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## THE SECRET OF INDUS VALLEY SEALS UNSEALED

*Abstract: Belief in goddesses helping mothers to have healthy and numerous offspring covered vast expanses of Europe and Middle East during several million years from the Neolithic to the period of early Christianity. In addition to material finds, this has been proven by reading many inscriptions from Lepenski Vir, Vinča, Byblos, and the territories of the present Portugal, France, Ukraine, and Russia, all written in a kind of Vinča ideographic/logographic script. Based on the previous readings of Vinča script, the article presents an interpretation of a large number of seals from Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa made in the third millennium BC by members of the Proto-Indian civilisation.*

*Key words: Indus Valley script, Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, Vinča script, Byblos “pseudo-hieroglyphic” script, ideogram, prayer, goddess.*

*Writing was for centuries the property of a priestly or scribal caste in a domain of occult powers, spells, and incantations.*

Dwight Bolinger *Aspects of Language* (1975: p. 160)

### 1. Introduction

The ancient script from the Indus Valley (now in Pakistan), dating from 2600 to approximately 1900 BC, discovered by Sir A. Cunningham in 1868, has been one among several undeciphered scripts in the world in spite of more than a hundred published attempts by professional scholars and amateurs. It was used by Proto-Dravidians, with an inventory of more than 400 sign types on 3,500 seals made of steatite and other material, intended to be impressed in wet clay, written

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on small tablets, pottery, graffiti, and other surfaces. Seal inscriptions are usually accompanied by images of an animal (unicorn or antelope, rhinoceros, bison, bird, zebu, gharial (crocodile), elephant, tiger, snake, tortoise, fish, markhor goat, deer, and most frequently bull/buffalo), which was possibly an avatar, and sometimes of a plant (among them the peepul tree and datura). Animals that accompany most seals may have had the totem status and/or may have been offerings.

According to one view, the Proto-Dravidians settled in India coming from the northwest in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC (Kristal, 1996: p. 308). The territory they occupied had been the scene of different cultures before they arrived (Charles-Picard, 1974: p. 380). The Indus civilisation, using copper-bronze technology and a standard system of weights and measures, had its centres in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. It excelled in town-planning including granaries, public buildings and drainage systems. Around 2000 BC with the strength of their weapons the Aryans began conquering more numerous Dravidians and during the next thousand years drove them to the south, but adopted much of their culture. Copious traces of the original Dravidian faith can be found in the subsequent Indian religion. For instance, rituals dedicated to Mother Earth in present-day India follow the veneration of Mother Earth Goddess in the Indus civilisation (Žbikovski, 1980: pp. 29–30). A strange figure from the Indus Valley of a god surrounded by animals may be a forerunner of Siva (Charles-Picard, 1974: p. 381). Goddesses represented on some seals quite resemble figures of Siva's wife (Iščezle civilizacije, 2009: p. 53).

The inhabitants of the Indus Valley conducted intense sea and land trade with surrounding countries, which in fact led a lot of researchers to believe that the inscriptions had been used as trademarks or names of products. Moreover, Linear B tablets and the Sumerian cuneiform script were of a commercial nature. As they were predominantly syllabic, just as later written languages of India, including the major Dravidian language Tamil, the majority of investigators into the Indus script believe that it also must be syllabic. However, the signs are too numerous to form a syllabary.<sup>2</sup> The fact that there are few duplicate Indus inscriptions<sup>3</sup> prompted investigators to exclude the possibility of their religious or descriptive use, and to believe that they were used in trade, to stamp signatures of the owners or to issue authorisation (Piggott, 1969: pp. 52–53, 234, 237). On the contrary,

<sup>2</sup> A long list of Indus signs can be found at <http://www.proel.org>, reproduced in Deretić/Antić, 2009: 273. Possehl (1996) gives a historical perspective on the study of the Indus writing system carried out by all scholars up to 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Deretić/Antić 2009: 274 present Genadiy Grinevich's table of these signs as representing syllables, basing his interpretation on Proto-Slavic although the language of the Indus people was not Indo-European.

the uniqueness of the inscriptions excludes the possibility that they were used for mercantile purpose because there could not have been 400 different kinds of goods each time, and it would be strange to have a record of such a large variety of owners/traders, without more occurrences of the same particular ones. The multitude of unique occurrences can indicate varied messages couched in terms of a restricted number of religious terms,<sup>4</sup> and some researchers do believe that the inscriptions functioned as tokens of votive offerings or of visits to temples. Animals accompanying inscriptions should be taken for incarnations of the spiritual world rather than for objects of merchandise. Even today some of them (cows, elephants, monkeys) are held sacred and are honoured in India.

