

A Dravidian of decipherment Indus script

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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.

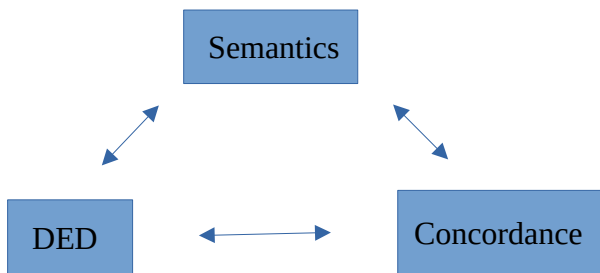
Important documents for understanding Indus script is the corpus created by Asko Parbola and [Iravadham Mahadevan's concordance](#) work (here on referred to as M77). We also need the [Dravidian Etymological Dictionary](#) (DED) by Burrow and Emeneau. Please download the two PDFs from Internet Archive 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. We use M77

Skilled artistry of Indus script

At the core of Indus script lies the mastery of a skilled metallurgist (𑀲𑀺?). We will illustrate this with these few examples:

𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺 = 𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺 = vel-tiral-nuraṇ-ūr = வேல்திரல்நுழனூர்

The semantic meaning being the town with tailors, jewellery and hunting professions.

𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺 = | 𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺𑀲𑀺 = mu-iru-mel-per-ul = முவிரு மேல்பொருள்

The semantic meaning being the mighty great guardian of the township (elevated to kings and gods at later times).

Some important townships

This is just indicative of the various kinds of townships and professions, and a deeper quantitative study is required to obtain their relative importance.

M77 Sign	Glyph	Syllable	DED	Description	Tamil
342	𑀲𑀺	ūr	752	town	ஊர்
347	𑀲𑀺	velūr	-	hunter's town	வேலூர்
358	𑀲𑀺	chevūr	-	bronze worker town	செவ்வூர்
351	𑀲𑀺	vel-nura-ūr	-	hunter-cloth worker town	வேல்நுழனூர்
?	𑀲𑀺	che-palla-ūr	-	bronze-elephant worker town	செவப்பல்லூர்
355	𑀲𑀺	vel-palla-ūr	-	hunter-elephant worker town	வேல்பல்லூர்
361	𑀲𑀺	che-ko-ūr	-	herder-bronze worker town	செங்கோவூர்
372	𑀲𑀺	vel-tiral-nuraṇ-ūr	-	hunter-jeweller-tailor town	வேல்திரல்நுழனூர்

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-, நல்-
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, munnal	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	ᳵ	-	-il, -da, -ta, -in	-ட, -டு, -த, -து -இல், -இன்
99	ᳶ	-	-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. These glyphs can be identified by the fact that it is mostly a stand-alone glyph with no adjacent glyphs in almost all its occurrences.

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	5379	scabbard fish with fang-like teeth	வாளை மீன்
	The fish “vālai” is known as the scabbard 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”				
295)ஃ	eri-valai	902	Another sharp tooth fish	ஏரி வாளை (மீன்)
	A fresh water shark, 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	இரூம்பு	irumpu	486	iron	இரும்பு
	Now we have triple pun: iru-pu (two insects) = erumpu (ant) = irumpu (iron)				
181	கொட்டு	kottu	2065, 2064	pour (sting)	கொட்டு
	We can see pincler claws are indicated to show “sting” and “pour” are homophones in Dravidian “kottu”. The stinging honey-bee also is supposed elucidate connotations of “honey” that pours (kottu) from the beehive.				
393	பல்லர்	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	𑌕	an	131, 132	person	அன்
	𑌕𑌕	an(n)-an	131, 132	brother	அண்ணன்
2	𑌕𑌔	kavalan	1417, 1416	security guard	காவலன்
25	𑌕𑌔	mutalvan	4950	chief	முதல்வன்
26	𑌕𑌔𑌔	nal-mutalvan	-	good chief	நல்முதல்வன்
3	𑌕𑌔	allan	234	distressed	அல்லன்
4	𑌕𑌔𑌔	natt-an	3638	country man	நாட்டான்
5	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	natt-ar-an	3638	country rules	நாட்டாரன்
6	𑌕𑌔𑌔	cadai-an	153	hairy man	சடையன்
7	𑌕𑌔𑌔	val(i)-an	5276	skilled man	வலியன்
8	𑌕𑌔𑌔	vel-an	5368	lance fighter	வேலன்
9	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	valai-velan, valaiyan	5288	animal trapper	வலையன்
12	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	vuṛavan	688	worker, farmer	உழவன்
13	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	vuṛaval	688	work, farming	உழவல்
14	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	per-uṛavan	688	big farmer	பேர் உழவன்
15	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	uṛavūr	688	working, farming town	உழவூர்
35	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	valaiyan	5288	trapper	வலையன்
41	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	kīṛān	1621	poor	கீழான்
42	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	pallan	3986a	mahout	பல்ல(வ)ன்
54	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	pu	4345	flower, insect	பூ (பூச்சி)
55	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	pol	4550	flowering	பொலி, பொலிவு
374	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	-n	1159b, 3621, 3621a	night, bug	நீர் (துளி), (ப)னி, நள், நல்லு
410	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	nān	3639	me	நான்
415	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	nannan	3639	a name	நண்ணன்
299	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	ida, idai	449	hip, left	இட-, இடை
301	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	idayan	450	herder, herdsman	இடையன்
287	𑌕𑌔𑌔𑌔	vala-, vaḷai	5313, 5314	bent, trap, right	வல, வளை

