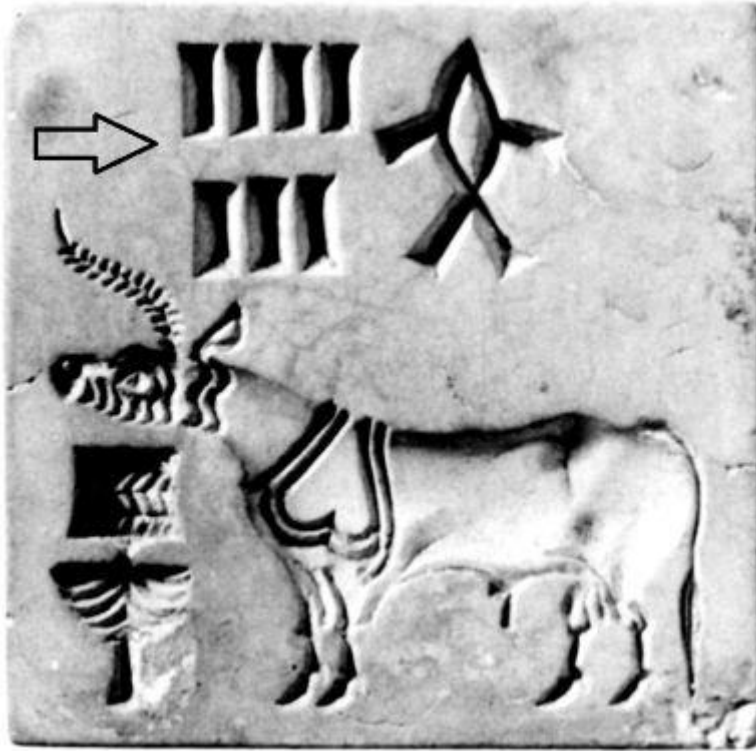


Deciphering the Fish Sign: A New Perspective



Sindhi language could serve as a valuable resource in deciphering the Indus script

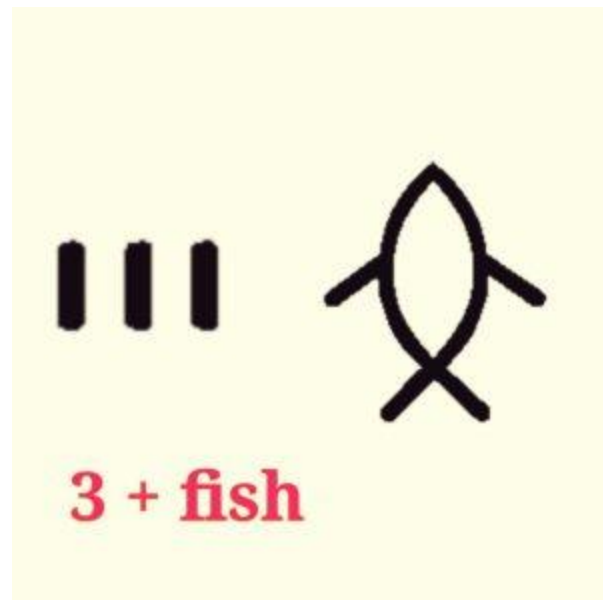
- Its linguistic connections to Dravidian languages, combined with its historical continuity, make it a crucial bridge for understanding the meaning and symbolism of Indus inscriptions

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The Indus script remains un-deciphered despite numerous attempts since its discovery, including ongoing research efforts today. While linguistic connections have been explored to decode the writing system of the Indus Valley Civilization, scholars have yet to achieve a definitive breakthrough. Some researchers propose a link to Dravidian languages, while

others favor a post-Dravidian context for interpreting the script. This study focuses on deciphering the fish sign within the Indus script. While previous interpretations have primarily relied on Dravidian languages, this research presents an alternative perspective based on the Sindhi language. Although Sindhi is now classified as an Indo-Aryan language, it retains a rich vocabulary and linguistic structures derived from Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian languages, including words with similar phonetic features.

