

# **The Indus Script of the Mohenjo-Daro Shamans**








**John Newberry**

*The Indus Script of the Mohenjo-Daro Shamans* is excerpted from the forthcoming book *The Mitanni: To Tushratta and Tut-Ankh-Amon*. Publication of another excerpt, *The Various Shaman Ideograms of the Indus Valley Culture*, dealing with translation of sentences in the Indus script is pending.

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




Cover: the top illustration depicts Pásupati, the Lord of the Animals of the  Directions. (SW tiger  NW elephant , NE rhinoceros  SE water buffalo  )


# THE INDUS SCRIPT OF THE MOHENJO-DARO SHAMANS

*By John Newberry*

**T**his pamphlet examines the Indus script used by the different shaman cults of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa which co-existed and shared a common language from 2500 - 1750 B.C.

The variety of related shaman cults are:

1. The Lord  of the Four Animals of the Directions (Upper cover fig.) also known as Paśupati.
2. Shaman  of the Vāhanas of Animals (Unicorn, Humped Bull, etc., see cover figure)
3. Shaman of the Offering  to the Nāgas (Snake spirits  )
4. Shaman of the Offering  to the Tree spirits
5. Shaman  of the Fertility Cult of the Female Spirit of the Pipal Tree 
6. Shaman of the Male Fertility Cult of the Bull 

The rites of Female and Male Fertility  were practiced at the same time and place (Figure 6)

## EXAMINATION OF THE SCRIPT ON THE INDUS SEALS

Of all the shamanist cults of Mohenjo-Daro, the key related structure of the script harkens to the initial organization of the universe into Four Directions personified by elephant, tiger, rhinoceros and water buffalo of the Lord of the Four Directions shaman. The cover figure shows this Lord of the Four Animals of the Directions sitting on a raised platform above two tiny deers surrounded by four

carefully placed animals which correspond exactly to directional signs arranged clockwise from southwest to northwest to northeast to southeast.

The tiger of the southwest is associated with the  $\uparrow$  or south sign above him and the  $\sim$  west sign above the elephant. The elephant of the northwest corner is associated with the north  $\wedge$  and west  $\sim$  sign above the headdress of the shaman. The rhinoceros of the northeast is associated with the north (his placement to the north of the water buffalo) and the east  $\times$ . Why is the north direction lacking? The answer is that (fig. 1) every rhinoceros seal which depicts the rhinoceros has him facing east without the necessity of having to specify the direction. The lone rhinoceros seal (fig. 2) that depicts a rhinoceros facing to the west is also inscribed with a west symbol.



*Fig. 1: East facing rhinoceros*



*Fig. 2: West  $\sim$  facing rhinoceros*

This may help to explain why the rhinoceros placed north on the seal functions without a  $\wedge$  north sign. Figure 1 has two north signs relating to the northeast position of the rhinoceros on the seal of the Lord  $\oplus$  of the Four Animals of the Directions (see cover). Both Figure 1 and 2 use the  $\oplus$  shaman of the Vāhanas ideogram, indicating that the animals were part of the stable of vehicles worshipped and assigned lore and directions in the script which accompanies their depiction on the seals. The last animal on the seal, a water buffalo is accompanied by the remaining directional script — east  $\times$  and south  $\uparrow$ .

The cult of the Lord or Shaman of the Four Animals of the Directions is based on the perception of the elephant, tiger, water



buffalo and rhinoceros from a four-sided headdress which has four faces — one back, one front, one right side and one left side. The world of Nature has been organized in a fashion that sets meaning and value of objects and animals into an array of thought out symbols and pictorial diagrams. The fact that a language was employed is an indication of the power of survival of early cults when combined with the power of the written word in a highly organized society. Although lesser religious traditions such as linga, yoni, tree and serpent worship are found in the shamanistic cults the organized nature of the religion embodied in the directional shamans' seal is the mark of a greater religion. The use of a complex language to express everyday as well as ritualistic concepts is the mark of civilisation achieved by few peoples. The well organized streets, baths, drainage, industrial and marine activities of the Indus cities indicate that the artistic, linguistic and rituals of the organized shamanist cults were capable of a greater tradition of religion.