## 2. Method

From the very first moment the present author saw Indus symbols it was obvious what they stood for as the similarity with Vinča eidograms (signs halfway between pictograms and ideograms) was striking. Harald Haarmann (2007:p.960) also finds that the Vinča symbols are closest to the elementary signs of the Indus script, supporting Parpola's conclusion (1986:p.408, in Haarmann 2007:p.98) that its individual signs stand for complete words with (almost) no indication of grammar elements. Farmer, Sproat and Witzel (2004:pp.38–39) also noticed the resemblance of Indus seals with the system of non-phonetic symbols from the Neolithic Vinča culture. "Inscribed Indus objects were considerably more sophisticated than Vinča inscriptions [...]. Some of those parallels include the relative standardisation of a small core of signs over large geographical areas; the inclusion beyond that core of hundreds unique or rare symbols; evidence in both systems of apparent ligaturing and sign clustering; suggestions of ritual uses of some classes of symbols; and the sudden disappearance of both systems, after centuries of relative stability, in periods of apparent social upheavals" (2004:p.39). However, these authors deny both systems the status of a proto-script because they do not reflect speech. This view is not tenable because modern Chinese ideographs, which serve the multilingual function of being read in different ways by various language speakers in China and, as suggested by Farmer et al. (2004:p.22), in the Indus civilisation as well, would have to be dismissed as a script on the same basis. The Indus script *is* a pre-script because its signs represent a chain of thoughts, creating invocatory messages in vertical communication with gods, as will be shown forthwith. Otherwise, the three scholars had a deep insight into the

<sup>4</sup>There are hundreds of different messages and only rare instances of identical ones, e.g. M – 511 and M – 512.

real nature of the inscriptions. They took into account the brevity of texts (the longest in the Indus culture has 17 symbols (according to Wikipedia 34 on a copper plate) the average length being 4.6 signs per inscription (Farmer et al., 2004:p.22), the fact that most high-frequency signs rarely repeat in single inscriptions (2004:p.30), the phenomenon that the percentages of unique signs increases with new inscriptions cropping up (2004:p.36), and the absence of texts on durable goods (2004:p.26). They suggested that some rare symbols can be classified as complex signs, their sense being deducible from the more basic components. They presume that at least some large symbols represented deities who were the intended recipients of offerings in the pots found, and believe that the most likely function of Indus symbols “was to associate individuals, families, clans, offices, cities, festivals, or professions, etc., with specific gods or their celestial correspondents, partly for identification purposes and partly to draw down whatever magic was accessible through those gods’ symbols”. They refuse to recognise that the symbols had permanent values in all inscriptions and all periods (2004:p.43) in spite of the fact that the signs reflected a religious view lasting for thousands of years.

The Indus civilisation, like that of Vinča, produced numerous terracotta mother goddess figurines as well as other plump female figurines with broad hips and ample breasts, which indicates that both communities practised a fertility cult (Charles-Picard, 1974:pp.379–380). (There is a particularly impressive Indus figure of Mother Goddess with elaborate headgear). The remains of this religious belief can be found in the fact that “[s]ome of the Dravidian languages of southern India lump females with inanimate objects into an ‘inferior’ gender, but place goddesses with males in a ‘superior’ caste” (Pei, 1960:p.105). The two civilisations share the swastika, a symbol of the life-giving Sun, as well as most other symbols. Both cultures left no evidence of warfare (Robinson,p.2015).

Dating Vinča inscriptions to the period from 6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> millennia BC indicates that the Indus script originated from, or was influenced by, migrating people from the Balkans, the cradle of the Vinča culture, but the actual course of events has been impossible to ascertain so far.

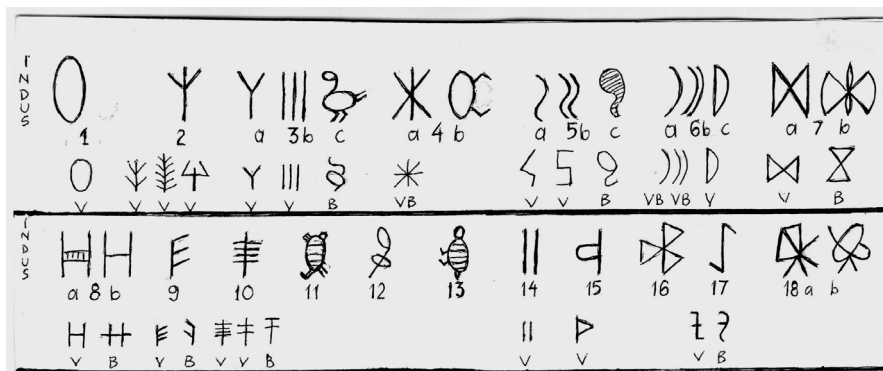
There are also numerous differences. Unlike members of the Vinča culture, the Indus people buried their dead (Iščezle civilizacije, 2009:p.50), but during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium cremated them, and judging by the objects placed in tombs (copper rings, necklaces, mirrors, jugs filled with food and drink), believed in an afterlife. According to archaeological finds, Indus valley people consumed chicken, which was not the case in Vinča, where birds were held sacred. While in the Vinča civilisation sexuality served the primary, if not exclusive purpose of reproduction, a

nude female figure in a provocative stance suggests that the Indus civilisation valued sexuality highly for its eroticism. This continued into later periods. “In India a cult of feminine energy, called *siakti*, was widespread. [...]. Rites associated with that cult were full of erotic elements [...]” (Žbikovski, 1980:p.68). There are numerous sexual associations accompanying texts. One of the seals (M-539) pictures a hare, the animal famous for procreativity. The datura, a plant represented on the seals is known to be an aphrodisiac (Džejms/Torp, 2002:pp.106,166), just like the rhinoceros’s horn, while the unicorn’s horn is a symbol of the phallus (Chevalier/Gheerbrant, 1983: s. v. *jednorog (unicorn)*)).

The masculine element in the Indus Valley played a more important role than in Vinča. Thus, a stone sculpture shows a bearded man with trefoils on his cloak and another one a horned male deity. Triads of this kind may symbolise the birth-life-death cycle in the manner of Siva who later became a deity of fertility and destruction. Another figure, surrounded by animals and seated in the lotus position, with enormous horns, erect penis and prominent testicles, has been claimed to be a prototype of Siva.