293	ᵛ	valaiyan	5288	animal trapper (short form)	வலை வேலன், வலையன்
328	ᵛ	vu	651, 761	ooze, mortar	வ, உ, ஊ
?	ᵛ	vala, vala	5304	strong, fertile	வல-, வள-
336	ᵛ	valan	5276	strong, skillful	வலன்
32	ᵛᵛ	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, பாணை
375	pal, pala	pal, pala	3986a	teeth, many	பல், பல
391	pallā	pallā	3986a, 1045	elephant	பல்லா (யாணை)
Depicted by the ornamental oval-shaped plate that is fixed on it's forehead					
392	nal-pallar (nalla-palla-iru)	nal-pallar (nalla-palla-iru)	-	good mahout	நல் பல்லர்
254	paṭi, paṭṭi	paṭi, paṭṭi	3848,3850	settlement, rest, roost, step gradee, rank	படி, பட்டி
216	ta, tā	ta, tā	2946, 3188, 3110	earthen pot	த (தண்டி), தவளை
53	tāvu	tāvu	3177	jump, luxuriant, tread gently	தாவு, தவளை
222	talū	talū	3105	beat, crush	தள்ளு
223	mumuta	mumuta	-	grand-parent	மும்முத
?	tar, tarī	tar, tarī	3178	bow down	தாழு, தாழி
36	tan	tan	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, கொண்ட
72	kōl	kōl	2238	boat, raft	கோல்
70	kāl	kāl	1483	cart	கால்
65	peru-kanni	peru-kanni		big boat	பெருங்கன்னி

78	𑌕	-pur, -puri	4374	bird	-புர், -புரி, புரா
81	(𑌕)	valai-puri	-	trapped bird	வலைபுரி, புரிவலை
319	𑌖	-mura	4977	snail, curl	முறை, முறுக்கு
134	𑌗	-peru, -ma	4411	big, large	பெரு-, -மா
261	𑌘	-ko	2207, 2203	fort, gentry	-கோ, கோட்டை
Origin of the word “ko” could be the Gond people of the mountains, reinforced by the West wind, from western practice of having kings in Sumeria					
30	𑌙	kovan		herder, herdsman, gentry	கோவன்
Cattle class that eventually becomes the ruling gentry					
261	𑌚	kota	2207, 2203	fort, gentry (west wind, western practice of having kings in Sumeria)	கொட, கோட்ட
197	𑌛	mael, mettai	5058	top, terrace	மேல், மெத்தை
402	𑌜	nādu	3638	country (as a contrast to village)	நாடு
162	𑌝	vel	5536	spear, valour	வேல்
245	𑌞	thatti	3036	cloth, wooden frame	தட்டி
296	𑌟	vaṛi	5297	way	வழி
149	𑌠	nālvaṛi	5297	cross-road	நால்வழி
297	𑌡	aruvaṛi	5297	six-way crossing	அறுவழி, ஆறுவழி
135	𑌢	peruvaṛi	5297	big way	பெருவழி
136	𑌣	naliru peruvaṛi	5297	two big way	நல்லிரு பெருவழி
153	𑌤	perupavan	4422	receiver	பெருபவன்
155*	𑌥	anupu, anbu	330	send	அனுப்பு, அன்பு
211*	𑌦	ambu, anupu	5536	send	அனுப்பு, அன்பு
83	𑌧	irappan, irappu	501	death	இறப்பு
50	𑌨	athu, adu	5153	goat	ஆத்து, ஆடு
124	𑌩	aer	2815	plough	கலப்பை
125*	𑌪	vilagu	5423	diverge	விலகு
47	𑌫	aran	204	squink	அரண், அரணை
43	𑌬	nal-aran	-	good behavior	நல் அறன்
113	(𑌭𑌭𑌭)	viḷai-ñālam	5437, 2913	fertile land	விளை நாலம்
415	𑌮	mu-pala	7-	important many	முப்பல
171	𑌯	nil-(v)anji, nilai	-	stable	நில்வஞ்சி, நிலை
?	𑌰	nal-inai, nāl-inai	-	good joining, joining four	நல்லிணை, நாலிணை
403	𑌱	patru, pattu, parai		sale	பற்று, பட்டு, பறை