Since we have examined the rhinoceros seals to clear up the question of the directional indications pertaining to the animal, let us examine the individual seals of the elephant, water buffalo and tiger. These seals are extremely regular in conformance to the place of each animal on the directional seal of the shaman. We know that the tiger  $\text{W}$  is placed southwest on the seal of the Lord  $\text{☉}$  of the Four Directions. We shall examine two tiger seals with the southwest orientational ideograms  $\text{A}$   $\text{U}$ .

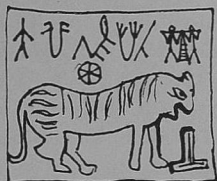
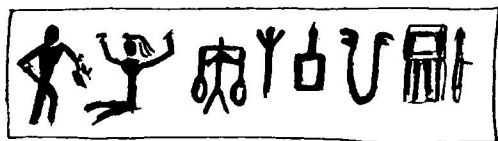


Fig. 3: Tiger seal with script and southwest  $\text{A}$   $\text{U}$  directionals.



Fig. 4: Three intertwined tigers and southwest  $\text{A}$   $\text{U}$  directionals.

Both seals contain the southwest directional signs which correspond to the tigers place on the seal of the Lord ☸ of the Four Animals of the Directions. The shaman must turn his head to the southwest to perceive this animal in a fixed position in nature, preserved as well on the seal of the individual animal. Figure 3 has an inscription reading: In the tiger corner ☸ of nature, the shaman ☸ sends the hands ☸ of two women ☸ and the arms ☸ of two men to capture game ☸. The seal can be read by interpreting another key seal as a basis. Figure 5 shows a man and a woman beside six characters. Since the first character ☸ looks like a man we can assume that the second character ☸ means woman. Since ☸ is associated with man and ☸ with woman, these are the directionals corresponding with man and woman. ☸ means south and its association with man ☸ eventually lead to creation of a man symbol ☸ for south — found on the Lord of Direction seal as well as the component of the ☸ ☸ southwest indication on the two tiger seals — figures 3 and 4.



*Fig. 5: Man and woman seal.*

Whereas the identification of man and south led to the creation of a man-shaped symbol for south ☸, the identification of woman stems from the female fertility cult. The woman sign ☸ is associated with west ☸ and the two women sign ☸ of figure 3 indicates where the west symbol originates. The female fertility cult of the pipal tree is the source of both the shape of ☸ and ☸. The original source is the female fertility rite in the pipal tree ☸ (figure 6).

The directional sign for north ☸ was originally like south ☸, a conventional pictorial equivalent. One day, the makers of the seal decided that the more alive terms ☸ and ☸ should replace the



Fig. 6: Multi-shaman marriage ritual. The Nāga shaman  $\parallel \otimes \parallel$  of the seven river Nāgas  $\rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle$  represented by seven dancers  $\rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle$ ; the Directional shaman  $\diamond$  (cardinal) represented as  $\uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow$  Vāhana  $\otimes$  shaman and the female pipal shaman  $(\uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow)$

colourless  $\square$  and  $\square$  symbols. The fish swimming upstream, whether to spawn or following his natural bent became associated with going north  $\uparrow$  as  $\uparrow$  was adopted for south.

The directional sign for east is based on the  $\times$  symbol, whose meaning is unknown. The simple addition of  $\times$  fingers to the right emphasizes the eastern quarter and remained the main symbol for east. As already explained, the need to use an eastern symbol on the east-pointing pictures of rhinos on the seals made the east symbol occasionally redundant.

The next animal found on the seal of the Lord  $\otimes$  of the Four Animals of the Directions is the elephant of the northwest. Figure 7A

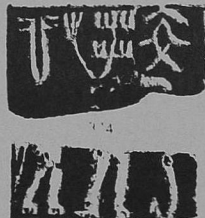





Fig. 7a: Elephant seal. Note  $\uparrow$  and  $\uparrow$ .

Fig. 7b:  $\uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow$  elephant.

is the most important elephant seal for it imparts the ideogram for elephant . As the three stripes reveal the tiger sign, the bulky legs and head are the script characteristics of the elephant. As well as the character  the most significant ideogram for elephant is  where the action of lifting his trunk to spray water is recorded in script form.