Not only the Indus script, but also the Byblos “pseudo-hieroglyphic” script manifests considerable likeness to the Vinča template, though both bear slightly less similarity to the original source than European post-Vinča inscriptions. Hrozný (1945) suggested relationship between the Byblos and a variety of scripts, including the Indus script (Woudhuizen, 2008:p.692). All three pre-scripts contain occasional synonyms, which are mostly variants of a single type (Hlebec, 2017:pp.240–250; Hlebec, 2022:pp.17–20). No complete uniformity within and between them can be expected considering the long usage and the vast area, as well as the probable lack of standardising authority.

### 3. Interpretation



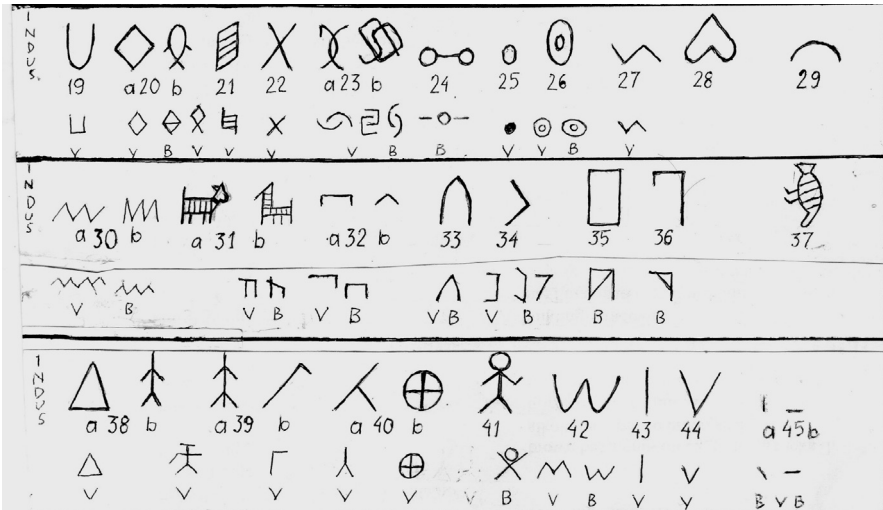


Table 1. Basic signs

V = Vinča script B = Byblos “pseudo-hieroglyphic” script

1 A simple large oval is the representation of a goddess. It often occurs with the symbol of a particular goddess inside. The circle in general served as a defence against evils that attack human communities. In the Byblos script, the Great Mother Goddess and her Daughter are signalled by circles to which “legs” and “tufts” or “ears” are added. The Silver Foil from Viminatium is full of encircled signs giving an air of holiness. Almond-shaped *mandorla* encircles holy symbols (Chevalier/Gheerbrant, 1983: s. v. *mačka* (*cat*)). H. Haarmann’s O[ld] E[urope] 185 from the Vinča symbolism is an oval, recurring as OE 187 that encircles a “fence” and stands for the goddess of vegetation (<http://www.prehistory.it/>). A single oval is shown in DS 167 of “Shan” Winn’s Vinča list of signs and symbols (Winn 1981; partly reproduced in Deretić/Antić, 2009:pp.140–145).

2 The three-pronged fork for the ‘Great Mother Goddess’ corresponds to similar Vinča ideograms. In the Indus script remained only two branches of the original fir-tree symbol for this supreme goddess, and in this respect, it is more like the Mauro Spelio variant from Crete (the last v in the row), which imitates the form of a goddess with raised arms.

3 Strangely enough, three dissimilar signs refer to one and the same, but very important avatar – the Bird Goddess. The last one is that obviously and has its counterpart in Byblos, (a) may be a very simplified design of a bird with wings spread and (b) is an abstract ideogram. In Vinča, the two latter graphemes also represented the Bird Goddess.

4 Both (a) and (b) derive from a vision of the frog, (a) simplified but also sometimes placed inside an oval to emphasise divinity, and (b) hieroglyph-like, turned for 90° to save space and to be in harmony with other oval shapes. Variant (a) is the representation of the goddess of transformation, an epithet of Moon Goddess (as H – 10 and H – 45 suggest), occurring in the Vinča Sitovo inscription, meaning ‘Goddess of Fertility’. A similar “star” stood for the Great Mother Goddess in post-Vinča and is equivalent to C 1 in the Maurice Dunand’s table of the Byblos signs (Deretić/Antić 2009:p.297), but is not present in the tablets analysed in Hlebec 2022. (b) is probably Goddess of Fertility, as M – 707 and M – 808 indicate. In Byblos, the goddess of fertility was symbolised by the glass-hour sign (“bee”). Variants (a) and (b) may occur in the same inscription (as in M – 808), so that their synonymy is not likely.

5 The goddess of new life is manifested in the snake, (c) more clearly than (a) and (b), and is matched with similar signs in Vinča and Byblos.

6 Crescents and the semicircle are transparent symbols of the Moon Goddess in all three cultures.

7 A simple drawing of a butterfly and the “labrys” sign stood for goddess of transformation, just like in Vinča. In the Indus script this goddess had two manifestations – 4b and 7.

8 The H – sign is a minimal drawing of plants with roots and it refers to the goddess of growth. It is present in Vinča and, with a longer horizontal line, in Byblos.

