A PARTIAL DECIPHERMENT OF INDUS SCRIPT

This paper describes a partial decipherment of the Indus script. The seals shown in the paper are sourced from The Corpus of Indus seals and Inscriptions (Pakistan and India) By Asko Parpola. The Protocuneiform characters and meanings are as described in Manuel d'epigraphie Akkadienne, Labat. Abbreviations are used in the paper as follows

CI- Corpus of Indus seals and Inscriptions – India , Parpola

CP- Corpus of Indus seals and Inscriptions – Pakistan , Parpola

MEA - Manuel d'epigraphie Akkadienne, Labat

Brahmi script characters are used in this paper.

Introduction

The readings in this paper are derived from similarities observed between Indus script and Protocuneiform script. It was possible to transfer meanings from Protocuneiform characters to Indus characters based on morphological similarities. Dravidian word sounds were applied to these characters and an attempt was made to elucidate meanings and correlate with the Brahmi script. The conclusions and derived meanings are described here. Similarities observed seem to show that Brahmi script could be derived from the Indus script. I will try to explain these aspects with the first seal.

Preexisting readings

- Min . I.Mahadevan et al have read this as MIN. It is read similarly in this paper. It can also be read as "An". Various diacritics seem to change it to "Ma" etc. Obvious similarities between the fish sign and Brahmi "Ma" are present.

- "An". This has been read as "An" generally based upon it being the most common ending character. I too read this as "An". It is generally thought to be a vase or a ship. It is not. This is a phallic symbol and is similar to the Protocuneiform "LU". MEA- Page 150.

LU meaning Man

Evaluation of Brahmi script will show that "na " is a phallic symbol as well.

na

'AN' is the Dravidian term for "man".

[nə]

Pashupati seal

The first reading I will attempt is the so called Pashupati seal

CP – Page 138 – M1181

This reading is incomplete. I only start with it as this was the first seal which I could read to any degree of certainty. This is to be read from right to left. The first letter is "X". This is similar to a Protocuneiform character called "KUR". (MAE- Page 62). This generally means opponent, hostile, stranger etc. The words in most Dravidian are "Ethiri", "Ethirali" etc. The Brahmi letter "X" sounds as "R". I have preferred to use the "R" sound though it is difficult as we do not have a complete reading.

The next letter is "ʃ". I have not yet managed to read this. It is probably "sha". But I am not certain about this.

The "Min" sign 𑀭 comes next. There is a small diacritic in it. I read it as "Ma".

The next character is "𑀮". This is similar to the water sign "𑀮" in Protocuneiform. (MEA- Page 236). The Dravidian words for water are Thanni, Neer, Vellam etc, .

At this point I used "Thanni" initially. The last letter is "An" which I have explained above.

Now we have a partial reading of "Ru ? Ma Tha An". There is a God in South India generally called "Maadan". There are several versions of this God including Chudalai Maadan etc. The question was whether to use "Tha" or "Da" as the term for the water sign. The question can be answered if the Brahmi term for "da" is examined.

ḍa

The similarity is obvious . I believe water was termed "Danni" in the language of IVC. So the reading would be "Ru ? Maa dan".

This seems to be a seal depicting an early form of Siva and is probably the source of the term Mahadev.

The next seal would be (CP- page 137 – M1179).

The first letter is “Da”, as explained earlier. The next letter is “An” . This also has been explained earlier. The completed reading would be “Adan”. There is a picture of a goat in the seal. The term for goat is “Aadu” in almost all Dravidian languages. I think this would be read as Yadavan. This reading proves that the prior reading is probably correct.

The question is what do these seals mean. The first seal is obviously the name of a God, with the figurine of the God in it. Why this was used as a seal is unknown. Perhaps it was used in relation to religious artefacts.

The second seal is a standard seal. It states an identification marker. Almost all subsequent seals will be of this kind. Seals will state the proper name, caste name and Right Hand/ Left hand divisions in various combinations. Some will only combine one or two elements. These would be employed using various characters for similar sounds though certain characters seem to be used by specific group.

Idangai(Left Hand) and Valangai(Right hand) tribes

Further seal readings would demand an understanding of the Right Hand and Left hand tribe divisions that existed in Southern India. Castes were divided into either Valangai or Idangai. This basically means Right Hand and Left Hand. There were significant conflicts recorded between these divisions. There is a book called Idangai Valangaiar Varaluru. It is in Tamil. Essentially, society was divided into 2 divisions with castes either belonging to the Idangai faction or to the Valangai faction.