Another conspicuous feature of the elephant seal is the presence both of the northwest directional symbols. This conforms to the pattern of the seal of the Lord  of the Four Animals of the Directionals where the elephant appears in the northwest associated with the   characters. Turning in the clockwise survey of the Direction Lord seal we again encounter the rhinoceros (fig. 7C).





Fig. 7c:  rhinoceros.



Fig. 7d:  elephant.


In addition to the points raised about the missing east signs and the pictorial representation of the rhinoceros as an eastern-facing animal, the seal in figure 7<sup>c</sup> shows us that the shaman  has created an















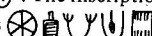
Fig. 8a:  unicorn.



Fig. 8b:  unicorn.

ideogram like  to depict the rhinoceros. This character is composed of additive features  —the horn,  —the four feet,  —the ears on top and the  large frame of the animal. Since we have identified  as tiger,  as elephant, let note other large animals on the seals. The common unicorn seals show that  was the ideogram for the one-horned beast. See the seals figures 8A and 8B.

The unicorn character  is similar in construction to the humped bull character on the cover . The inscription on the cover humped, long-horned bull seal reads  "The shaman looking south with two women perceives the humped bull in the enclosure."





Very few seals survive of the fourth and last directionally fixed animal, the water buffalo of the southeast. One broken seal indicates the character for south but may be restored as    The man killed the water buffalo of the southeast for his woman — see figure 9.



Fig. 9: Man spears water buffalo, 



 sign restored to broken corner.



Fig. 10: Man, tree (acacia), tiger.

Returning to the first animal, the tiger of the southwest, the sign for tiger  appears on a seal connected with acacia tree worship — figure 10.








On figure 10, the three characters correspond to the three pictures. Since man is as obvious as tiger ( and ) the remaining symbol  must mean acacia. Figure 11 shows another person-tree-acacia combination with an inscription that may indicate that the figure is a woman rather than a man.     reads "The western woman gives a pipal tree offering to the tree of the tiger."



Fig. 11: Man, tree and tiger pattern.

Since these last two seals enter the area of tree worship, let us diverge to the cult of worshipping the tree, the acacia offering ritual. This ritual must be distinguished from the fertility tree ritual of a female in a pipal tree and the seven dancers. Figure 12 shows a man making an offering  $\cup$  to an acacia tree. The four strokes of the inscription  $||||$  indicate that a number of offerings were made to the tree.



Fig. 12: Man offering to acacia tree.

This inevitably leads us to the conclusion that a numbering system was in use in the large city of Mohenjo-Daro. This number system is almost impossible to distinguish from the Egyptian numerical system.

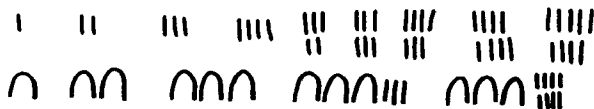


Fig. 13a: Egyptian numerical system.



Fig. 13b: Mohenjo-Daro numerical system.

A slight difference is the piling up of multiples of ten in the Mohenjo-Daro system, as contrasted with the sideways arrangements of the Egyptian multiples of ten. The depiction of offerings U is not limited to the shamanistic cult of tree offering, but extends to the Shaman of Offering to the Nāgas (Snake spirits).



Fig. 14: Presiding shaman of offerings to the snake-spirits (Nāgas). ||⊗||

Figure 14 illustrates the offerings U being given by devotees in front of a shaman closely resembling the Lord ⊗ of the Four Animals of the Directions. The offering is the same shape as that of the acacia offering, indicating that the connection between tree and serpent worship goes back to the days of Mohenjo-Daro.



Fig. 15: Unicorn and pipal tree. ⊠



Fig. 16a: Female in pipal tree.



Fig. 16b: Devotees around pipal. ⊠

Let us briefly consider the other shamanistic cults of the Indus culture. In addition to the acacia worship, the ♠ pipal was worshipped as a symbol of female fertility. Figure 15 shows two unicorns entwined around a pipal configuration. Figures 16A and 16B show the female fertility cult of the pipal tree as represented in two separate seals. This fertility cult is combined, not only in figure 6 with the male bull fertility cult, but in two other seals. It is perhaps not unexpected that male fertility (bull vāhana) and the female fertility cult of the pipal







Fig. 17a: Male bull Vāhana and female pipal tree fertility cults.













