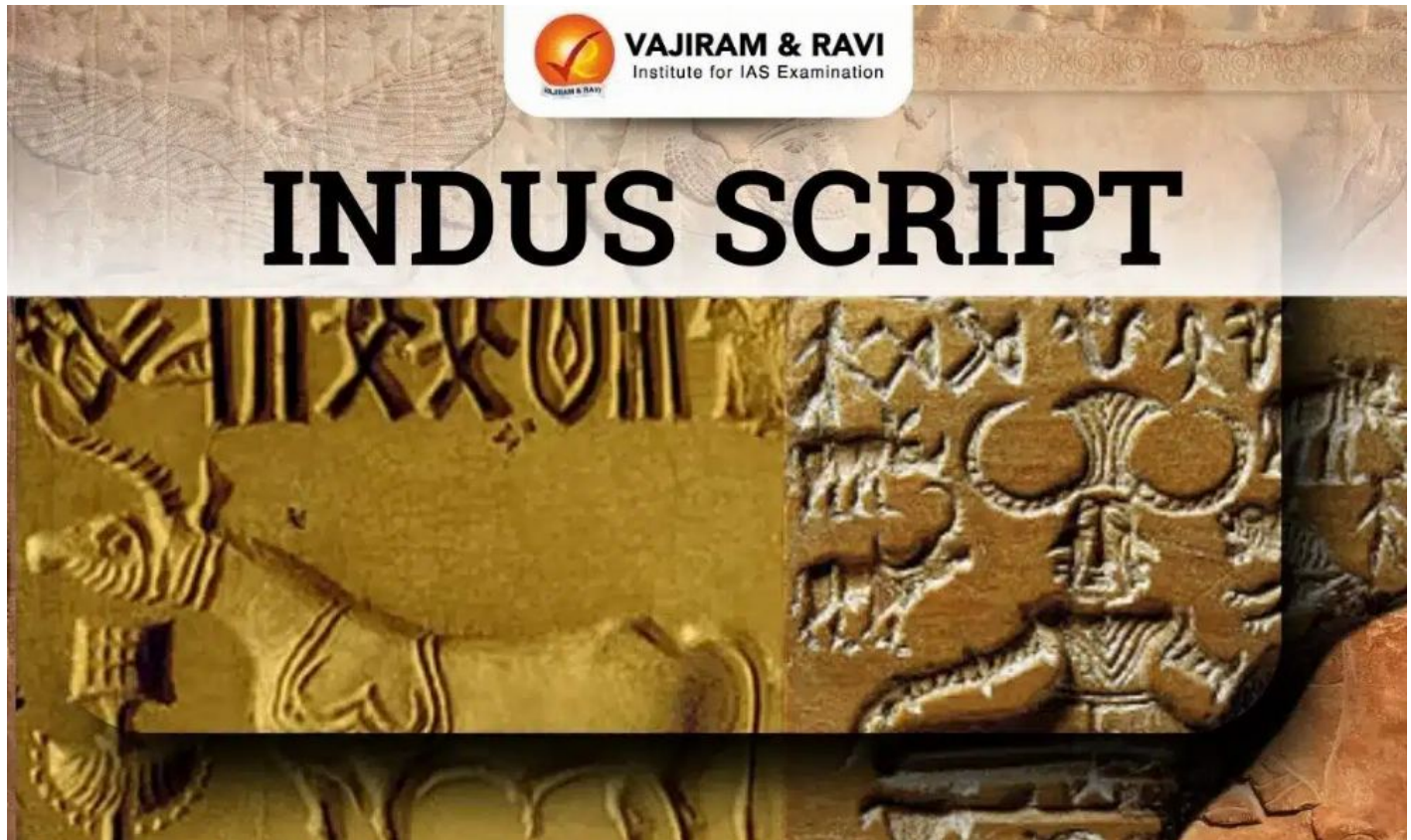


Indus Script, Evolution, Features, Structure, Characteristics

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The **Indus Script** which was developed by the **Indus Valley Civilization (IVC)**, represents the earliest known writing system in the Indian subcontinent. While its significance is well acknowledged, the script remains undeciphered, presenting an intriguing challenge for researchers. This Script was extensively inscribed on **miniature seals, pottery, tools, tablets** and **ornaments** in **Boustrophedon** and **Pictorial style**.

Deciphering the Indus Script is critical to understanding invaluable insights into this influential civilisation's socio-economic structure, technological innovations, trade links, beliefs, and decline.

About Indus Script

The Indus script is a collection of symbols used by the **Indus Valley Civilization** (2600–1900 BCE) for communication. Found on **seals, pottery, and other artefacts**, it remains undeciphered and consists of short inscriptions with pictorial and abstract symbols. Evidence of this script has been found widely across **modern Pakistan** and **northwest India** excavation sites.

