

Indus Script etched in Stones

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Introduction

This article deals with the Indus Script etched in stones in Khirthar mountain range of Sindh, Pakistan. The Indus Script is explored first time in Sindh out of Mohen-Jo-Daro Inscribed on rocks beside the rock art of Sindh. While working on rock art of Sindh in Khirthar Mountain Range near Wahi Pandhi, taluka Johi, District Dadu Sindh, Pakistan, I judged the inscriptions of different types of scripts including Indus Script. I started to sort out Indus Script symbols in my collected pictorial stuff in the light of Asko Parpola and John Marshall research based Indus Script prepared by Shabir Kunbhar and issued by Culture Department of Sindh including the Indus Script on Indus seals. I got success to discover the symbols of Indus Script and variant of Indus Script in rock carvings of Sindh, Pakistan.

The inscriptions of the Indus seals script are inscribed in large quantity here in rock art of Sindh. These can be considered as evidence concerning the linkage of urban society of the Indus valley civilization with its towns, villages and other remote areas in Sindh. Therefore, probably Indus Script or writing system of Indus civilization was widespread here in remote areas of Sindh during the period of Indus civilization. Furthermore, the Variant Indus script is also discussed which is some different from Indus script found from Indus seals. Most likely, variant of Indus script was commonly in use here in the backward localities of Sindh. Possibly, the Indus Script and its variant continued here in remote areas in Vedic period and before the development and evolution of Brahmi and other scripts after fall down of Indus Valley Civilization. The variant Indus script either was variant form of Indus script or it was developed from the Indus script in late periods. In all probabilities, the variant Indus script was developed from Indus script before or during the Vedic period after the rapid disappearance of Indus civilization. It is believed that Brahmi or other scripts of Dravidian and Indo-Aryan languages had been developed from this variant of Indus script. The most ancient engraved religious symbols of Yoni-Lingam nearby the Indus seal script and its variant provide evidence that the Indus script and its variant were prevalent here in this area of Sindh before the development of other scripts of India and the dominance of Mauryan, Rai and Brahman dynasties on Sindh. It is supposed that the Buddhists and Brahmins were as well unaware of the Indus Script and variant Indus script. Accordingly, they implemented early Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts. So, maybe the links of variant Indus script as well as Indus seal script vanished.



Indus seal script

Sindh is one of the most ancient lands of the world and the archaeological evidences have attested that it has been remaining civilized since earliest ages. The Indus valley civilization is recognized in whole the world as one of the earliest cradles of civilizations. The Indus-Saraswati traditions of writing system culminating in Indus script have been traced back to about 7000 BC. The evidence has been explored from Mehrgarh (Kok: 1993:375). Three stages of development of Indus civilization have been described. First was about 7000–4300 BCE, second about 4300–3200 BCE and third about 3200–2600 BCE. While its magnificent urban life in which writing system was developed about 2600–1900 BCE (Parpola: 2005:29). Kenoyer writes, the Indus Script was invented around 2600 BCE which reflects the fundamental changes in social, political and ritual organization that accompanied the formation and consolidation of cities (Kenoyer: 1997:69).

Parpola also holds that Indus script was invented in 2500 BCE (Parpola, Dani: 1981:118). David indicates to tradition of inscribing on rocks in very old time. The phenomenon of

pertoglyphs combined with inscriptions indicates that the tradition of executing rock carving was already in use when nomadic tribes who lived at the periphery of complex agriculture societies pushed forward into the Indus Valley (David: 2001:771). Later, the tradition of writing system might have been continued, especially in the form of inscriptions, particularly on rocks and pottery from the Vedic period to medieval period. Some samples of inscriptions have also been discovered, inscribed on rocks and ancient bricks from ancient archaeological sites of Sindh, Pakistan.

The symbols of the Indus seals are inscribed at a large scale in the rock art of Sindh combined with depictions of animals and other social and religious representations. Several symbols have become too dim due to rains, climatic change and other natural disasters. Lots of symbols of Indus seal script are not inscribed accurately in rock art of Sindh, comparing to symbols Inscribed on Indus seals. According to my point of view there may be two reasons. First, the inscribing symbol on rock was more difficult than on clay material or such other objects. Secondly, after the collapse of Indus Civilization, Indus script might have been continued but perhaps due to gap the later engraver might have engraved some symbols according to his memory. Therefore, some inaccuracies seem to be appeared in the form of Indus seal symbols into stones. Thus, it has been considered as variant of Indus script.