9 This is the first Vinča symbol interpreted correctly ever, by Prof. Emeritus Toby Griffen (2007:p.14) and is a contiguous representation of the bear goddess by her paw.

10 Following the Vinča and Byblos practice, the goddess of vegetation is symbolised by a stylised plant.

11 This hieroglyph may stand for a cat, in India later known as the invoker of rain (Chevalier/Gheerbrant, 1983, s.v. *mačka* (cat)).

12 The drawing suggests a leafy branch, so it might be synonymous with either (8) or (10).

13 The turtle as an avatar.

14 The same as the Vinča generic symbol of a birth goddess.

15 A profile of a bird, who connects man with the heavens. The meaning is ‘communication with goddesses’.

16 Probably a compound sign; see the mirror-like variant of 72.

17 Even more simplified than the corresponding signs in Vinča and Byblos: an arm as an agent of giving. Therefore, the meaning is ‘give’.

18 A walking creature conveying the meaning 'bring', possibly the egret, believed to be the bringer of babies, like the stork in other regions of the world (Chevalier/Gheerbrant, 1983, s.v. *roda* (*stork*)).

19 The symbol inspired by a vessel to hold food and water imitates the elongated shape of ceremonial vessels made of terracotta from the Indus culture. The sharp edges from the original Vinča symbol became rounded following the general tendency to ovality. The meaning is 'life'.

20 Both (a) and (b) designate great fertility embodied in the fish, (a) being an extremely simplified version of (b).

21 A vision of ladders, leading to heavens and 'bliss'.

22 Crossing of a male and a female in a sexual act.

23 Another sign of interconnection, 'a happy union of a man and woman', corresponding to yin and yang.

24 Fertilisation is represented as two seeds in the soil. In the Byblos "pseudo-hieroglyphic" script the same idea is expressed by a single circle flanked by two dashes (Hlebec, 2022:p.16, # 56).

25 A small-sized oval, distinct from 16 plays the role of a seed.

26 The "watchful eye" follows the fashion of upright ovals, unlike its cognates in Vinča and Byblos. The image of the eye is a symbol of watching and protection.

27 Existing only in combination with 32a overhead, this serpentine sign indicates new life, motivated by a snake after moulting.

28 The heart-shaped symbol is turned upside-down in comparison with the modern usage. In India the heart is believed to be Brahma's abode from which time cycles start (Chevalier/Gheerbrant, 1983, s.v. *trokut* (*triangle*)), here probably connoting the beginning of creation.

29 Possibly a variant of 6a.

30 Like in Byblos, the wavy lines indicate water that 'brings'. The symbol is as old as the Lepenski Vir culture.

31 Variant pictographs of the dog as 'protection'.

32 Both the (a) "flat hat" and (b) "pointed hat" sign denote protection.

33 A slightly rounded version of a "horn" as a symbol of abundance. Quite frequent is a sharp-angled version, also occurring in Vinča and Byblos. Futhark, the Germanic runic script, which also stems from the Vinča script (Hlebec, 2022:pp.55–56), had the two versions, too (Beekes, 1995:p.346).

34 To be distinguished from 6a, this sign refers to transformation, the moon being the model.

35 The square represents a house.



36 A part of a house, a corner.

37 Perhaps a pictogram of a cat (goddess of rain), with a variant manifesting two ears instead of the head and a tail turned to the right.

38 The triangle, the Vinča sign for a woman, often replaced by a humanlike figure (DS 210 of “Shan” Winn’s classification, the extension of the arm denoting a child).

39 (a) is the same as 38b except for a male extension between the legs. The alternative symbol (b) for a male has its predecessor in Vinča.

40, 41 The three signs refer to man in general. The big-headed 41 may have an additional meaning.

42 The “M” sign for a woman in childbirth echoes the Byblos script and, when inverted as in M - 1271, mimics Vinča.

43 A long vertical line for ‘mother’ has a long-standing tradition.

44 The deified woman, symbolised by the “V” sign, can be traced to Lepenski Vir.

45 A single stroke refers to a ‘child’. When doubled or (many times) multiplied, it motivationally means ‘([very] many) children’. It is usually in a vertical position, but sometimes can be found horizontal or slanted. Strokes and notches for ‘children’ in the original Vinča script also vary their stance.

The restricted choice of basic signs produces monotonous messages, but this monotony dispenses with the necessity to have symbols for abstract grammar words. Relations between entities are simple and predictable: deities are invoked to help women bear children, children are desiderata, and home is the place where children are born. The only actions are those of giving, helping, protection, and birth. An analogous system of pictograms could be devised to express some modern prayers for illiterate believers. For instance, “Hear my cry, O God; attend to my prayer” (Psalm 61:1) could be communicated by a sequence of pictures: symbol of God + ear + praying person with the open mouth + God + eye + hands clasped in prayer, and “Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck” (Psalm 69: 1) by a head in water + symbol of God + a hand throwing a lifebelt. This practice was even more easily performed in less sophisticated religious systems in the past. On the other hand, there are also a great number of compound signs, ligatures, and modified versions, which can be read by combining their individual meanings, as well as a few unique signs, “singletons”, whose meanings are sometimes rather obscure. Occurrences of ligatures are much more numerous than those of simple symbols.