The Idangai faction consisted of 5 artisan castes initially called Anchalar / Panchalar. The Valangai faction involved agricultural castes and numbered about 60 – 70. But these divisions varied between places. There were numerous castes added on to the Idangai and Valangai groups. Some groups would be in Idangai in one place and Valangai in another.

The Paraiyan caste was called Valangaimutran. ie The Head of Valangai.

Five basic castes in Idangai are

Kannar – Bronze smiths

Asari- Carpenter

Kollan – Blacksmith

Kaikollan – Weaver

Thattan- Goldsmith

Now these vary, and in some places Thatchan/ Mesthiri/ Saliyan etc are added. In modern times Palli seemed the important group in Tamilnadu. This same system with variations is seen in Karnataka and Andhra.

The antiquity of this arrangement can be derived from the fact that the Sumerian word for jeweller is KABSAR (KAB = Left).

There is also an interesting division in a tribe called Bakhtiari tribe in Iran. This is an ancient nomadic tribe from the Fars province. They have a system whereby their tribes are divided into HaftLang and ChaharLang. ie Seven legs and Four legs. The origin of this division is lost in time, but we will gain an understanding on reading this paper.

The next two seals will need to be read together

(CP-Page 33-M673)

(CP – Page 57 – M749)

The first letter is the number seven. This motif is very common throughout the corpus. We can examine the words for seven in Dravidian languages.

Ezhu – Malayalam

Elu - Tamil

Edu - Telugu

Elu - Kannada

The second letter is . This is similar to the hand sign in protocuneiform (MEA- Page 162). The word for hand in almost all Dravidian languages is "Kai".

This information lets us read the seal. This is "Edu Kai", otherwise "Idangai". Confirmation would be from the Brahmi letters for "Kai"

kai

and the Brahmi letters for the vowels "i" and "ii"

[i]

[i:]

The vowel form is quite unusual in that it seems to use digits and I believe this is the reason for it.

The second seal is quite unusual in that it is to be read from left to right.

The first letter is four.

Malayalam – Nalu Kannada - Nalku

Telugu – Nalugu Tamil - Nanku

Combining “Nalu” with “Kai” will give you Nalkai. Obviously when you read Edu Kai as Idangai ,This is to be read as Valangai.

The “Idangai” and “Valangai” divisions in the castes of South India is what is reflected here. Idangai and Valangai are often followed by the “AN” character and this is read as Idangaian/ Valangaian.

This is also the source of the peculiar tribal divisions of ChaharLang and Haft Lang which I had mentioned earlier. It would have meant Left Leg and Right Leg in antiquity. These meanings would have slowly disappeared with time leaving only the digit usage.

These are not the only characters used to denote Idangai and Valangai.

Multiple characters are used with the meanings of “Idam”, “Valam” and “Kai”.

Idam: IIII
 IIII

Valam: IIII , 𐑖 , 𐑕

Kai : 𐑕 , 𐑕 , 𐑕 , 𐑕 , ()

Some of these are obvious as is the use of the “Archer” character which will be “Villali” in Tamil and Malayalam. This gets translated as “Valam”.

For example (CP – Page 23- M644) the last segment of the seal is Idangaian. The sign used for Kai here is the most common sign used in relation to Idangai.

(CP- Page 45 – M714) the last segment is Idangaian

CP- Page 50 – M728) This uses a different character. But is almost certainly Idangaian. It might seem that there are nine lines here. But the top two lines are actually a diacritic for the first character.

Similarly, readings of “Valangai” can be made in several seals. The predominant character used to write “Valam” is not the digit “Four”. It is a specific character seen in this seal.

(CP -Page 33- M- 672)

The first character is unknown. The last three characters mean Valangaian. The second character is spelled “VAL” as I explained earlier. The closest cognate that I can find in Protocuneiform is “KUN “ (MEA – Page 72) . This means tail in Sumerian and would sound “VAL” in Tamil. The Brahmi letter “Va” seems derived from this.

(CI- Page 43 – M131)

You can notice here that the “Kai” sign is slightly different. This is similar to the plant sign in Protocuneiform and probably means “Kaira”. In the word it is spelt “Kai”. There are two sections , the initial section is also a “Kaiyan”. This probably reads Idangaia Valangaian, but the first character is not very certain.

The next seal is from Mohenjodaro

(CI – Page 107 M1063)

A simple Valangai reading. The first character is uncertain.

