A HARAPPAN SEAL FROM RĀKHĪGADHĪ, HARYĀṆA

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The photograph on Plate 1 shows a Harappan seal, and below it a plaster-cast impression. The seal belongs to the collection of Swami Aumānanda Sarasvatī, and the photograph was sent to Eric Grinstead, who has provided the following note on its origin:

1. *The provenance of the seal*

While in New Delhi in 1970 for preliminary work on the Tangut Tripitaka,¹ I met the Acharya Bhagavān Dev at the house of Dr. Lokesh Chandra, and learned that the Acharya was extremely knowledgeable about the relics of India's long past. The Indus civilization soon came into the conversation, as I was just then learning about the excavations that have extended the boundaries of the Harappan 'empire' from the coast to very near Delhi. The Acharya invited us to his village in Jhajjar, about 60 km west of Delhi, where there is a small museum, but we were unfortunately prevented by an electricity blackout from seeing the exhibits.

However, through the kind offices of Dr. Lokesh Chandra, and the generosity of the Acharya, who by that time had taken strict vows and become the Swami Aumānanda Sarasvatī, a photograph of a Harappan seal was sent to me.

By that time I was in Australia, and the photograph we use for this article is an enlargement made for me in Sydney with special regard for maximum legibility.²

¹ *The Tangut Tripitaka*, in 9 volumes, compiled by Eric Grinstead, New Delhi: The International Academy of Indian Culture and the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, 1971 (Śāstra-Piṭaka, 83-91).

² I am much indebted to my brother-in-law, James Andriesse, and his associates for the technical expertise (EG).

The letter accompanying the photograph of the seal bears the letterhead of the Haryāṇā prāntiya-purātattva-saṃgrahālaya, Gurukul Jhajjar, District Rohtak, Haryana, of which the Swami is Director.³

In his letter the Swami Aumānanda tells me that the seal was obtained in Rākhigaḍhī village, District Hissar in the same province. This village is about 150 km WNW of Delhi.

Asko Parpola, who has been working on a critical edition and concordance of the Harappan inscriptions and on the decipherment of the script,⁴ was invited by Eric Grinstead to supply the following note on the seal from Rākhigaḍhī:

2. *The type and genuineness of the seal*

The seal is undoubtedly genuine, even from the photograph. It is hitherto unknown, and the inscribed text has not been recorded for any previously published inscription. The physical appearance of the seal goes also to its authenticity. It belongs to the little-known type of roughly-cut, unperforated stone seals, the majority of which are plano-convex.⁵ Some of the original specimens were examined by me in the museums on my visit to India and Pakistan in 1971. In addition, the inscription has been rather roughly incised, another proof of its genuineness. A village as the finding place seems to be significant.

³ See *Haryāṇa ke vir yaidhev*, 1969.

⁴ See the Newsletter of the SIAS, Nos 2-5 and the three preliminary reports on a partial decipherment quoted under bibliography (FA, Progress, FP). All these reports, that have not been available in bookshops and are now out of print, are somewhat dated, but a proper monograph is in preparation. A summary may be found in Parpola, 1970. See also addenda, p. 114.

⁵ Cf. particularly the seals 2059, 2372, 2394, 2497, 2575. - The numbering of the inscriptions has been standardized for our forthcoming edition and concordance of the Harappan inscriptions along the lines indicated in FA, p. 54f. (note 23 ff.): the first number indicates the site of publication (1 stands for Mohenjo-daro in Marshall, 1931, 2 for Mohenjo-daro in Mackay, 1938, 3 and 4 for Harappa, 5 for Chanhudaro, etc.), and the next three numbers for the most part coincide with the consecutive numbering of the photographs published in the archaeological reports.

3. *The text of the seal inscription*

The general readability is rather good in comparison to a few others I have seen. However, some familiarity with the script is necessary for a true reading of the signs. I have written out what I can see of the writing on the photographs of the seal and its plaster (originally clay) impression. This impression is technically a 'sealing', and is of course the true writing of the Indus people, the incised text being in mirror image. The characters are all individually represented in published inscriptions, and the combinations of two or more characters are established from lists compiled and checked over the known corpus.⁶ Below the photograph and the tracings we write the standardized form, using the plotter-script devised for computer print-out of our concordance. The direction of writing in the sealing stamped with our seal can be established by means of the sign combinations and their concord with those of the other Harappan inscriptions: it is from right to left, which is the normal writing direction in the Indus valley civilization.⁷ We follow the same direction in writing out combinations and texts in the rest of this article.

4. *The words and their probable meaning*

The combinations of signs occurring in this text can be compared with recorded inscriptions to establish segmentation and some probable meaning.

a.