NFM-Indus Script no: E06-4



NFM-Indus Script no: E06-5

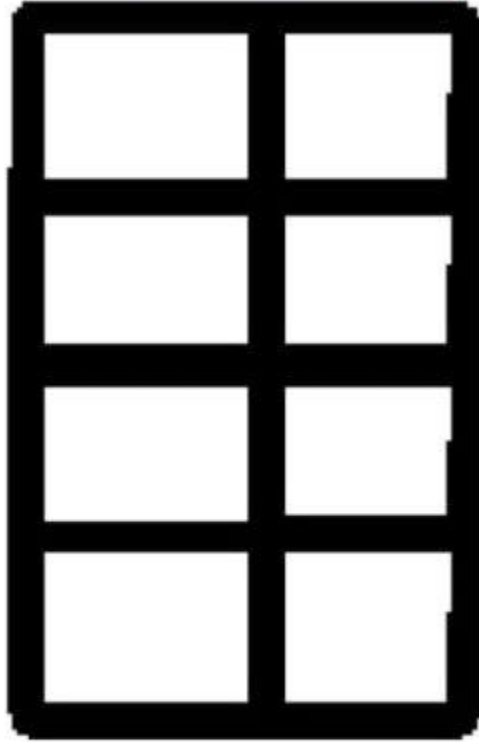
The Indus seal signs inscribed here in stones in rock art of Sindh can be measured as an evidence of linkage of urban society with its remote areas in Sindh during the period of Indus valley civilization. Probably, Indus Script or writing system of Indus valley civilization was prevalent herein towns, villages and distant areas of Sindh during its survival. The historians have declared that more than thousand settlements of Indus civilization have been discovered over an area of some 1.25 million square kilometers, longer than today's Pakistan or the Egyptian and Mesopotamian empires of the third millennium BC (Parpola: 1994:6).

Most examples (around 3,700) of Indus writing come from the excavations of Mohen-Jo-Daro and Harappa but some 60 different sites throughout the Indus Valley have contributed one or more objects with the script (Kenoyer: 1997:70). According to some research scholars, the Indus valley civilization (2600 to 1900 BCE) left behind its undeciphered script on several small, inscribed objects (Yadav: 2013:67). The majority of historians have linked Brahmi with Indus script and its language with earlier Vedic Sanskrit. The language of Indus script is an early Vedic Sanskrit which we may call Gandharic (Richter: 1997: 8). But the history reveals that Aryans are the authors of Rig-Veda and its language is early Sanskrit.

The Vedic culture flourished in the subcontinent in between 1900 to 800 BCE. Vedas have been passed from generation to generation by oral traditions and Scholars differ about the age of composition of Rig-Veda (Sardar: 2007: 52). Here question arises that if Rig-Veda was passed orally to generations then how can we link its language with Indus script or its language with Indus script? There is a gap of centuries between the composition of Rig-Veda and collapse of Indus valley civilization and even there is big gap between period of Rig-Veda and historical record till 4th century BCE. Some scholars have obviously determined that Rig-Veda, the oldest of four, was composed sometime between 1700 to 1100 BCE, codified about 600 BCE and was finally committed to writing in 300 BCE. (Slawitt: 2015:5).

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By Culture Dpt Sindh



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It has been explained that the dating of Rig-Veda has been and likely to remain a matter of contention and reconsideration because as yet little has been uncovered in the material record or in the hymns themselves that allow us to date the period of Rig-Veda hymns (Jamison: 2014:3-5). Ninan's opinion just like supports Slawit's and Jamison's by saying that the bibliographical evidences indicate that the Vedas are written in the Grantha and Nagari scripts and according to tradition Veda Vyasa, a Dravidian, compiled and wrote the Vedas. The Grantha script belongs to the southern group of scripts and Veda Vyasa being

Dravidian would certainly have used it. Since the earliest evidence for Grantha is only in the 5th century AD, the Vedas were written rather late (Ninan: 2018:199).

Consequently, compilation and writing of rig-Veda by a Dravidian in other scripts, it can be supposed that probably having no script of its own; the Vedic Sanskrit might not have been connected with early Vedic Sindhi language and Indus script. Perhaps, a Dravidian might have given preference to Sanskrit because Sanskrit was language of elites. And being elite's language Sanskrit might have influenced Sindhi language as well. Meanwhile, the initial portions of the Persian version include the early history of Sindh prior to Sindhi's connection with Mahabharata heroes (Panikar: 1997:491). The other accounts inform that during the early period of Sindhi literature or even one or two centuries prior to it, the study of Sanskrit literature flourished in Sindh (Datta: 1988:1710).