				announcement with a drum beat	
404	'ᳵ'	nal-parai		good annoucement	நல்ல பறை
49	ᳵ	kula	1829	generation, geneology	குலம்
51	ᳵ	maru-, mu-kula-iru-maran	4834	reliable third generation barter	மாறு, முக்குல மும்மாறனார்
130	ᳶ	kol	2151	exchange, buy/sell	கொள், கொள்முதல்
304	᳷	vil	5422, 5421	bow, sell	வில்
305	᳸	vilai	5421	price	விலை
127	᳹	alaku/aṛagu	239, 246, 255	beak, beauty, grains of paddy	அலகு, அழகு
306	ᳺ	alaku-ᳺlam	-	good home	அழகு ஊஇல்லம்
307	᳻	vilampu	5434, 5433	proclaim openly, superintends food	விலம்பு
397	᳼	thirai	3245	pearl necklace	திரள், முத்து மாலை
377	'᳾'	nal-thiral-pala	-	many good pearl necklaces	நல்திரள் பல
233	᳿	mumalai	-	three mountain range	மும்மலை
235	᳾	mumalai-vel	-	three mountain range worker	மும்மலை வேல்
180	᳾	kottu	2063, 2064	pour, sting	கொட்டு (தேன்)
181	᳾	kottu	2063, 2064	pour, sting	கொட்டு
169	᳾	nilam	3676	land, ricefield	நிலம்
171	᳾	nilai	3675	firm, stable	நிலை
174	᳾	iru-nilam	481, 3676	great/vast land	இருநிலம்
88	᳾	nal-iru	3610, 480	fine life	நல்லிரு
176	᳾	idai	450	herdsman	இடை
249	᳾	māṭṭu	4801, 4802	kindle, fire, put in, fasten, hook, load	மாட்டு
253	᳾	māṭṭal	4802	necklace	மாட்டல்
182	᳾	achu	48	loom frame, mould, ridge in field	அச்சு
178	᳾	kalappai	1304	plough	கலப்பை
176	᳾	inai	457	join	இனை
323	᳾	il, ila	494, 497	non-existence, leaf	இல

325	𑌕	ila	497	leaf	இல
326	𑌖	ilai	497, 496	leaf	இலை, இலஞ்சி
327	𑌗	ilavaṛian	-	name?	இலவழியன்
76	𑌘	ce-	1931	red	செம்மை
311	𑌙	yar, eṛil	5156	harp, music, beauty	யாழ், எழில், இசை
400	𑌚	nuṛan	3715	penetrate	நுழ-, நுழன், நுழம்பு
219	𑌛	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	𑌕𑌖	aer-nilam	-	farm land	ஏர் நிலம்
130-51	𑌕𑌗	maru-kol, mu-kula-iru-maran-kol	-	barter	மாற்று கொள்
402-267	𑌕𑌘	koda-nadu	-	herder country	கொட நாடு
402-267	𑌕𑌙	valaiyan-nadu	-	trapper's country	வலையன் நாடு
402-76	𑌕𑌚	ce-nadu	-	red country, bronze country	சே நாடு
67-65	𑌕𑌛	peru-kanni-kondu	-	with big vehicle	பெருங்கன்னி கொண்டு
59-67	𑌕𑌜	konda-kal	-	bullock cart	கொண்டா கல், கோண்ட கல், மாட்டு வண்டி
59-67	𑌕𑌝	peru-konda-kal	-	big bullock cart	பெரு கோண்ட கல், பெரு மாட்டு வண்டி
372 = 342+400+397+162	𑌕𑌞 = 𑌕𑌟𑌕𑌠	vel-tiral-nuṛan-ūr	-	town with hunters, pearl and cloth workers	வேல்திரல்நுழனூர்
194 = 342+400+397+162	𑌕𑌡 = 𑌕𑌢𑌕𑌣𑌕𑌤	mu-iru-mel-per-ul	-	the mighty mel-perul	மூவிரு மேல்பொருள்