

Indus fish signs and it's varied manifestations

In this article we concentrate on just the fish signs and it's manifestations alone. One of the early interpretation of fish sign as “mīn” was by Father Heras in 1930s [1]. This was reiterated with caution by Iravadham Mahadevan [2]. If we look at the frequency of the consonants in Tamil (both modern and old), the one that comes on top is “ka” and not “ma” or “mi”. We know that the fish sign is the most frequent in Indus script, so the obvious Turing's not so enigmatic result is that the fish sign must start with “ka” and we found “kanni” is probably more feasible. However, our result “kanni” is independent of it and was inspired by M.V.Bhaskar's interpretation (personal communication) that the “Garial” (the river crocodile) is synonymous with fish and was probably trained and used as a boat. My own personal exposure to local customs also revealed that “kanni” is a term used commonly in earlier times for boat or any vehicle. The analogy could be that “kanni” referring to a women carrying children or it could be that the boat itself was driven by women in those days. However, this analogy is not without it's difficulty. The word “kaṇṇi” referred in modern Tamil to be a maiden is without any support in DED [3]. The only support comes the word “kaṇi” according to DED 1408 is “tender”, “love”, “devotion” etc., and so is “kātal” DED 1445 - “love”, “affection”, “lust” etc. From not so mystical angle it could be just derived from “kaṇ” DED 1159 “eye”, “peacock's tail”. Support from another quarter is “traveling places” come from DED 1443 “kāṇ” – “to see”, DED 1161 “kaṇ” – “place”, DED 1166 “kaṇai” (Gondi: kaṇi) - “arrow”, and DED 1109 “kaṭa” - “to move”. The interpretation that it is “kaṇṇi” is reinforced by other evidences like sign-63 “kaṇṇi-pori”, where it is meant as a “snare” DED 1183+4538.

Assuming that sign-59 𑀩 is “kaṇi/kaṇṇi”, it could mean any of these things: vehicle, boat, cart, trap, trapper, soft, tender etc. We will show lines of text that seem to provide such evidences, but before that we decide a few variants of fish sign and phrases:

Standalone fish signs

M77 Sign	Glyph	Syllable	DED	Description	Tamil
59	𑀩	kaṇi, kaṇ, kaṇṇi	1166, 1159, 1408, 1109	boat, bamboo raft	கணீ, கண், கன்னி
72	𑀩	kōl	2238	boat, raft	கோல்
70	𑀩	kāl	1483	cart	கால்
65	𑀩	peru-kaṇṇi	-	big boat	பெருங்கன்னி
67	𑀩	kondu, kōnda, gōnde	2053, 2216	bull, with	கொடு (கொண்டு), கொண்டே, கொண்டே, கொண் ட

Fish sign phrases

M77 Signs	Glyph	Syllable	DED	Description	Tamil
67-65	𑌕𑌕	peru-kanni-kondu	-	with big vehicle	பெருங்கன்னி கொண்டு
70-67	𑌕𑌕	kondā-kāl	-	bullock cart	கொண்டா கல், கோண்ட கல், மாட்டு வண்டி
70-67-65	𑌕𑌕𑌕	peru.kanni-kondā-kāl	-	big bullock cart	பெருகன்னி கோண்ட கல், பெரு மாட்டு வண்டி
72-67	𑌕𑌕	kondā-kōl	-	bullock raft?	கொண்டா கோல்
59-328	𑌕𑌔	u(ka)-kanni	559, 563	boat rising in waves	யுக கன்னி

Reading lines of text

Sample line 1 (kanni = trapper)

𑌕 𑌔𑌔 𑌕𑌕 |

mutal-vilampan-mu.malai-kanni

முதல்-விலம்பன்-மும்மலை-கன்னி

Semantics:

Chief archer, an expert trapper (or gentleman) of three mountains

Sample line 2 (kanni = transport vehicle)

↑ 𑌕 𑌔

nilai-kanni-anupu

நிலை-கன்னி-அனுப்பு

Semantics:

(Please) send (goods) by a stable boat/raft/cart

Sample line 3 (kanni = boat/raft)

↑ 𑌔 𑌕 𑌕 𑌕 || 𑌔 𑌕

palla-ar-iru-kanni-kōl-velan-ūr-anupu

பல்லர்: கன்னி கோல் (மூலம்) வேலனூர் அனுப்பு

Semantics:

Elephant town: send (goods) by boat to hunter's town

References

- [1] Heras, H., (1976) Henry Heras - the Scholar and His Work, Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture
- [2] Mahadevan, I., (2000?) The Indus fish sign, <https://www.harappa.com/content/indus-fish-sign>
- [3] Burrow, T., Emeneau, M.B., Dravidian Etymological Dictionary, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1961, (see also: <https://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/burrow/>)