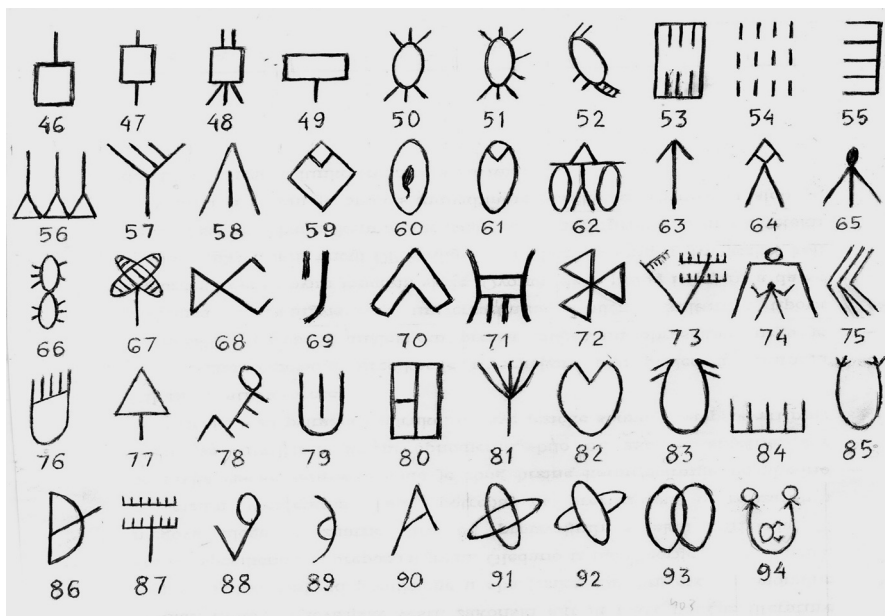


Table 2. Compound signs

46 = 35 + 43; 'mothers in homes'.

47 = 35 + 45a + 45a; 'children in homes'.

48 = 33 with 45a for 'child' in the middle + 2 x 45a on top + 35; 'abundance of children in homes'.

49 = horizontal 35 = 43; 'mothers in homes'.

50 = 1 + 2 x 3 strokes for 'children', meaning 'goddess of children'.

51 = 1 + 2 x 3 strokes + 2 strokes added, meaning 'goddess of many children'.

52 = 1 + strokes added on top, on the left-hand side and at the "tail", meaning 'Goddess of Many Children', probably depicting an animal avatar.

53 = 35 + 2 x 3 vertical strikes on top and at the bottom; 'many children in homes'.

54 = three rows of four 45a's one above another; 'a lot of children'.

55 = 5 x 45b connected with 43; 'children for the mother', or, more precise, 'siblings for the mother'.

56 = 3 x 43 with 38a; 'women as mothers'.

57 = 3a with two slanted strokes; 'Bird Goddess with her children'.

58 = a sharp 33 with 43 inside; 'abundance for mothers'.

59 = 20a + 44; 'great fertility of deified woman'.

60 = 5c inside 1; 'Goddess of New Life'.

- 61 = 44 inside and at the top of 1; 'deified woman like a goddess'.  
62 = modified 38b flanked by 1 and topped by 32b 'protect(ed) mother supported by goddess'.  
63 = 32b + 43; 'protect(ed) mother'.  
64 = 32b + 44 + "legs" of 38b (cf. "legs" in 18); 'protect a deified woman'.  
65 = lower part of 39a + 25; 'inseminating male'.  
66 = Two joined seeds 25 with strokes for 'children'; 'insemination for children'.  
67 = 91 shaded with lines + 43; 'goddesses united, [give] many children to mothers'.  
68 = 22 + 43 + strokes; 'sexual acts for mothers to have children'.  
69 A compound sign linking 'child' (45a) with a "cuddling" "J" sign, jointly meaning 'child-caring'; and most frequently followed by a name of a goddess.  
70 = very thick sharp-angled 33, for 'very great abundance', usually shaded with lines for 'of children' to be distinguished from a similarly shaped 28.  
71 = 8a with 2 x 45a for 'children' added at the bottom; 'Goddess of Growth with her children'.  
72 = 4a with three strokes; 'Goddess of transformation with her children'.  
73 = 44 + 2 x 84 + 43 with strokes; 'deified woman with many mother's siblings of a childed mother'.  
74 = image of a praying woman inside an enlarged 32a + 25 on top; 'for praying women secure insemination'.  
75 = multiplied 34 in either direction 'create' or 'transform', or, more precisely 'do the great transformation/creation'.  
76 = 19 + 84; 'lives of many children of a mother with her children'.  
77 = 38a + 43; 'woman as mother'.  
78 = 33 + 55 + 25; 'sexual potency (seed) for abundancy of mother's siblings'. Interestingly, this ligature produces an image of a monkey. "In India, sterile women take off their clothes and kiss a statue of *hanuman*, the sacred monkey, in order to become fertile" (Chevalier/Gheerbrant, 1983, s.v. *majmun* (*monkey*), the sentence translated by the author of this article.)  
79 = 19 + 43; 'life of a mother'.  
80 = 35 + 43 + 45b; 'mother at home with a child'.  
81 = 2 + 2 x 45a for 'child'; 'Great Mother Goddess with her children'.  
82 = 1 + 44; 'deified woman'.  
83 = 19 + 2 x 2 x 45b; 'life of children'. Being the essential notion and the purpose of all messages, this is the most frequent sign, usually occurring at the beginning of prayers.

84 = a horizontal 43 with strokes; 'mother with her children'.