Fig. 17b: Five dancers with male bull Vāhana and female pipal tree fertility cults. ||⊗||

tree is combined on the seals. The two cults must have been practised in concert with each other — see figures 17A and 17B.












































One shaman presides over the combined cults in each seal depiction of the cult(s) — the north  directional is clearly visible in figure 6 and the pipal cult is the origin of the  symbol for west  and the related signs . These shamanistic cults share basically a unitary script and pictography. Immediately following is a list of translated ideograms.














































## A LIST OF MEANINGS ATTACHED TO CHARACTERS OF INDUS SCRIPT



































Numbers refer to Koskeniemi, Parpola & Parpola, *Materials for the Study of the Indus Script*, (Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1973), pp.xxii-xxvi.

CHARACTER	MEANING	CHARACTER	MEANING
1	 Man	12	 Presiding over bend of river
5, 6	 Man heading to the West	12B	 Presiding over river
37	 Man heading to the east	15	 South (derived from   )
7	 Two men capture game	21	 Running



25		Greetings	63		A place to the north
26		Embrace	64		A place to the north within the directions
27, 28		Throwing (five fingers emphasized)	65, 66		Stopping at a point north
31, 32		Hunting	72, 73		Insect
35, 36		Archer	74		Fowl
38		Man and shamans diamond	76, 78		Bird
39		Man with woman	77		Flying insect
40		Man between shaman (male) and ritual offering	79		Cock
41		Man with ritual offering	82		Hand holds rattle
42		Man with unicorn	83		Tropical fish
44, 45		Dog	84		Spider
46, 47		Animal	85		Hand holding arrows.
48		Leg of animal	87		Put on clothing
54		Fish	88		Put on hunting clothes
55, 56		North	90		Paws of animal, eg. dog, see #45
57		Both symbols for north	93		Woman
59, 60		Bird flying north	94		Womans hand
61		A point north	94B		Womans hand over head
62		A point north within the directions	95		Woman stopping
			99		Five-fingered hand
			100		The fingers of both hands
			102		Using both hands
			103		Woman using both hands
			106		Tree

CHARACTER	MEANING	CHARACTER	MEANING
397	 Acacia tree	198	 River water
107	 Grass	199	 Fist with thumb
108, 109	 Flower	200	 Fingers and thumb
110	 To plant a flower	202	 Elephant
111	 Woman holding flower	203	 Elephant waving trunk
112	 Pregnant woman and flower	215	 Bagged game
115, 116	 Pipal leaf	217, 218	 Carrying bagged game
117, 118	 Weekly pipal ritual may mean this is a unit of a week	222	 Spearheads
126-140	 Mohenjo-Daro numerical system	223	 Arrowheads
156	 Tiger (stripes)	224	 Spear
159	 Bank of River	225	 East (see figure two)
161	 Bank of riverbend	235	 East
164	 Arm with thumb stuck out	236	 East, a central point
165	 Arm with thumb stuck out from hand	239	 West as reverse of east
168	 Fingers on arm	241	 Hands pointing east
169	 Bend of river	244, 245	 Centre
170	 Thumb and arm	248	 Stop at centre
176	 River	258	 Sign resembling acacia
176B	 Riverbend	259	 Centre, heart
177	 Point on river	260	 Spearheads in heart, hunting
177B	 Point on riverbend	261	 Womans heart
188	 Bow and arrow	264	 Shamans orientational ideogram
197	 Drinking water		

CHARACTER	MEANING	CHARACTER	MEANING
269	 Orientational ideogram	331	 Woman in pipal ceremony
270	 Ritual Ideogram	332	 Two women in pipal cult
279, 280,	 South	333-337	 Pipal cult rituals
284	 Southeast	339	 Shaman sitting on dais above animals (Fig. 2, 12C)
282	 Southeast	345, 347	 Carrying water
290, 291	 Rhino	350	 To make love
292	 Rhino with ears & feet	351	 Two ritual participants
293	 North	352	 One male & one female participant
314	 Offering	359	 Female cult participant
315	 Two offerings	364-390	Shamanist orientational/ directional ideograms
316	 Three offerings		
319	 Unicorn		
319B	 Unicorn with ears		
320	 Unicorn with feet		
310	 Birds nests		
325	 West		
326-8	 One-three offerings to west		
330	 Shaman holding with both hands offering to pipal cult		