Some scholars take Indus script to be of Dravidian origin while others believe that it was imported from Sumeria or Egypt. Probably, Indus script has roots in Indo-Aryan languages but as for Sanskrit is concerned, the earliest preserved records of Sanskrit language are in other scripts derived from Brahmi while written records in Brahmi and in Kharosthi date back to 3rd century BCE, strange as it may seem, Sanskrit Language has no script of its own (Benerji: 1989:672). No record has been explored which may prove relationship between Sanskrit and Indus script. Ninan has argued that Buddha was advised to translate his teachings in to the learned man's (Elite's) tongue (language) the "Chandasa". There is no mention of Sanskrit. Buddha refused by preferring the Prakrit. There is not even single reference in any contemporary Buddhist texts to the word Sanskrit. The word Sanskrit occurs for the first time as referring to a language in Ramayana. It is noted that the extant version (in record) of Ramayana (of the epic period) dates only to the centuries AD (Ninan: 2008: 94).

Inverse Indus Script



NFM-Indus Script no: E0A-6



In present days Devanagari is considered as the main script for Sanskrit but Brahmi the most ancient script of India served as a national script for a long (Datta: 1987:143). Renowned historians have also refused that the culture recited in the Rig-Vedic hymns is quite dissimilar from the Indus Civilization (Parpola: 2005:.46). About the relationship between Indus script and Brahmi or Karoshthi, Kenoyer says when they first appeared; these newly invented scripts represented fully developed writing systems with no direct connection to the earlier Indus script (Kenoyer: 1997:78). About Dravidian language, it is mentioned that the Indus Valley writing is not a multilingual system of writing. The writing indicates that this population was literate and spoke a Dravidian language. The study also indicates that the Indus Valley writing was not used to write an Indo-Aryan language, because the Aryans did not arrive in India until after 1600 BC (Winters: 2012:2019).

Kenoyer's assessment can be considered as worth able that the traces of Dravidian words are still found in the southern Indus Valley in the form of river names, (Sindhu or Sindhi?) and many Dravidian loan words are found in ancient Sanskrit, the Indo-Aryan languages of Rig-Veda. After the end of Indus cities, Indo-Aryan languages must have spread throughout the regions once dominated by the Indus Dravidian Language (Kenoyer: 1997:78). However, In this regard, if there was a possibility of minor link between Vedic Sanskrit and Indus script, then up till now Indus script must have been easily deciphered. Most of the opinions have been given that the Indus script was written from right to left and in some instances it is noted that Indus script was written from left to right. I think, while referring Kenoyer is also confused that first line proceeds from right to left and the next line reads left to right (Kenoyer: 1997:72).

Ghosh is also of the same opinion that Indus script writing occurs on a variety of objects found at the site of Indus civilization, the script consisting of individual signs and their variant was in use almost throughout the area of content and during the period of the existence of civilization as an evident from the discovery of objects containing writing script from many sites located over wide area of its spread. The largest numbers of inscribed objects are from Mohen-Jo-Daro. It is generally agreed that direction of the script is right to left; this has also been conclusively demonstrated by scholars. Some of the inscriptions suggest a left-to-right direction (Ghosh: 1990: 360,361).