Indus Script Evolution, Features

The Indus script, also known as the **Harappan script**, evolved from pre-firing potter's marks and post-firing graffiti to a fully developed writing system. The Indus script might have evolved through two phases:

- **Early phase (3500–2700 BC):** Initial examples of Indus Script signs were discovered on **Ravi** and **Kot Diji pottery** at Harappa. These signs are typically singular, reflecting a **preliminary stage** of the script.
- **Urban period (2600–1900 BC):** The script reached **maturity** during this era, with longer inscriptions appearing. Over **thousands of inscriptions** have been found across **60 excavation sites**, averaging **five signs per inscription**, with none exceeding **26 signs**.

Material Form

Indus Script inscriptions appear on various materials, including Seals and seal impressions, Pottery, Bronze tools, Stoneware bangles, Bones, Shells, Ivory, Steatite, bronze, and copper tablets.

- **Seals:** Square stamp seals, approximately 2.54 cm², dominate. These typically display the script at the top with an animal motif at the centre. Some seals were made of steatite, silver, faience, or calcite, often coated with a glossy finish.
- **Functionality:** While some seals might have served as amulets or talismans, they were primarily used for identification and administrative purposes, like marking trade goods.
 - Clay tags bearing the script have been found as far as **Mesopotamia**, highlighting the vast trade networks of the Indus Valley.
- The script also featured **narrative imagery**, combining text with depictions of **humans, animals**, and **mythical creatures**, suggesting possible **religious** or **liturgical** significance.

Indus Script Characteristics

Over the years, approximately **400 basic signs** have been identified in the Indus Script. Notably, only **31 signs** occur more than 100 times, suggesting that much of the script was inscribed on **perishable materials** like palm leaves or birch, which have not survived.

Origin and Development of the Indus Script

: Insights from Harappa and other sites

Parameter	Finding
Direction	- Boustrophedon: Written from right to left and from left to right in alternate lines.
Numeral system	- Based on the decimal system: Single downward stroke for units, semicircles for tens.
Usage	- Combination of logographic word signs and phonetic syllable symbols indicating logo-syllabic nature.
Total symbols	- The exact number of signs is debated, with estimates ranging from 400 to 600 .

- Indus Script was used for **narrative imagery** depicting scenes from myths or stories, combining script with images of humans, animals, and imaginary creatures in active poses, resembling other writing systems' religious, liturgical, and literary use.
- This shows a structured writing approach for **administrative** and **commercial tracking** purposes served by a logical numeric system.
 - But short seal texts make recurrent sign analysis difficult.
- Open questions remain around **linguistic meaning** or **phonemic value** assignation without comparative cross reference.

Indus Script Deciphering Challenges

The Indus Script remains undeciphered due to the absence of bilingual inscriptions, short text lengths, and no connection to later Indian scripts.

- **Lack of bilingual inscriptions:** Unlike the **Rosetta Stone** for Egyptian hieroglyphs, no comparable bilingual texts have been found.
- **Short inscriptions:** The brevity of inscriptions (less than 30 signs) makes it difficult to identify recurring patterns.
- **Unknown language:** The language(s) represented by the script remains a mystery. Scholars speculate links to **Dravidian, Indo-European, Austroasiatic**, or even lost language families.
- The absence of **bilingual texts** and unclear links to later Indian writing systems (e.g., **Brahmi, Devanagari**) has left the Indus Valley Civilization among the least understood ancient civilizations.
- Early symbolic communication developed into logo-syllabic writing, with standardisation and diffusion across the Indus Civilisation. The script eventually disappeared, with limited graffiti persisting in the post-urban era.

Indus Script Important Findings

Recent findings suggest the Indus script likely represents a **Dravidian language**. Archaeologists in Tamil Nadu discovered over 10,000 graffiti marks, with Sivakalai artefacts dating back to 2500-3000 BCE and **Keezhadi artefacts** to 580 BCE, showing similarities to the Indus script.

- **Findings:** The study, published in Palgrave Communications (a Nature group journal), suggests that most Indus inscriptions were written logographically (using word signs) rather than phonograms (units of speech sounds).
- Instead of attempting to decipher the exact content, the research emphasizes understanding **how Indus inscriptions conveyed meaning**.
- **Seals and tablets** with inscriptions were likely used for **administrative purposes** related to the **commercial transactions** of the **Indus Valley Civilisation**.
- Contrary to earlier assumptions, the study asserts that the Indus seals and tablets did not use the **rebus method** for meaning generation.
- The popular hypothesis that the seals contained **Proto-Dravidian** or **Proto-Indo-European names** of their owners was also rejected.

The Indus Civilization began to decline around 1800 BCE, and the script they had invented disappeared along with it. The emergence of the **Vedic culture** did not lead to the adoption of the Indus Script, nor did they have a writing system of their own.

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