The last two signs (reading from right to left) form a compound which occurs five times in the inscriptions known to date:

4106

2484

⁶ For the forthcoming concordance see the SIAS Newsletter No. 5, March 1972, p. 12ff. and 34 (sample page). See also p. 114.

⁷ The direction of writing was established by B. B. Lal, 1966, from overlapping characters scratched on pottery; cf. also Lal, 1967-68, and, for the internal evidence of the seals FA, p. 18.

1319 𐀵𐀶 ' 𐀶𐀶 𐀶𐀶
 2551 𐀵𐀶 | " 𐀶𐀶
 3370 U III 𐀵𐀶 " 𐀶𐀶

This compound is similar in shape, and probably in meaning, to 𐀵𐀶 or 𐀵𐀶, compounds that occur no fewer than 51 times in the whole corpus. They are also mostly in the final position (45 instances out of 51); the six initial occurrences of these sign combinations—in four cases forming the entire inscription—show that they do not represent suffixes added to inflected words, but an independent and semantically complete lexeme. A comparative analysis indeed proves beyond doubt that there is a word boundary to be supplied between 𐀶 and U in our inscription.

The hieroglyph 𐀵 has a variant form that is identical with the archaic Sumerian character depicting 'plough'.⁸ The signs 𐀶, 𐀶 etc.⁹ are more problematic. The basic form might not be 'drum' as we have previously proposed,⁹ but we cannot put forward any alternative for the time being.

In order to conclude something about the intended meaning of the combination 𐀵𐀶 which may be quite different from the pictorial meaning of the signs, we must consider its contexts.

The combination 𐀵𐀶 is usually preceded by one of the several 'fish'-signs of the Indus script. Here are some examples from the corpus to show the relation to the 'fish'-signs (the last three signs only have been included), and to some other signs that occur in the same position (whole inscriptions included):

⁸ FA, p. 31 and n. 58. There is now ample evidence that the plough was known to the Harappans; cf. particularly IAR 1968-69, p. 29f. with pl. XXXIV, and Agrawal, 1968, p. 256. On the interpretation of this sign cf. also FP, p. 21ff.

⁹ FA, p. 29ff. and FP, p. 21ff.

or		4 times
		4 times
		11 times
		5 times
		4 times
<hr/>		once
once
once
once

In the above occurrences the fish-signs immediately precede the combination $\text{𑀘} \text{𑀭}$ or $\text{𑀘} \text{𑀭}$, but in one case the sign 𑀶 intervenes. There are other parallel cases with the fish-signs, where the number of occurrences with an intervening 𑀶 is greater than the immediate 'agglutination'.¹⁰ The sign 𑀶 is by far the most common sign of the Indus script, which in about three quarters of the total number of occurrences is found at the end of inscriptions, and in most cases of the rest can be shown to precede a word boundary. We have considered it as the genitive suffix, as most students of the script. The alternation of this suffix with zero in positions like the one we are discussing is in accordance with our theory according to which the Harappan language was an early form of Dravidian. Dravidian characteristically often uses a preceding bare stem for the expression of the possessive function.

The hypothetical genitive suffix is found to alternate with some

¹⁰ Cf. particularly the sign after the fish-signs which may be followed or not by the suffix we are discussing; Progress, p. 6 ff.

other pictograms with similar statistical and positional characteristics, in several cases at the end of the same stable combinations. We have suggested that these suffixes form a paradigm of nominative, genitive and dative in singular and plural.¹¹

The signs preceding the hypothetical dative suffix in 'dedicatory' inscriptions have been supposed by us to denote divinities.¹² Since it is above all the various fish-signs which are found in such positions, they are likely to represent astral divinities, as the word *mīn* in Dravidian means both 'fish' and 'star' and as the meaning 'fish' fails to make so good sense in seal inscriptions.¹³

From the contiguity of the final combination $\text{𐀀} \text{𐀁}$ etc., we think that it may denote a 'temple official' or 'priest' of some kind. There are various grounds for which a 'temple institution' seems a less probable meaning. There are several occurrences of the sequence $\text{𐀀} \text{𐀁} \text{𐀂}$,¹⁴ and the sign 𐀀 almost certainly denotes 'woman' or 'wife' or the feminine suffix.¹⁵

For the sign 𐀂 etc., we have the ligatures 𐀂𐀃 , 𐀂𐀄 , 𐀂𐀅 , 𐀂𐀆 , which seem to refer to priestesses. In two cases we have a priestess actually depicted on the iconography of the seal. On the seal 1357 which we have already discussed previously,¹⁶ the sign 𐀂 occurs with the iconographic scene of a shamaness with a bovine head and tail and cloven hoofs, reaching towards a horned tiger standing on its hind legs.