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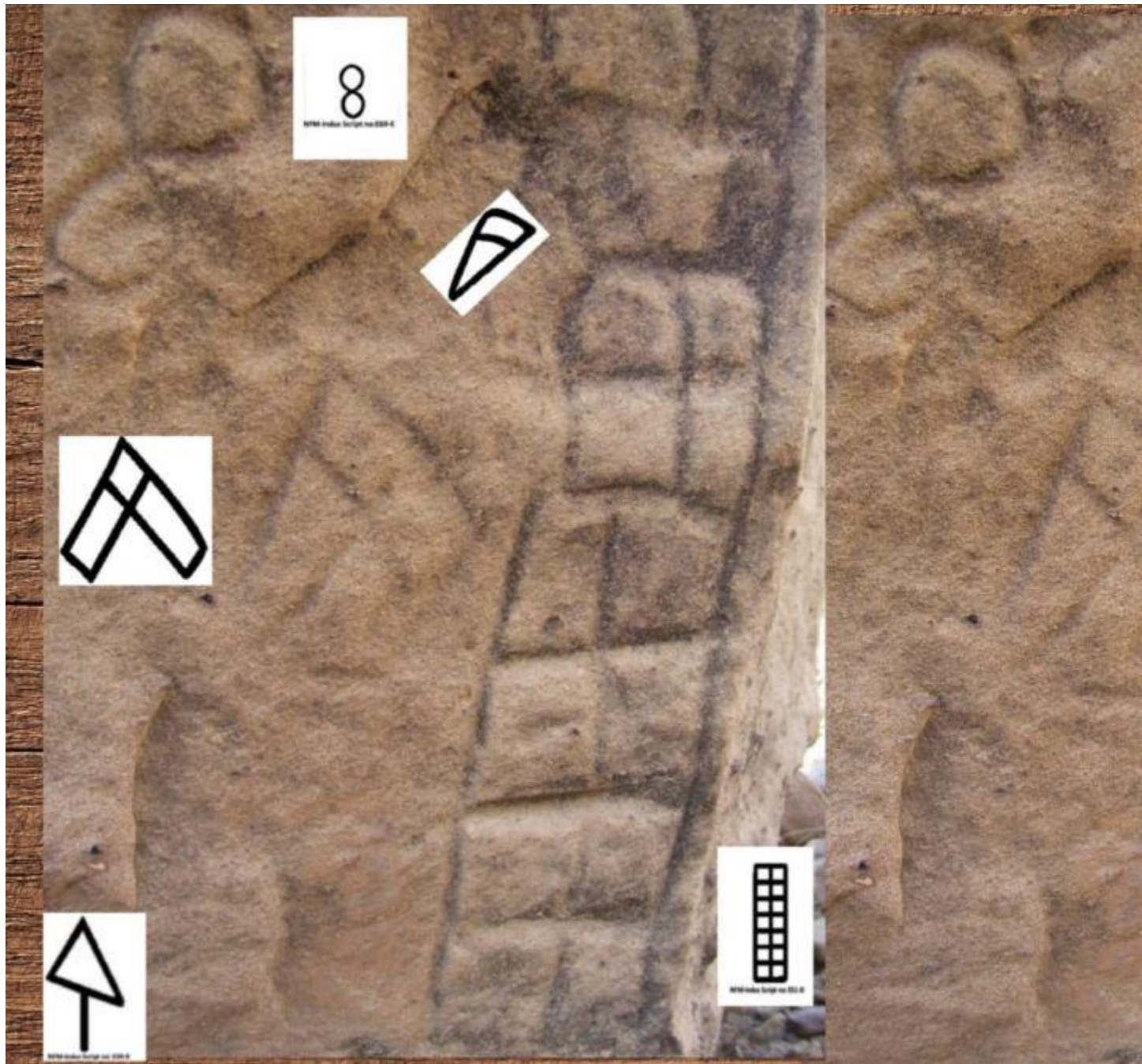


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It has been too supposed that maybe the direction of Indus writing system was from upward to downward or from downward to upward. Because, when we think over the components of compound Indus symbols they are connected either from upward to downward or from

downward to upward. As for the time period, it has been already suggested that comparative study of Sindhi language with other languages and loaned words in ancient literatures may connect Sindhi Language with early Vedic period including Indus script. The sites where the Indus script signs inscribed in stone have been explored are of approximately located at a distance 150 kilometers from MohenJo-Daro.

In the light of inscriptions of Indus seal script and its variant inscribed on rocks herein rock art of Sindh close to Mohen-Jo-Daro, an opinion can be made that probably Indus seal script might have survived unconnectedly from early Sanskrit in the Vedic period and almost certainly, the Indus seal script might have continued up to 5th or 4th century BC (Frawley: 1993:255) in the form of a variant Indus script. Here in the mountain region of Johi, District Dadu the Indus seals can be explored along the routes which led to western countries in past.



The inverse signs of Indus script

Many symbols of Indus seal script together with variant Indus script are inscribed inversely comparing to signs found on Indus seals. Probably, during the carving process the engraver might have Indus seals before him on which inverse signs were carved. As a result, inscriber engraved signs inversely on rock panels. Because, the script stuck on Indus seals might have been seen inverse system of Indus It is also believed that such were actual forms of symbols in ancient writing system of Indus Valley Civilization. Many depictions of same symbols

of Indus script and animals inscribed on Indus seals have also been discovered in which animals and signs have obverse or inverse directions. However, I am of the opinion that conceivably usage of obverse and inverse characters was prevalent in writing system of Indus Valley Civilization.