Introduction

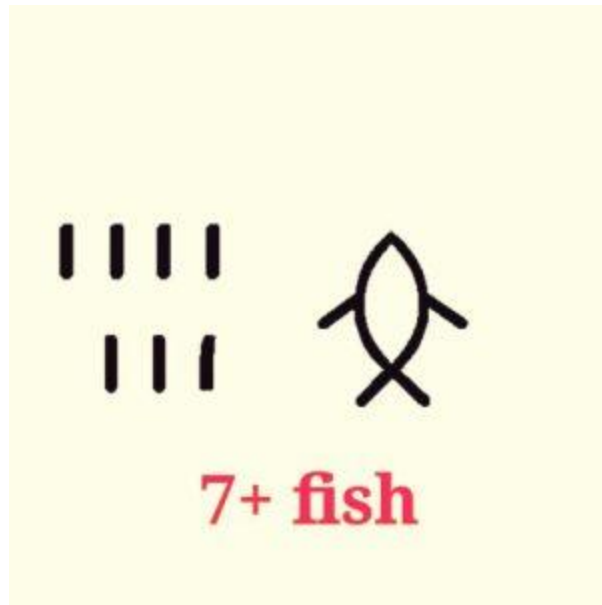


Over a century has passed since the discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization, yet its script remains an un-deciphered enigma. The primary challenges preventing a widely accepted decipherment have been extensively explored. Similarly, interpreting the “fish” sign within the Indus script presents comparable difficulties. Since the 1960s, numerous scholarly studies have attempted to analyze the structure of the script, notably those led by Russian linguist [Yuri Knorozov](#), Finnish archaeologist [Asko Parpola](#), and Indian epigraphist [Iravatham Mahadevan](#), employing computational and other analytical methods (Janer R. McInath, 2008, p. 55). Although direct textual records of the Indus script may not be available, Shu-ilishu’s cylinder seal offers a glimmer of hope for future breakthroughs in deciphering this ancient writing system (Possehl, 1996, p. 43).



This study examines two central questions: Can we determine the possible meaning of the “fish” sign? If so, can this interpretation provide deeper insights into Indus society and culture? It will be argued that the fish symbol held significant political and religious importance within the Indus Valley Civilization. Furthermore, this analysis will treat the symbol as an ideogram, prioritizing its conceptual meaning rather than its phonetic value (Sengupta A., 2023, p. 87).

The fish signs of the Indus script are believed to have multiple interpretations. One prominent theory suggests that the fish symbol represents a star, astral deities, and the Dravidian etyma ‘min’ (‘fish’) and ‘min/vin’ (‘star,’ ‘to glitter, shine, and flash’). This interpretation aligns with various elements of Indian astronomical and religious traditions, including planetary worship, the Vedic star calendar, the vernal equinox, the significance of due east, and the asterism marking the New Year. Additionally, astral proper names in India, the North Star, and evidence of Harappan goddess worship have been considered in relation to this symbol. The combined motifs of “fish” and “star” on Indus pottery from Amri further support these interpretations (Parpola, A., 1994, pp. 179, 182, 183, 201, 240).



Robert (1976, p. 196) argues that this linguistic root is preserved in many Dravidian languages. The word 'vin' refers to the sky and derives from 'vin', meaning "to be clear," while 'min' signifies both "a star" and "a fish," originating from 'min', meaning "to glitter." Similarly, the Tamil word 'vejji' denotes the planet Venus and silver, derived from 'ven', meaning "white."