A rather interesting pictorial confirmation to the interpretation of the sign 𐀀 as 'woman' or 'feminine suffix' is the seal 1227

¹¹ FA, p. 18 ff.; Progress, p. 6 ff.; Parpola, 1970, p. 90 ff. It seems, however, that the 'plural suffix' is throughout to be interpreted rather along the lines referred to in note 10 above.

¹² FA, p. 42, and FP, p. 6 ff.

¹³ FA, p. 43 ff.; Progress, p. 8 ff.; FP, p. 9 ff. Much further work has been done by the present writer on the astral religion of the Harappans; the main results have been presented at the 29th Congress of Orientalists in Paris, July 16-22, 1973.

¹⁴ FA, p. 29 and 62.

¹⁵ FA, p. 28 ff.; FP, p. 11, 15, 23 f.; Parpola, 1970, p. 90, 92 and 109.

¹⁶ FP, p. 22.

䷊ ䷋ ䷌ ䷍ ䷎
䷏ ䷐ ䷑ ䷒ ䷓

A comparative analysis of parallel seals with similar combinations shows that we have to segment $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{E} \\ \text{E} \\ \text{E} \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{E} \\ \text{E} \\ \text{E} \end{smallmatrix}$ and $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{E} \\ \text{E} \\ \text{E} \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{A} \\ \text{A} \\ \text{A} \end{smallmatrix}$ as separate lexemes. If we allow for two related possibilities of reading the

sign , namely, 1) Dravidian **peṇ*- 'comb'¹⁷ = Dravidian **peṇ* 'woman'¹⁸ and 2) in an extended use the Dravidian feminine suffix *-i*, *-ti*, *-ci*, etc.,¹⁹ we can read as *peṇ + ti peṇti* 'woman',²⁰ and as *āṇ* or *āl* 'man, servant'²¹ + *ti* = *āliti* 'woman, female servant'.²² It is very striking, that *āliti* also happens to be a derivative of the Dravidian root *āl* 'to dance, move', meaning 'one who makes or is made to dance', (*tāvar-āliti* 'soothsayer', i.e. one moved by the god) and a near homophone of *āl* 'dancer'.²³ On the other hand, the word is with great probability the name of the god Murukan in the genitive,²⁴ and this god (cf. also his Sanskrit name Skanda 'leaper') is traditionally associated with devil-dancing. My suggestion is that the various sides of the seal represent various designations of a shamaness in the service of the god Murukan, the pictorial representations probably having magical implications.

I return to the ligatures etc. referred to above. We have suggested²⁵ that if etc. depicts a *tampa* drum, the pictograph may stand for the word *tampi* or *nampi* 'younger brother', used

¹⁷ DED, no. 3607; for the etymology, see Parpola, 1970, p. 109 n. 2, and, in addition, Śaṅkhāyana Gṛhyasūtra 4, 15, 7, where the word *phaṇa* itself is used of a comb presented to serpents along with other toilet articles.

¹⁸ DED, no. 3608.

¹⁹ Beytham, 1943, p. 169. The suffix *-i* to derive noun stems of feminine gender from monosyllable roots existed already in Early Old Tamil, cf. Zvelebil, 1967, p. 21.

²⁰ DED, no. 3608. The segmentation *peṇ-ti* is not meant to be etymological (*peṇ-i* seems more likely), but is used for a simpler explanation of the graphic representation. The same remark applies to *āliti*.

²¹ DED, no. 342a.

²² DED, no. 342b.

²³ DED, no. 290.

²⁴ FP, p. 27. The second element (the sign consisting of two long strokes) probably stands for the word *vāl* (DED 4548), cf. Tamil *Muruka-vāl*: the sign is very often used in front of the simple fish sign, and this interpretation would give the interpretation *veṇ-mīn* or *veṭṭi-mīn* 'white star': the word *veṭ* (DED 4524) in many Dravidian languages denotes the morning star. The sign , in which we previously read this word, apparently stands for *vāl + mīn* 'the white star' = the planet Venus, cf. the word *vāl* 'hair' (DED 4394 betides 4395) and the graphic variant .

²⁵ FA, p. 30f. and FP, p. 21f.

in Dravidian languages of the inferior clergy, as well as title of princes and gods, which agrees with the use of the pictogram. The ligatured forms that we now are discussing could represent the feminine counterpart of this term, *taṅkai* or *naṅkai* 'younger sister', used to address a lady of quality or distinction. The tail-like object may be a picture of a tail, as suggested before, and refer to the animal-costume of the shamaness, as seen in the iconography.²⁵ Another possibility is that it depicts a 'hand', the primitive Dravidian form of which can be reconstructed as **kay*:²⁶ by homophonic extension this could be used for Dravidian **kay* 'younger sister'.²⁷ The word *taṅkai/naṅkai* seems to be formed from this word by putting before it possessive pronominal forms.²⁸ *Tampi/nampi* similarly seems to be derived from the root *pin* 'after', which is used also in the meaning 'younger brother', i.e. he who is born later.²⁹ Is this element represented by the indentation in the variant form of the sign .

b.