The variant of Indus script

The term variant Indus script has been used for such script which is some different from Indus seal script and as well as Indus seal script inscribed in rock art of Sindh. The variant Indus script is inscribed in rock art of Sindh in a large quantity. It resembles only to the Indus script. Although, some characters of early Brahmi Kharosthi and Pali are mixed with it which might have been loaned from Indus script but it is quite dissimilar to these scripts. The variant Indus script does not match by all means with early Brahmi, Kharosthi and other Sanskritic scripts of India. It is already discussed that there is probability that after the fall down or vanishing of Indus valley civilization, Indus script continued in other towns, villages and far-away regions of Indus valley civilization. Discussing gradual disappearance of urban life of Indus civilization the historians are of the opinion that the Indus civilization came into an end around 2600-1900 BCE but some latest and definitely recognized samples of Indus script found near Mumbai, belong to 1800 BCE (Parpola: 2015:22).

It points towards the continuity of Indus script in later periods. The variant Indus script is inscribed close by the Indus seal script in the rock art of Sindh. It also appears that there may have been one or more Early Indus Scripts (Kenoyer: 1997:69) and numerous writing systems may have been invented by individual spiritual leaders to record myths or by merchants to keep track of their goods (Kenoyer: 1997:70). This opinion clarifies that variant Indus script may be another form of Indus script. Sharma describes that the load bearer sign of Indus script has 57 variants and some authors have deciphered it as name 'Bharat' who was perhaps name of king of Indus valley empire (Sharma: 2000:59). The opinions of scholars support us on the topic of variance of Indus script and invented various forms of Indus script. The sites of rock art in Khirthar Range, Sindh, Pakistan which are rich in inscriptions of Indus seal script and variant Indus script are not far from Mohen-Jo-Daro. These are situated towards west-south of the great city of Indus Valley Civilization. It seems the area was connected with great city of Indus valley civilization. Probably, trading caravans were used to travel through the trade routes leading from this mountainous region from Indus Civilization to the cities of Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt and Sumerian civilization. And trade caravans might have halted here in mountainous area. It is already conversed that many ancient trade routes used to lead from Sindh to western countries in ancient times from this region (Shedai: 2008:48). The engravers might have observed Indus seals and thus they inscribed the signs of Indus seal and variant Indus script etched in stone.



NFM-Indus Script no:E69-E



Probably, from Indus Valley civilization to Vedic era the Indus script seems to be continued here in this region of Sindh. This variant Indus script is not another form Indus script and variance appeared in later periods then it is believed that the variant Indus script developed or evolved directly from Indus seal script. As a result, variance appeared during evolution and development. After the end of Indus cities, Indo-Aryan language must have spread throughout the regions one dominated by the Indus-Dravidian language (Kenoyer: 1997: 78). It is also proposed that the Indus script was used in parts of India as late as 500 BCE thus showing its continuity and usage with probably Indo-Aryan languages (Frawley: 1993:255). Winters says that it would appear that they (Dravidians) introduced writing to

the Indus Valley. They continued to use this writing on their pottery in South India and later punch-marked coins. This is supported by the discovery of writing in South India dating back to before 600 BC (Winters: 2012:2019) Probably, the Indus script or its variant script continued up to Buddhist period during 4th century BCE in Sindh and afterward it was replaced by the usage of newly evolved Brahmi, Kharosthi and other Indian scripts.

Inscribed more than one symbol at one place

Herein Khirthar mountain range the symbols are inscribed at one place close to each other but these are not etched in proper sequence like sequence of Indus script symbols on Indus seals. To me, the reason seems that inscribing on rock similar to seal was too difficult. Therefore the inscribers inscribed the symbols close to each other.

As for decipherment of Indus Script, there is controversy over it. No attempt of any scholar of the world has become completely successful to decipher the script yet. Maybe, the inscriptions of Indus seal script in rock art of Sindh may provide the Rosetta stone plate which may become helpful to decipher Indus script. I have tried to provide evidences of etched symbols of Indus Script etched in stones in rock art of Sindh. Concerning the ancientness of etched symbols of Indus Script in stones herein stones, it is believed that these symbols were etched in stones from Bronze Age including early Iron Age.

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