85 = Two extremely simplified raised arms incorporated in 19 for 'abundance'; 'give [abundance]'.

86 = 6c + slanted 43; 'Moon Goddess as a mother'.

87 = 2 x 84 + 43; 'mother with her numerous children'.

88 = 44 + 25; 'deified woman like a goddess'.

89 = 6a extended by c to refer to a 'pregnant Moon Goddess'. The same symbol with a thick crescent appears as the Egyptian pictogram 'moon' (Algeo/Pyles, 1966:p.29).

90 = The metaphorical meaning 'hearth' of this simple but infrequent sign is based on a slightly modified Vinča sign for a fire stack of logs and branches. It is also found surrounded by strokes with ΠΠ at the end of the shorter arm ('children in homes'), and within a "diamond" 59, meaning 'great fertility in homes'.

91 = The two goddess signs crossing each other occur only once in the whole corpus, as part of the K - 15 inscription (reproduced in Farmer et al., 2004: p. 38). The grapheme 91 is immediately followed by 92, where one goddess sign stands in the background. 91 may refer to 'goddesses united in action' and 92 to 'goddesses acting one by one'. 93 should be synonymous with 91.

94 = 4b with arrows 'leading to' two "seeds" 25; 'Goddess of fertility leading to insemination'.

The accumulation of (near-)synonyms in our interpretation of the Indus inscriptions is not surprising considering the fact that cohesion in language is made by means of repetition, which sometimes passes into redundancy.

Obviously, it would be futile to attempt to reconstruct the actual language of the Indus Valley texts because they consist of ideograms/logograms, legible in any language if the reader is familiar with their meanings. We presume that the language is Proto-Dravidian and the only help that the seals could provide may be concerning word order and the semantic class of words. Dravidian languages, nowadays spoken by over 160 million speakers, are agglutinative, with many clitics, and the verb is normally at the end of its clause. Actually, ideograms identified as 'give', 'secure', 'bring', and 'protect' in M - 682, M - 713, M - 735, M - 1262, M - 1271, and H - 46, do occur in such a position (also in M - 819 if the reading should proceed in the opposite direction), but not in M - 735, M - 741, M - 1390, and H - 22.

The following 28 inscriptions will be read according to the glossaries in Tables 1 and 2. Drawings are meant to reproduce impressions rather than seals. Inscriptions are marked by codes as in Koskenniemi/Parpola (1979) and Joshi/Parpola (1987), and the letters refer to Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa.

 M-628	 M-629		
 M-682	 M-707		
 M-713	 M-727	 M-747	 M-753
 M-756	 M-769	 M-777	
 M-783	 M-796	 M-813	
 M-828	 M-834	 M-855	
 M-1262	 M-1271	 M-1390	
 H-7	 H-10		
 H-22	 H-43	 H-45	
 H-49	 H-135	 H-580	

Table 3. A sample of inscriptions

M – 628 [Give] lives of children, o, Goddess of transformation, and great fertility for children create by means of sexual acts, of sexual acts for mothers to have many children!

M – 629 Enable (Protect) sexual acts for lives of children and sexual potency for abundance of many children, great fertility for many children, o, Goddess of Regeneration, for children, and great fertility of the deified women!

M – 682 [Give] lives of children, o, Goddess of Regeneration, and great fertility of mothers for children create, of women as mothers, of deified women!

M – 707 Lives of children give, for children great fertility of their mothers, mothers with their children, o, Goddess of Fertility and Great Mother Goddess!

M – 713 Great fertility for children, o, Great Mother Goddess, and lives of very many children (lit. many children children) to deified women give!

M – 727 [Give] lives of children to deified women, to mothers with very many children (lit. 'many children children'), o, Goddess of transformation!

M – 747 O, Goddess of Fertility, [let] mothers be deified women, o, Goddess of Regeneration!

M – 753 [Let] women be mothers, o, Bird Goddess, [give] lives of fertilised mothers, o, Bear Goddess!

M – 756 [Give] lives of children for deified women through sexual potency for abundance of children, of children, o, Goddess of Great Fertility, for mothers!

M – 769 For women as mothers, o, protecting Bird Goddess, protect (enable) great fertility, great fertility, [you] goddess of birth, of mothers with their children'!

M – 777 To mothers supported (surrounded) by goddesses, to women as mothers, enable great fertility for children through sexual acts of mothers to get children!

M – 783 Women protected by goddesses, become mothers of children, of children through fertility of deified women!

M – 796 Life of mothers bring by means of messages to goddesses!

M – 813 [Give] fertility for deified women to get children, for mothers in homes, o, Great Mother Goddess, through protection for women by goddesses!

M – 828 O, joined goddesses of birth [give] plenty of children for many mothers (lit. 'for mothers for mothers') in homes!

M – 834 [Give] fertility for deified women to have children, o, Moon Goddess, for mothers in homes, o, Great Mother Goddess, for women protected by goddesses!

M – 855 [Give] lives through sexual acts, o, fertilised goddess, to children for mothers in homes, o, Great Mother Goddess and the fertilised goddess Bird Goddess!

M – 1262 Divinely inspired sexual acts for mothers to get children do secure!

M – 1271 Siblings for the mother protect, o, Goddess of transformation with your children, [and give] abundance of children in homes. To women in childbirth for homes with many children (inverted 42 + 35 + several 45a's), abundance of children, o, pregnant Moon Goddess bring!