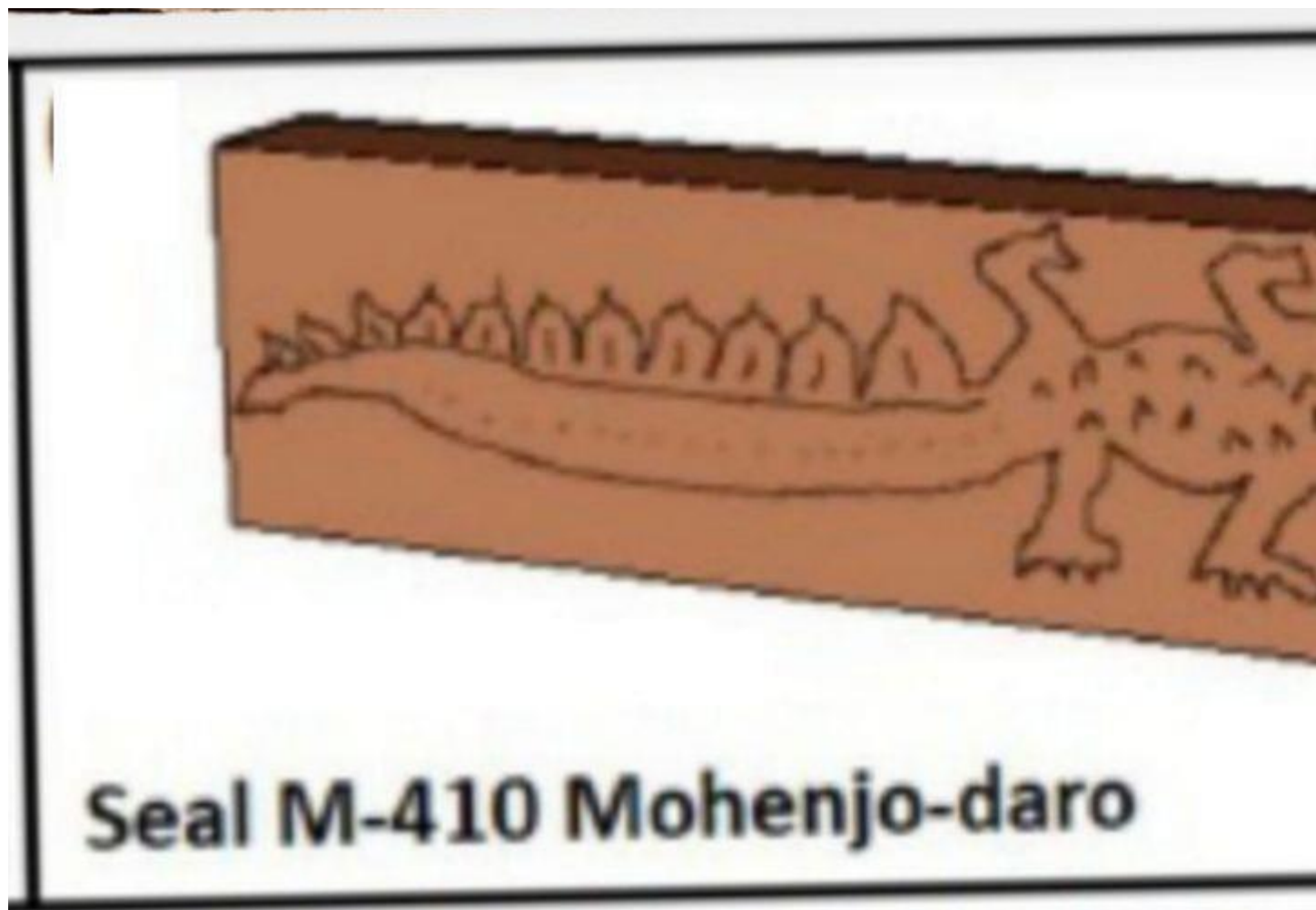
However, in general, there is no significant difficulty in distinguishing Sanskrit derivatives from ancient Dravidian roots. Only a few cases present ambiguity regarding whether certain words originate from Sanskrit or Dravidian. For instance, 'nīr' (water) and 'min' (fish) are claimed as components of both languages. Nevertheless, it is widely believed that both words are of Dravidian origin (Robert, C., 1976, p. 45). In Sindhi, the word 'nīr' refers both to water and to tears. Krishnamurti confirms that the Proto-Dravidian word for "water" is 'nīr', a term that remains consistent in Dravidian languages (Krishnamurti, 2003, p. 46).



