Evidence for the Artisan in the Indus Script

Iravatham Mahadevan¹ and M V Bhaskar²

Summary

1. Indus Ideogram for SKILL:

The paper identifies the ideogram in the Indus Script depicting 'a pair of raised hands with folded fingers' (Sign 358, ASI Concordance) with the intended meaning SKILL > 'the skilled one, Chief Artisan, Scribe’. The Sign is found incised mostly on the copper tablets from Mohenjodaro (20 out of 32 occurrences, ASI Concordance). The sign is therefore interpreted as referring especially to the artisans producing bronze and copper metalware. Dravidian literary and inscriptive evidence includes the scribe among artisans.

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¹ Indus Research Centre, Roja Muthiah Research Library, Chennai 600113. India. iravatham.jani@gmail.com

² An independent researcher and CEO, AuthorCafe. bhaskar@authorcafe.com
2. **Methodology:**

The Indus-Dravidian expressions for 'artisan' were later borrowed as loanwords and loan translations into Indo-Aryan. However, the borrowals were not always faithful to the original, giving rise to myths invented to explain them. The present investigation has led to many such myths in the Vedic Mythology. It is shown that the myths can be resolved by comparing the corresponding Indus-Dravidian and Indo-Aryan expressions. Such resolution provides vital clues for decoding the Indus Script. The coherence of the results forms a three-dimensional grid of interlocked sounds and meanings at three levels namely, Indus-Dravidian, Indo-Aryan and Later Dravidian. The grid cannot happen by chance and constitutes proof of the correctness of the methodology.

3. **Archaeological Evidence:**

(i) A detachable, perforated arm of an alabaster statue was found at Lothal (*Lothal*, Vol. II: Plate CCLXIIB). The hand is raised with fingers closed. The object is interpreted by us as the physical basis of the Indus Ideogram, depicting a pair of raised hands with folded fingers, conveying the intended meanings 'dexterity, skill, competence'.

(ii) The Indus Ideogram occurs mostly on the copper tablets of Mohenjodaro and is connected with metal workers.
(iii) The famous 'Paśupati' seal from Mohenjodaro (CISI: M-304) is interpreted by us as depicting Prajāpati 'Lord of Creation', the Creator of all living creatures. He is identified with Viśvakarman, the Divine Architect with faces and eyes 'on all sides'. In later times, Viśvakarman is identified with the four-headed Brahmā, the creator god of Classical Hinduism. Evidence indicates that the seated figure on the seal had four faces, the fourth one hidden behind.

A detachable, perforated arm of an alabaster statue from Lothal, Vol. II: Plate CCLXIIB, shown inverted here to present it in the correct perspective and interpreted as the physical basis for the Artisan Sign.
Artisan sign as it occurs in a sign sequence on a copper tablet from Mohenjodaro, CISI M 557

'Paśupati' seal from Mohenjodaro, CISI 304
4. Linguistic Evidence:

(i) Dr. *tēr* (verb) 'to know, understand, be proficient';
IA. *dakṣa* 'dexterity, skill, competence' > Dakṣa 'N. of the Vedic artisan deity'.
(cf. also Dr. *tiraṅku* 'to be folded as the fingers of a closed hand'; *teri* 'to write, inscribe'.

(ii) Dr. *koḷ* (verb) 'to seize, hold'; kai-k-koḷar 'N. of a Dr. artisan group'
IA. *grbh* 'to grab, grasp, seize, hold' > Ṛbhu 'N. of the Vedic artisan group'

(iii) Dr. *val* 'skilful'; *valaṅ-kai* 'right hand' (ideogram for 'artisan')
IA. Vala (loanword) 'N. of the Chief of the Paṇis, the non-Aryan artisan group.
(cf. Dr. *pani* 'to do, make > *pañi* 'work').

5. Artisans in Vedic Mythology

Dakṣa and Tvaṣṭṛ; Viśvakarman, Viśvarūpa and Prajāpati; the Ṛbhus and the non-Aryan Paṇi-s. They are identified as artisans whose ultimate origin is to be sought among the artisans of the Indus Civilisation. It is significant that there is no evidence of the scribe in Vedic Mythology.

6. Artisans in the Dravidian Tradition

Literary and inscriptionsal evidence in Dravidian provides us with names of several professional groups of artisans. It is shown that many of them correspond to the names of the artisans and crafts in the Indo-Aryan tradition. While some of the Dravidian names are re-borrowed from Indo-Aryan, other expressions can be shown
to be derived from Indus-Dravidian in the light of the new evidence from the Indus Script.

7. Limitations of the Present Study

The study is limited only to those aspects of the Vedic deities relating to their functions as artisans. These deities possess many other more important characteristics that fall outside the scope of the present study. In particular, Dakṣa's role as an Āditya is not discussed in this paper. The pre-history of the Ādityas of the Ṛgveda in the Indus Civilisation is the subject of a forthcoming publication by the first author of the paper.

Keywords:
Indus Civilisation; Indus Script; Indus Artisans; Vedic Artisans; Indus origin of Vedic and later Dravidian Artisans.