M – 1390 Siblings for mothers (a variant of 55) give through sexual acts for children!

H – 7 O, pregnant Moon Goddess, by means of in-home sexual acts for getting children, o, you, inseminated Goddess of transformation, do the transformation like the Moon does (6a + mirror-image 34)!

H – 10 O, Goddess of transformation, do transform mothers in homes with many children (repetition by various means) into women connected to the Moon Goddess with her children for motherhood! (A 6c crossed by a horizontal line has been recorded as DS 164 of “Shan” Winn’s table.)

H – 22 Lives of children create (transform) for mothers in homes with a lot of children, many children for women connected with the pregnant Moon Goddess for motherhood to start great creation (2 x 28)!

H – 43 O, Bird Goddess with your children, [let] deified women through sexual acts be a birth goddess!

H – 45 To women [give] lives of children, o, Moon Goddess, to deified women, o, Moon Goddess with your children, Goddess of transformation!

H – 49 Let many mothers in homes [have] children through sexual acts of mothers for children, o, Bird Goddess! (The repeated compound sign that consists of a rectangular with a grid representing mothers in homes with children has been classified as Vinča DS 163 by “Shan” Winn.)

H – 135 [Give] lives of children, o, Bear Goddess, for mothers with many children, through inseminated fertility for children, o, Bear Goddess, for children, fertility of deified women!

H – 580 [Give] lives of children, o, Goddess of New Life together with Moon Goddess in her phases (a variant of 5 depicted as a legged reptile flanked by crescents) in homes for mothers with many children through sexual acts!

The following 24 inscriptions will be read and analysed providing identification numbers from Tables 1 and 2.

M – 276 To women as mothers (77), o, Bird Goddess (3b), [give] lives of mothers (79) through sexual potency for abundancy of children (78)!

M – 278 To mothers in homes with children (80), o, Great Mother Goddess with your children' (81), [give] a lot of children (4 x 45a + 2 x 45a) of deified women (82)!

M – 327 [Give] lives of children (83), of protected children (2 x 32 + 2 x 45a below), children (2 x 45a) through great fertility of deified women (59)!

M – 638 [Give] lives of children (83) abundantly for deified women (70 + 44 at top of 70), for mothers with many children (3 x 84 one on top of another), and great fertility (20b with a stroke for 'child' added at the sides), great fertility enable (protect) (20b + 32b) for lives of many children (83 + 3 x 45a), lives of children (83) to mothers in homes (46)!

M – 651 O, Goddess of transformation (4a) of children (2 x 45a), [give] great fertility for children (20b with a stroke for 'child' added at the sides), great fertility (20b) to all mothers (4 x 43)!

M – 672 [Give] lives of children (83), o, Bird Goddess with your children (57), for mothers in homes (46) and protect great fertility (20b + 32b above)!

M – 682 Sexual acts (thick 22) for begetting children (a slanted stroke and 45a), o, goddess of many children (52), give (17). [Give] sexual acts (thick 22) for great fertility for children (20b with a stroke for 'child' added at the sides), sexual acts (thick 22), o, Bird Goddess (3a) and Great Mother Goddess (2 in an oval), to mothers (43)!

M – 710 To all mothers (4 x 43), o, Great Mother Goddess (2), [give] many mothers' siblings (55)!

M – 720 [Give] abundance for mothers (58) of children's lives (83), o, Moon Goddess (6a), and great fertility (20b), [you] birth goddess (14), for children (2 x 45a) through great fertility of deified women (59)!

M – 723 [Give] great fertility of deified women (59) for children (2 x 45a), o, birth goddess (14), great fertility (20b), protected fertility for children (20b with 32 above), for children in homes (47); to women as mothers (56) [give] lives of children! (83)

M – 724 [Give, o], Great Mother Goddess (2), lives of many children of a mother with her children (76), insemination (25) for children (2 x 45a) and great fertility for deified women (59)!

M – 735 Lives of children (83) give (85) and protect great fertility (20b with 32b above) of children (2 x 45a), o, Great Mother Goddess (2), for women (38b) connected with Moon Goddess as a mother (86), you goddess of many children (51)!

M – 741 To praying women secure insemination (74) for mothers with their numerous children (87)!

M – 750 [Give] lives of children (83) for deified women with many mothers' siblings of childed mothers (73), o, child-caring (69) Goddess of transformation (4a in an oval)!



M – 786 [Give] lives of children (83), o, Goddess of Fertility (4b), great fertility (20b) for children's lives (83) to women deified like goddesses (88)!

M – 794 [Give to] mothers like goddesses (a long vertical line 43 inside an oval 1) great fertility for children (20b with 45a inside and 2 x 45a one above another on the left side), for children (2 x 45a) great fertility of deified women (59)!

M – 798 [Give] abundance of children in homes (48), o, Goddess of New Life (60), to all women (2 x 38b)!

M – 802 O, Goddess of ? (66) [give to] women as mothers (38 with 43 inside) lives of children (83) for women (38b)!

M – 808 [Give] lives of children (83), o, Goddess of transformation of children (72), and great fertility for children (20b with a stroke added on both sides)! Protect (Enable) great fertility (20b with 32b above), o, child-caring (69) Goddess of Fertility (4a in an oval 1)!

M – 819 Protect mothers (32b with 43 separated, similar to 63), protect deified women (64) for great fertility of children (20b with two "horns"), mothers like goddesses (43 inside 1, i.e. a long vertical line inside an oval with children (2 x 45a), defied woman like goddesses (61)!