The combination is one of the most frequent in the script, and would seem to correspond to the popularity of the terracotta figurines of the Mother Goddess: as the sign appears to denote a divinity on the basis of its contexts, and as there is a parallel (not identical) sign , which sometimes is found side by side with it, we have suggested that it may denote the 'Great Mother' apparently worshipped also in the Indus valley together with her son-spouse, who possibly is represented by the sign .

The basic form may picture a seated person: in the Egyptian script a seated person is a person of authority. This suggestion³⁰ is open, however, to improvement.

²⁵ FA, p. 30 f. and FP, p. 21 f.

²⁶ DED, no. 1683; Zvelebil, 1970, p. 71.

²⁷ DED, no. 2445.

²⁸ DED, p. XV; Emeneau, 1953, p. 339 f.

²⁹ DED, no. 3452. Cf., however, Emeneau, 1953, p. 340 n. 4.

³⁰ FP, p. 25 f.

c. 𐀵 𐀶 𐀷

The combination 𐀶 𐀷 occurs otherwise in only one inscription, namely,

1340 𐀶 𐀷 𐀸 𐀹 𐀺 𐀻 𐀼 𐀽 𐀾 𐀿

In our inscription the combination occupies the position of an 'introductory formula' usually ending in one of the three 'diacritics' (' " 𐀵). It probably denotes an epithet of the divinity.³¹ In an inscription like the above quoted 𐀵 𐀶 𐀷 𐀸 the epithet might be used instead of the god's explicit name and have the function of the determinative part of a possessive compound (zero genitive).

The seal, then, seems to have been used for the certification of documents and trade goods, probably in the possession of a priest acting in an administrative capacity.

5. *The importance of the Rākhigadhī seal*

In any case the Rākhigadhī seal is most interesting and important in having been recovered from what probably was a peripheral village even in the Harappan times. Archaeology in this village is of course of paramount importance for the solution of this and the other problems raised by this one seal. The rough manufacture of the seal anyway also points into this direction. We have hitherto very few specimens of Harappan seals found in minor sites.³² The mere presence of such seals in the hitherto very little known villages would be a matter of great importance for our understanding of the Harappan means of economic and political control of the rural districts.

³¹ FA, p. 11, 33f. FP, p. 4f., 11, 35.

³² All the minor sites that have yielded Harappan inscriptions (Desalpur, Alamgirpur, Rupar, Rojdi, Rangpur, Nindowari, Kot Diji, Jhukar, Naru-Waru-Dharo, Lohumjo-daro, and Amri) seem to be bigger settlements than villages.

That the seal is found in Hisār (Hissar in the traditional English spelling) is a confirmation of the ample evidence we already have for the Indus civilization, that it spread along the rivers. The Indus basin was quite different from the present in the Harappan days, and the ancient Sarasvatī (modern Ghaggar) in particular has changed drastically.³³ About twenty Harappan sites in Rajasthan and more than ten in Bahāwalpur state have been identified along its ancient course,³⁴ but Rākhīgadhi would be an important addition to the rather few more easterly sites. The direct river connection makes Kalibangan more probable than Harappa as the cultural foyer of the Hisār region, which, we hope, will be properly surveyed by the archaeologists.

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³³ H. T. Lambrick, *Sind*, Hyderabad (Sind) 1964, with many maps.

³⁴ M. Wheeler, 1968, p. 138 ff., and the map on p. 4, reproduced above, p. 109.

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ADDENDA

While the present paper was in the press, the computer-drawn concordance to the pairwise sign combinations of the Harappan inscriptions (referred to above, notes 4-6) has come out:

Seppo Koskeniemi, Asko Parpola and Simo Parpola, *Materials for the study of the Indus script*. I. A concordance to the Indus inscriptions. Helsinki 1973. Roy.-8°, xxviii, 528, 55* pp. (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Ser. B, Tom. 185).

Reference may also be made to the papers on the Indus script read at the Royal Asiatic Society's sesquicentenary symposium on "The Undeciphered Languages", London, July 25-27, 1973. An up-to-date list and map of the Harappan sites is provided by M. Rafique Mughal. *Present State of Research on the Indus Valley Civilization*, Karachi 1973.