

A Dravidian of 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.

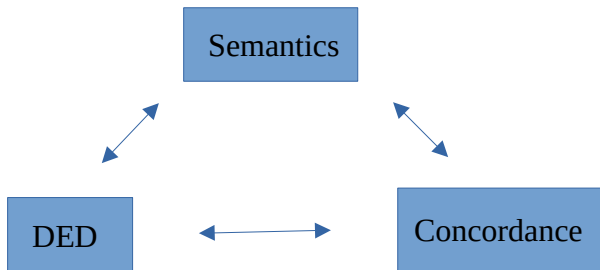
Important documents for understanding Indus script is the corpus created by Asko Parbola and [Iravadham Mahadevan's concordance](#) work. We also need the [Dravidian Etymological Dictionary](#) by Burrow and Emeneau. Please download the two PDFs from Internet Archive and you should be ready. There are 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 மையம் (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.

Decipherment is a commutative diagram:



Of course, a lot of hard work and walking on three legs.

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 | Glyph | Syllable | DED | Description | Tamil |
|----------|-------|-----------------------|----------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 86 | | onn-, mu-, muthal- | | one, primary | முதல், -ல், ஒண்ணு |
| 87 | | ra-, ir-, iru- | 474, 481 | two, great, eminence | ர-, இர்-, இரு- |
| 89 | | mu-, mun- | 5052 | three | மு-, முன்- |
| 95 | | nal-, -nāl, nalla- | 2912 | four, good | நல்-, நால்-, நல்ல- |
| 96 | | ai- | 2826 | five | -ஐ |
| 108 | | -ar | 2485 | six, river | ஆறு |
| 110 | | elu-, -elu | 910 | seven, rise | ஏழு, எழு |

Application of above phonemes

| | | | | | |
|-----|--|-------------------------|------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 112 | | nalām, nālam, munnaḷ | 2913 | land, healthy, before | நலம், நாலம், முன்னால் |
| 116 | | nallai, nellai | - | rice | நல்லை, நெல்லை |
| 121 | | nal.nel.nāl | - | good rice person | நல்நெல்லானால் |
| 120 | | mu-munamum | - | three generations back | மும்முன்னோனும், மும்முன்னமும் |
| 119 | | mu-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 | ┐ | - | -il, -da, -ta, -in | -ட, -டு, -த, -து -இல், - இன் |
| 99 | ┘ | - | -ra, -ru | -ர, -ரு, -ற, -று |
| 123 | ┘ | - | -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 | Glyph | Syllable | DED | Description | Tamil |
|----------|---|------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 298 |)))) | valai = vala+ai | - |) = vala+5 | வல+ஐ=வலை |
| | Right-parenthesis is “vala” (curved as well as right) in Tamil and “vala” + “ai” = “valai”. “vala” is curve, as well as “right”, which fits well with description of right parenthesis. This is further explained by a pun statement shown in the next row. | | | | |
| 62 | (ஃ) | valai-kanni | - | vālai fish | வாளை மீன் |
| | The fish “vālai” is known as the shark fish that has sharp teeth. A nice 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 | | | | |
| 295 |)ஃ | eri-valai | 902 | Another sharp tooth fish | ஏரி வாளை (மீன்) |
| | 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 | (ஃ) | kanni-pori-valai | - | Trapping of birds | கன்னி-பொறி-வலை |
| | 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 | ⌋(ஃ) | valai-kanni | - | The clitic reverses reading order | கன்னி-பொறி-வலை |
| | The clitic sign 64 reverses the reading order to the right of it. This learning script defines that. | | | | |
| 376 | ☪ | pal | - | teeth | பல்லு |
| | A teeth is indicated by the protruding teeth effect, just like in the fish teeth. | | | | |
| 57 | ☪ | irumpu | 486 | iron | இரும்பு |
| | Now we have triple pun: iru-pu (two insects) = erumpu (ant) = irumpu (iron) | | | | |
| 181 | ☪ | kottu | 2065, 2064 | pour (sting) | கொட்டு |
| | We can see pincler claws of crab are indicated to show “sting” and “pour” are homophones in Dravidian “kottu”. | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|----------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 393 |  | palla-ar | 3986a, 1045, 4016 | palla, pallar | பல்லர் (பள்ளம்) |
| The sign 391 “palla” (see sign list below) is indicated here by putting it upside down in a hole (pallam) by creating the pun. | | | | | |