H – 46 [Give] lives of children (83), o, Moon Goddess with your children' (89) and Goddess of Growth with your children (71) and protect fertility for children (20b with 32b above)!

H – 55 O, Bird Goddess with your children' (57), [give] a lot of children (4 x 45a below followed by 2 x 45a above) through fertility of deified women (59), of women connected with Moon Goddess with her children' (348b connected to 6c, to which a slanted stroke is added outside, a ligature similar to 86)!

H – 141 [Give] lives of children (83) to deified women with lives of mothers with their children.

(73 with 19 instead of the extension at the left-hand arm), great fertility for children (20b with a stroke added on both sides) of child-caring (69) mothers with their children (84), abundance of children (3 x eight 45a's in a row one above another)!

H – 412 [Give] o, goddesses with your children (45a inside 1), lives of children (83), o, birth goddesses (14), very great fertility (2 x 20b) for mothers supported by goddesses (62 without Λ)!

*Dholavira signboard* from the northern gate of Dholavira: O, Goddess of transformation (4a in an oval), to mothers in homes (49), o, goddesses united, [give] many children to mothers (67)! O, Goddess of transformation (4a in an oval), [give] great fertility (20a) through sexual acts (22) to mothers (43), o, goddesses

of transformation (2 x 4a in an oval), sexual acts for mothers to have children (68 in opposite direction)!

Signs are sometimes doubled for the sake of emphasis or to mark plurality (cf. H – 10 and H – 49) and ‘give’ is most frequently omitted as redundant. The same two conventions were practised in the original Vinča script and in the Byblos “hieroglyphics”. A single sign often carries plural meaning.

Inscriptions usually encode prayers addressing one goddess, less frequently two, as in M – 747, M – 753, M – 855, H – 46, and. H – 580. ‘Goddess of transformation’ and ‘goddess of birth’ seem to be the epithets of Moon Goddess and of any particular goddess, respectively.

Why should all these numerous prayers, with always new variations, be concentrated on a unique supplication, that of the desire to have a lot of children? If we proceed from the principle that supplications are rooted in the wish to gain something of vital importance that is lacking or is in danger to be lacking, we may surmise that the inhabitants of the Indus Valley had problems with conception and/or that women had problems in delivery. Perhaps babies and/or mothers often died at birth and/or men suffered from impotence. Causes of infertility and sterility are numerous, and without the help of obstetricians, climatologists, and anthropologists there is no way of telling what really troubled these people and for what cause. The same problem persisted throughout Europe and Asia, as witnessed by inscriptions from Vinča, post-Vinča, and Byblos. Even today, in India and Pakistan 22% of couples cannot have children, and there is a high prevalence of infertility due to a lack of knowledge regarding causes, and lack of healthcare-seeking behaviour for this medical issue (Muacevic/Adler, 2020).

#### **4. Conclusions**

According to the analyses of the Byblos “pseudo-hieroglyphic” and Indus pre-scripts, throughout the Old World, the Vinča pre-script with its variants including the two former ones appears to have been the universal medium halfway between pictography and ideography. Moreover, this type of script, which had the aim of communication with birth-giving and child-caring goddesses, provides an important link in the developing chain of fully-fledged literacy. A lot of important consonantal and alphabetic scripts have their roots in the Vinča mythograms, directly or via mediator, e.g. Germanic runes and the Cyrillic alphabet. Even the Phoenician script and the Greek alphabet owe their origin partly to the same source (Hlebec, 2021).

Both the Vinča and Indus civilisations should be called proto-historic, since they were already using a script with its syntax, not just individual symbols. Therefore, there is no room for the so-called Great Divide between oral (primitive) and literate cultures.

As Benjamin Lee Whorf stated, “[w]hen Champollion began the decipherment of Egyptian writing, he was in the relatively fortunate position of not having to oppose an extensive body of established doctrine holding that the markings were not writing but nonlinguistic symbols” (Whorf, 1956:p.174). The present author has to meet a different fate. The discovery that inscriptions from the Vinča and Indus civilisations and from Byblos constitute a pre-script may leave dissatisfied both believers in their alphabetic nature and supporters of the thesis that they are no script at all. A negative reaction is expected though the decipherment and the explanations of the three cognate systems support each other and confirm a great degree of plausibility. Their meaningful and consistent readings must ease the resistance and counteract the denial of the obvious. Further interpretation along the paths paved in this article will verify, modify, or refute some of the claims.

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## ОТПЕЧАЂЕНА ТАЈНА ПЕЧАТА ДОЛИНЕ ИНДА

### *Резиме*

Током трајања протоиндијске цивилизације била је у употреби једна стилски углађенија варијанта винчанског претписа, и то хиљаду година након распада винчанске цивилизације. Док су историјске околности под којима је дошло до ове појаве остављене по страни, пажња је посвећена интерним (у оквиру постојећег система) и екстерним (поредбеним са праузором) доказима. Мноштво подударња у облику и значењу између ова два писма, као и глатко и логично читање натписа дају тумачењу вјеродостојност. Циљ молитвених порука које су биле урезане у печате да би биле отиснуте, као и оних исписаних на плочицама и другим објектима, био је да допру до богиња како би обезбијдиле здраво и бројно потомство. Дат је преглед свих основних знакова као и избор сложених, да би тако настали гласар послужио у одгонетању педесет три натписа.

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