Seven stars in sky

Similarly, in Sindhi, the word 'meen' traces its roots to the Proto-Dravidian term 'min', which means "fish," "brightness," "shining," and "a planet" (Blouch, 1988, p. 2760). Furthermore, Baloch (2006, p. 657) notes that in Sindhi, 'Meena' ('mina') signifies "sky," "blue color," "painting on gold and silver," and 'meenakari' refers to colorful enamel work on precious metals, all of which symbolize shining and glittering.

It has been suggested that the Proto-Dravidian word for "fish," 'mīn', is widely used across present-day India and conveys meanings such as "shining," "bright," and "gemstone" in several Dravidian languages. Etymologically, it is linked to the Proto-Dravidian root verb 'mīn', which denotes "to shine" and "to glitter." Symbolically, it has been associated with stars, fireflies, lightning, and fish-eye stones, among other luminous entities (Ansumali, B., 2023, pp. 1–3).



According to Parpola, the combination '7 + fish' or 'fish + 7' ('elu + min') represents "seven stars." In Tamil, this refers to Ursa Major, known in India as the "Seven Sages." A similar concept exists in India, where seven fish-shaped sages are worshiped (Parpola, A., 1994, p. 275).

In the Sindhi language, the word 'min' or 'meen' denotes fish and a 'Katti' for seven stars. The 'Katti' is a constellation of seven stars in the sky, which also appears in Sumer. Additionally, 'katti' refers to a specific season for cultivation (Balouch, N. A., 2006, p. 483). During this season, when the constellation of 'katti' appears at the center of the sky, peasants traditionally begin planting crops. From a Sindhi linguistic and cultural perspective, the interpretation of '7 + fish' or 'fish + 7' may correspond to 'katti'.

Similarly, the combination 'fish + 3' symbolizes three stars, corresponding to the asterism of Mrigashira in Tamil (Parpola, A. 1994, p. 275). In Tamil Nadu, this constellation is associated

with the "Month of the Seven Sages." In Sindh and the Sindhi language, it is referred to as 'treru' or 'trelhu', denoting "three stars" or "three rows of stars" (Balouch, 2006, p. 150). Consequently, the expression 'fish + 3' may represent 'teru' or 'trelhu' in the Sindhi language.

Although this is unrelated to the main topic, it is essential to mention that the 'ratti' unit, based on the weight of 'Abrus precatorius' seeds, continues to be widely used for measuring gold across India (Ansumali, B., 2022). If this symbol represents 'ratti', then similarly, in Sindh and the Sindhi language, 'ratti' has been used as a unit of weight exclusively for gold since ancient times and remains in use today. According to the interpretation of this symbol as 'ratti', the combination '2 + ratti' or 'ratti + 2' may similarly denote a value of two 'rattis'.

According to the M-410 seal of Mohenjo-daro, a crocodile is depicted consuming or swallowing fish, which implies a connection to water. However, the seal does not suggest any association with gemstones, gems, eye shaped stones, or even stars. This is because a crocodile is inherently linked to water and consumption of fish but not to the consumption of gemstones or beads, nor does here appears any symbolic connection to a star. Therefore, the interpretation of min or meen in relation to a gem or star should be reconsidered for its accuracy.

Conclusion

Although Sindhi is classified as part of the Indo-Aryan language family, its roots can be traced back to Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian languages. The interpretation of the fish sign in the Indus script, using Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian words such as 'nīr', 'min', and 'meen', demonstrates that these linguistic elements have persisted in the Sindhi language. This suggests that Sindhi was originally a Dravidian language but, due to prolonged influence from Aryan and Semitic languages, it eventually became part of the Indo-Aryan group.

Consequently, the Sindhi language could serve as a valuable resource in deciphering the Indus script. Its linguistic connections to Dravidian languages, combined with its historical continuity, make it a crucial bridge for understanding the meaning and symbolism of Indus inscriptions. Future research incorporating Sindhi, along with other Dravidian linguistic and

cultural elements, may contribute significantly to unraveling the mysteries of the Indus script.

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