Syllabic development

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

| M77 Sign | Glyph | Syllable | DED | Description | Tamil |
|----------|---|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 |  | an | 131, 132 | person | அன் |
| |  | an(n)-an | 131, 132 | brother | அண்ணன் |
| 2 |  | kavalan | 1417, 1416 | security guard | காவலன் |
| 25 |  | mudalvan | 4950 | chief | முதல்வன் |
| 26 |  | nal-mudalvan | - | good chief | நல்முதல்வன் |
| 3 |  | allan | 234 | distressed | அல்லன் |
| 4 |  | natt-an | 3638 | country man | நாட்டான் |
| 5 |  | natt-ar-an | 3638 | country rules | நாட்டாரன் |
| 6 |  | cadai-an | 153 | hairy man | சடையன் |
| 7 |  | val(i)-an | 5276 | skilled man | வலியன் |
| 8 |  | vel-an | 5368 | lance fighter | வேலன் |
| 9 |  | valai-velan, valaiyan | 5288 | animal trapper | வலையன் |
| 12 |  | vuṛavan | 688 | worker, farmer | உழவன் |
| 13 |  | vuṛaval | 688 | work, farming | உழவல் |
| 14 |  | per-uṛavan | 688 | big farmer | பேர் உழவன் |
| 15 |  | uṛavūr | 688 | working, farming town | உழவூர் |
| 35 |  | valaiyan | 5288 | trapper | வலையன் |
| 41 |  | kīṛān | 1621 | poor | கீழான் |
| 42 |  | pallan | 3986a | mahout | பல்ல(வ)ன் |
| 54 |  | pu | 4345 | flower, insect | பூ (பூச்சி) |
| 55 |  | pol | 4550 | flowering | பொலி, பொலிவு |
| 374 |  | -n | 1159b, 3621, 3621a | night, bug | நீர் (துளி), (ப)னி, நன், நல்லு |
| 410 |  | nān | 3639 | me | நான் |

| | | | | | |
|-----|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--|--------------------|
| 415 | ṣ | nannan | 3639 | a name | நண்ணன் |
| 299 | (| ida, idai | 449 | hip, left | இட-, இடை |
| 301 | ḷ | idayan | 450 | herder, herdsman | இடையன் |
| 287 |) | vala-, vaḷai | 5313, 5314 | bent, trap, right | வல, வளை |
| 293 |) | valaiyan | 5288 | animal trapper (short form) | வலை வேலன், வலையன் |
| 328 | ṽ | vu | 651, 761 | ooze, mortar | வ, உ, ஊ |
| ? | ṽ | vala, vala | 5304 | strong, fertile | வல-, வள- |
| 336 | ṽ | valan | 5276 | strong, skillful | வலன் |
| 32 | ṽ | vuvan | | person between two | உவன் |
| 342 | ūr | ūr | 752 | town, village | ஊர் |
| 347 | ūr | vellore | - | hunter's town | வேலூர் |
| 358 | ūr | chevur | - | bronze worker's town | செவ்வூர் |
| 344 | ūr | ūr-ar | - | important sign with clitics | ஊரார் |
| 343 | ūr | ūr-il | - | important sign with clitics | ஊரில் |
| 373 | pa | pa | 3805, 4016, 4124 | sun, pot | பகல், பள்ளம், பானை |
| 375 | pal, pala | pal, pala | 3986a | teeth, many | பல், பல |
| 391 | pallā | pallā | 3986a, 1045 | elephant | பல்லா (யானை) |
| 392 | nal-pallar (nalla-palla-iru) | nal-pallar (nalla-palla-iru) | - | good mahout | நல் பல்லர் |
| 254 | paṭi | paṭi | 3848,3850 | settlement, rest, roost, step gradee, rank | பட்டி |
| 216 | tha,thā | tha,thā | 2946, 3188, 3110 | earthen pot | த (தண்டி), தவளை |
| 53 | tāvu | tāvu | 3177 | jump, luxuriant, tread gently | தாவு, தவளை |
| 222 | thalu | thalu | 3105 | beat, crush | தள்ளு |
| 223 | mumutha | mumutha | - | grand-parent | மும்முத |
| ? | tar, taṛi | tar, taṛi | 3178 | bow down | தாழு, தாழி |
| ? | thān | thān | 3196 | oneself | தான் |
| 36 | than | than | 3045 | cold, water | தண் (தண்ணீர்) |
| ? | pān | pān | 4068 | song, melody | பாண் |
| 31 | pāṇan | pāṇan | 4068 | tamil bard | பாணன், பாடுபவன் |
| 59 | kan, kanni | kan, kanni | 1159a, 1166, 1167, 1417 | boat, bamboo raft | கண், கன்னி |
| 60 | nalla-kanni | nalla-kanni | - | good vehicle | நல்ல கன்னி |
| 67 | kondu, kōnda, gōnde | kondu, kōnda, gōnde | 2053, 2216 | bull, with | கொடு (கொண்டு), |