An interesting variant is seen in (CI- Page 202- H156).

I read this as "Idangaian". The brackets seem to indicate a hand . If the brackets are read as a "KAI" we will find further interesting readings. These will be discussed with the individual seals

Further readings are possible with regards to the castes involved.

It would seem straightforward to obtain further readings once the Right hand and left hand caste names are identified. Sadly, this is not so. The system seems to have been different in the IVC, though similarities can be ascertained.

The diacritic " " seems to be used as "An". That helps us to read multiple seals. Several signs seem to be used with both Idangai and Valangai. Among these are some of the most used signs in the Corpus

There are three usual signs associated with both Idangai and Valangai. These are likely to be some form of caste names.

I have only made a tentative reading of the first one.

I read this as "Kan". More based on the shape than anything else. "Kan" means Eye in Dravidian languages and the character seems to resemble an eye.

This associated with the diacritic " , ' ' , would be read as "Kannan",

A characteristic reading is

(CP- Page – 64 M776)

I read the interlocking ovals as “Mutta” the Dravidian word for egg. This is similar to Protocuneiform “NUNUZ”. (MEA – Page 180) Though we have interlocking circles instead of a line between them. The Brahmi word for “Tta” is a circle. So the complete reading would be “Kannan Idangai mutran”.

Some interesting Idangai readings

tha

(CI- Page 258. L-84) Kannan Idangai. This gives the first reading for the bracket sign that I mentioned earlier. Reading it as “Kai” gives a very sensible reading here.

(CI- Page 345. B10 and B12)

B7 A

B8 A

B9 A

B8 C

B8 B

B8 D

B7 B

B9 A

B9 B

B9 C

B9 D

B10 A

B10 B

Page 345 of Corpus(India) shows multiple interesting readings. B7 is a simple reading and states Kannan. B8 shows a different character and probably means “Thiran”. But that is a very uncertain reading dependent upon similarity between this and certain Protocuneiform characters. B9 is a simple Valangai reading. B10 and B12 are Idangai readings in various forms. The Kai of B12 shows

the origin of the “Kai” with three fingers. It is probably derived from the Sumerian word for plant/ oil palm etc .

Valangai.

Several further readings of Valangai are available throughout the Corpus.

(CP- Page199 M 1452B)

This is a simple and straightforward reading. It says ValkaiAn.

The particular reading is from an inscribed copper plate.

The best reading for Valangai would be from (CP-Page 56, M746)

This introduces a new letter “𑌕”. This is similar to a Sumerian term “PAR”. (MEA Page – 68).

This means “side/ other side”. The Brahmi letter “Pa” would be cognate. I read it as “Par/Pur”. Tamil word for side is “Pakkam”. Malayalam word for other side is “Puram” This would give a reading for the terminal portion as Purayan.

I read the “2” sign as “Iru”. The fish sign is “Min”. The complete reading would be

“ValanKaiAr IruMan Par An”. This is probably Valankaiair Raman Paraiyan

This reading can be seen in 2 seals.

The second seal is (CorpusPakistan – Page 271 H420)

The first and second signs are uncertain. The terminal portion however is Par An Valam Kai.

The Idangai castes were also called Anchalar/Panchalar. You can find straightforward examples of this throughout the corpus.

(CI- Page 44 M138)

The reading is selfexplanatory except for the "La" part. If this sign is read as "La" several further readings can be obtained. MEA Page 174 gives a possible cognate "LIS" from Protocuneiform.

Another reading which is essentially the same is Corpus Pakistan Page 286 H512

H 511 a

We also get combined readings. However, here we have complications. As I mentioned earlier the Idangai tribes were called Anchalar. However, in some readings we find Valangai Anchalar.

Corpus Pakistan Page 81 M878

M 878 a

The fist character is a man holding a bow. "Vil". This is followed by a "Kai". This is followed by the "An" sign. I read this as "Ar" in this instance. So the whole reading would be Valangaiar Anchalan. Now I am not sure why this is so. But I must conclude that the divisions were not very solid at this time. There are several instances in modern times of fluid divisions in the Right hand and left-hand castes. Palli for example have people belonging to both sides of the division.

The next reading is more straight forward

Corpus India – Page 181 H50

This reads simply as Valangaiar Valangain

Further readings are possible. These will be explained in subsequent papers.

RAMKUMAR UNNIPILLAI SANTHAKUMARI