |
| 36 🂢 than 3045 cold, water தண் (தண்ணீர்) ? 🍥 pān 4068 song, melody பாண் | | | | | | |

| 59 | ¢ | kan, kanni | 1159a, 1166, | boat, bamboo | கண், கன்னி |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|--|
| 60 | ¦ ∕\}¦ | nalla-kanni | 1167, 1417 | good boat | நல்ல கன்னி |
| 67 | X | konda, konde | 2216 | bull, horn | கொண்ட, கண்ட |
| 70 | Ŷ | kāl, kala, kal | 1479, 1480 | leg, canal | கல், கல, கால் |
| 7.0 | ^ | nai, naia, nai | 1175, 1100 | icg, cuitai | (கால்வாய்) |
| 78 | À | -pur, -puri | 4374 | bird | -புர், -புரி, புரா |
| 81 | (美) | valai-puri | _ | trapped bird | ഖலെபுரி, புரிவலை |
| 319 | 6 | -mura | 4977 | snail, Curl | முறை, முறுக்கு |
| 134 | \wedge | -peru, -ma | 4411 | big, Large | பெரு-, -மா |
| 261 | \Diamond | -ko | 2207, 2203 | fort, gentry | -கோ, கோட்டை |
| | | | | (west wind, | |
| | | | | western practice | |
| | | | | of having kings | |
| | | | | in Sumeria) | |
| 30 | ☆ | kovan | | herder, | கோவன் |
| | | | | herdsman, | |
| | | | | gentry (cattle | |
| | | | | class becoming | |
| | | | | the ruling | |
| 197 | Д | -mel, -madi | 5058 | gentry) | மேல், மாடம் |
| 402 | / I | nādu | 3638 | top, terrace country (as a | நாடு |
| 402 | 10 | IIduu | 3030 | contrast to | நாகு |
| | | | | village) | |
| 162 | Ψ | vel | 5536 | spear, valor | ි ඛක් |
| 245 | | thatti | 3036 | cloth, wooden | தட்டி |
| | | | | frame | · • |
| 296 |) | vaŗi | 5297 | way | வழி |
| 149 | X | nālvaŗi | 5297 | cross-road | நால்வழி |
| 297 | 9 | aruvaŗi | 5297 | six-way crossing | ട്ട அறுவழி, ஆறுவழி |
| 135 | \wedge | peruvaŗi | 5297 | big way | பெருவழி |
| 136 | \Diamond | naliru peruvaṛi | 5297 | two big way | நல்லிரு பெருவழி |
| 249 | \Box | carakku, acu | 47, 2353 | load, sack | சரக்கு, அச்சு |
| 153 | \uparrow | perupavan | 4422 | receiver | பெருபவன் |
| 155* | \downarrow | anupu, anbu | 330 | send | அனுப்பு, அன்பு |
| 211* | Î | ambu, anupu | 5536 | send | அனுப்பு, அன்பு |
| 83 | *** | irappan, irappu | 501 | death | இறப்பு |
| 50 | Ä | athu, adu | 5153 | goat | ஆத்து, ஆடு |
| 124 | 人 | aer | 2815 | plough | கலப்பை |
| 125* | K | vilagu | 5423 | diverge | விலகு |
| 47 | \mathcal{A} | aran | 204 | squink | அரண், அரணை · |
| 43 | \ } | nal-aran | - | good behavior | நல் அறன் |
| ? | (':::') | mun.nāl-valai | - | 3 by 4 (yards) | முன்னால் வலை |
| /1 □ | 8 | mu polo | | net | முப்பல |
| 415 171 | 8 Ψ | mu-pala nil-(v)anji, nilai | - | many many | முப்பல் நில்வஞ்சி, நிலை |
| ? | = | nal-inai, nāl-inai | _ | jood joining, | நல்லிணை, நாலிணை |
| • | _ | mar-man, mar-man | • | joining four | الماري , الماري , الماري المار |
| 403 | (0) | patru, pattu, parai | | sale | பற்று, பட்டு, பறை |
| | = = | L, Patta, Pattar | | announcement | . 🔾 |
| | | | | | |

| | | | | with a drum bea | |
|-----|-----------------|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 404 | ¦@¦ | nal-parai | | good annoucement | நல்ல பறை |
| 49 | <i>J</i> F | kula | 1829 | generation, | குலம் |
| | | | | geneology | |
| 51 | 篡 | maru-, mu-kula-iru- | 4834 | reliable third | மாறு-, முக்குல |
| | | maran | | generation barte | |
| 130 | 1 | kol | 2151 | exchange, buy/sell | கொள், கொள்முதல் |
| 304 | D | vil | 5422, 5421 | bow, sell | ඛ්මා |
| 305 | (F) | vilai | 5421 | price | ഖിതെ |
| 127 | Л | alaku/aṛagu | | beak, beauty, | அலகு, அழகு |
| | | . 0 | , , | grains of paddy | - 0 - |
| 306 | 6 | alaku- v ilam | - | good home | அழகு வி இல்லம் |
| 397 | þ | thiral | 3245 | pearl necklace | திரள், முத்து மாலை |
| 377 | <u>'</u> 0 | nal-thiral-pala | - | many good pear necklaces |] நல்திரள் பல |
| 233 | ₿ | mumalai | - | three mountain | மும்மலை |
| | | | | range | |
| 235 | DE " | mumalai-vel | - | three mountain range worker | மும்மலை வேல் |
| 180 | M | kottu | 2063, 2064 | pour, sting | கொட்டு |
| 181 | (TFC | kottu | 2063, 2064 | pour, sting | கொட்டு |
| 169 | Ÿ | nilam | 3676 | land, ricefield | நிலம் |
| 171 | Ψ | nilai | 3675 | firm, stable | நிலை |
| 174 | ' | iru-nilam | 481, 3676 | great/vast land | இருநிலம் |
| 88 | { } | nal-iru | 3610, 480 | fine life | நல்லிர <u>ு</u> |
| 176 | E | idai | 450 | herdsman | இடை |
| 249 | \vdash | māṭṭu | 4801, 4802 | kindle, fire, put | மா ட் டு |
| | | | | in, fasten, hook, | |
| | | | | load | |
| 253 | ф | māṭṭal | 4802 | necklace | மாட்டல் |
| 182 | 黑 | achu | 48 | loom frame, | அச்சு |
| | | | | mould, ridge in field | |
| 176 | E | inai | 457 | join | இனை |
| 323 | $\hat{\omega}$ | i | 494, 497 | non-existence | @ |
| 325 | $\hat{\varphi}$ | il, ila | 497 | leaf | |
| 326 | \$ | ilai | 497, 496 | leaf | இலை, இலஞ்சி |
| 327 | # | ilavaṛian | - | name? | இலவழியன் |
| | | | | | |