| | | | | | |
|------|-----|-----------------|------------|---|------------------------------|
| | | | | | கோண்டே, கொண்டே, கொண் ட |
| 72 | 𐏃 | kōl | 2238 | boat, raft | கோல், கோலம் |
| 70 | 𐏃 | kāl | 1483 | cart | கால் |
| 65 | 𐏃 | peru-kanni | | big boat | பெருங்கண்ணி |
| 78 | 𐏃 | -pur, -puri | 4374 | bird | -புர், -புரி, புரா |
| 81 | (𐏃) | valai-puri | - | trapped bird | வலைபுரி, புரிவலை |
| 319 | 𐏃 | -mura | 4977 | snail, Curl | முறை, முறுக்கு |
| 134 | 𐏃 | -peru, -ma | 4411 | big, Large | பெரு, -மா |
| 261 | 𐏃 | -ko | 2207, 2203 | fort, gentry (west wind, western practice of having kings in Sumeria) | -கோ, கோட்டை |
| 30 | 𐏃 | kovan | | herder, herdsman, gentry (cattle class becoming the ruling gentry) | கோவன் |
| 261 | 𐏃 | kota | 2207, 2203 | fort, gentry (west wind, western practice of having kings in Sumeria) | கொட, கோட்ட |
| 197 | 𐏃 | -mel, -madi | 5058 | top, terrace | மேல், மாடம் |
| 402 | 𐏃 | nādu | 3638 | country (as a contrast to village) | நாடு |
| 162 | 𐏃 | vel | 5536 | spear, valour | வேல் |
| 245 | 𐏃 | thatti | 3036 | cloth, wooden frame | தட்டி |
| 296 | 𐏃 | vaṛi | 5297 | way | வழி |
| 149 | 𐏃 | nālvaṛi | 5297 | cross-road | நால்வழி |
| 297 | 𐏃 | aruvaṛi | 5297 | six-way crossing | அறுவழி, ஆறுவழி |
| 135 | 𐏃 | peruvaṛi | 5297 | big way | பெருவழி |
| 136 | 𐏃 | naliru peruvaṛi | 5297 | two big way | நல்லிரு பெருவழி |
| 153 | 𐏃 | perupavan | 4422 | receiver | பெருபவன் |
| 155* | 𐏃 | anupu, anbu | 330 | send | அனுப்பு, அன்பு |
| 211* | 𐏃 | ambu, anupu | 5536 | send | அனுப்பு, அன்பு |
| 83 | 𐏃 | irappan, irappu | 501 | death | இறப்பு |
| 50 | 𐏃 | athu, adu | 5153 | goat | ஆத்து, ஆடு |
| 124 | 𐏃 | aer | 2815 | plough | கலப்பை |

| | | | | | |
|------|-------|--------------------------|---------------|--|---------------------------|
| 125* | 𑌕 | vilagu | 5423 | diverge | விலகு |
| 47 | 𑌖 | aran | 204 | squink | அரண், அரணை |
| 43 | 𑌗 | nal-aran | - | good behavior | நல் அறன் |
| 113 | (𑌘𑌙𑌚) | viḷai-ñālam | 5437, 2913 | fertile land | விளை நாலம் |
| 415 | 𑌛 | mu-pala | 7- | important many | முப்பல |
| 171 | 𑌜 | nil-(v)anji, nilai | - | stable | நில்வஞ்சி, நிலை |
| ? | 𑌟 | nal-inai, nāl-inai | - | good joining, joining four | நல்லிணை, நாலிணை |
| 403 | 𑌠 | patru, pattu, parai | | sale announcement with a drum beat | பற்று, பட்டு, பறை |
| 404 | '𑌡' | nal-parai | | good annoucement | நல்ல பறை |
| 49 | 𑌣 | kula | 1829 | generation, geneology | குலம் |
| 51 | 𑌤 | maru-, mu-kula-iru-maran | 4834 | reliable third generation barter | மாறு, முக்குல மும்மாறனார் |
| 130 | 𑌦 | kol | 2151 | exchange, buy/sell | கொள், கொள்முதல் |
| 304 | 𑌧 | vil | 5422, 5421 | bow, sell | வில் |
| 305 | 𑌨 | vilai | 5421 | price | விலை |
| 127 | 𑌩 | alaku/aṛagu | 239, 246, 255 | beak, beauty, grains of paddy | அலகு, அழகு |
| 306 | 𑌪 | alaku-vilam | - | good home | அழகு ஈஇல்லம் |
| 397 | 𑌫 | thiraḷ | 3245 | pearl necklace | திரள், முத்து மாலை |
| 377 | '𑌬𑌭' | nal-thiral-pala | - | many good pearl necklaces | நல்திரள் பல |
| 233 | 𑌮 | mumalai | - | three mountain range | மும்மலை |
| 235 | 𑌯 | mumalai-vel | - | three mountain range worker | மும்மலை வேல் |
| 180 | 𑌰 | kottu | 2063, 2064 | pour, sting | கொட்டு (தேன்) |
| 181 | 𑌱 | kottu | 2063, 2064 | pour, sting | கொட்டு |
| 169 | 𑌲 | nilam | 3676 | land, ricefield | நிலம் |
| 171 | 𑌳 | nilai | 3675 | firm, stable | நிலை |
| 174 | 𑌴 | iru-nilam | 481, 3676 | great/vast land | இருநிலம் |
| 88 | 𑌵 | nal-iru | 3610, 480 | fine life | நல்லிரு |
| 176 | 𑌶 | idai | 450 | herdsman | இடை |
| 249 | 𑌷 | māṭṭu | 4801, 4802 | kindle, fire, put in, fasten, hook, load | மாட்டு |
| 253 | 𑌸 | māṭṭal | 4802 | necklace | மாட்டல் |
| 182 | 𑌹 | achu | 48 | loom frame, | அச்சு |

| | | | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|----------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| | | | | mould, ridge in field | |
| 178 | 𑌕 | kalappai | 1304 | plough | கலப்பை |
| 176 | 𑌕 | inai | 457 | join | இனை |
| 323 | 𑌕 | il, ila | 494, 497 | non-existence, leaf | இல |
| 325 | 𑌕 | ila | 497 | leaf | இல |
| 326 | 𑌕 | ilai | 497, 496 | leaf | இலை, இலஞ்சி |
| 327 | 𑌕 | ilavaṇian | - | name? | இலவழியன் |
| 76 | 𑌕 | ce- | 1931 | red | செம்மை |
| 311 | 𑌕 | yar, eṛil | 5156 | harp, music, beauty | யாழ், எழில், இசை |
| 400 | 𑌕 | nuṛan | 3715 | penetrate | நுழ-, நுழன், நுழம்பு |
| 219 | 𑌕 | tai | 3473 | sew, stitch | தை |

Common phrases

Here we list multiple logos (mostly pairs and triplets) that commonly occur together in IVC. We also list a few non-agglutinative entangled glyphs which we try to describe them as complex mixed states.

| M77 Signs | Glyph | Syllable | DED | Description | Tamil |
|-----------------------|---------|---------------------------------|-----|--|-------------------------------------|
| 12-124 | 𑌕𑌕 | aer-vuṛavan | - | farmer | ஏர் உழவன் |
| 169-124 | 𑌕𑌕 | aer-nilam | - | farm land | ஏர் நிலம் |
| 130-51 | 𑌕𑌕 | maru-kol, mu-kula-iru-maran-kol | - | barter | மாற்று கொள் |
| 402-267 | 𑌕𑌕 | koda-nadu | - | herder country | கொட நாடு |
| 402-267 | 𑌕𑌕 | valaiyan-nadu | - | trapper's country | வலையன் நாடு |
| 402-76 | 𑌕𑌕 | ce-nadu | - | red country, bronze country | சே நாடு |
| 67-65 | 𑌕𑌕 | peru-kanni-kondu | - | with big vehicle | பெருங்கண்ணி கொண்டு |
| 59-67 | 𑌕𑌕 | konda-kal | - | bullock cart | கொண்டா கல், கோண்ட கல், மாட்டு வண்டி |
| 59-67 | 𑌕𑌕𑌕 | peru-konda-kal | - | big bullock cart | பெரு கொண்ட கல், பெரு மாட்டு வண்டி |
| 372 = 342+400+397+162 | 𑌕 = 𑌕𑌕𑌕 | vel-thiral-nuṛan-ūr | - | town with hunters, pearl and cloth workers | வேல்திரல்நுழனூர் |