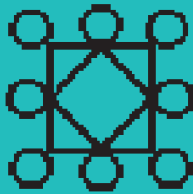


EGBERT RICHTER-USHANAS

**TWO SYSTEMS  
OF SYMBOLIC WRITING**



**THE INDUS SCRIPT  
AND THE EASTER ISLAND SCRIPT**

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The motif on the cover has been taken from A. Parpola et al.,  
Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions, Helsinki 1991, fig. M-1356.

For the explanation cf. chapter 9

# Introduction

The Indus Script and the Easter Island Script also called Rongorongo have several things in common, apart from the fact that both are still regarded as undeciphered. The most striking parallel is that some pictograms look identical, as was pointed out already by G. de Hevesy, but he relied on insufficient renderings of the signs. Though the signs that look identical or nearly identical in its form must not have the same meaning, it cannot be denied that both writing systems make use of a similar method of rendering words by pictograms and word sequences by ligatures and fusions. Moreover, the number of basic signs in both scripts is about 100. It is known that the Rongorongo script was not used for ornamental purposes, but that the inscribed tablets called *kohau rongorongo* were recited publicly on special occasions with a religious purport. Many of the inscriptions of the Indus seals and tablets look too short for a recitation, but since they have amulet function they served for a religious purpose too. This is also evident from the motifs.

On the other hand, there are great differences. The Indus script was written on small seals, the average number of signs on a seal being only five, whereas the Rongorongo script was carved on wooden plates and sticks in lines of about 40, sometimes about 80 signs depending on the length of the tablet. The language that is expressed by the signs is known in the case of Rongorongo as being Rapanui, the language of Easter Island, called Rapa Nui nowadays, though not identical in grammar and words with the Rapanui that is presently spoken there.

It can only be surmised that the language of the Indus script is related to some of the languages spoken today in the Indus Valley or in the neighbouring areas. The Indus script is often applied as a legend to a motif, whereas the Rongorongo script has no relation to motifs, except that in a few cases the signs were carved on wooden figures like a breast ornament and a birdman.

Besides, the Indus script was used in big towns with a population of many thousands of people that had far-reaching oversee and overland relations with other civilizations, the Rongorongo script was used by and known to a very small group of persons not exceeding five hundred, and it was developed in a tribal society that had very little and over several centuries no contact at all with other cultures.

The Indus script is one of the oldest writings that were conceived by the human mind going back to the era of the bull 3000 years before the beginning of the Christian era. There are only the Sumerian and the Egyptian pictographic writings that are of equal age or still older. The Rongorongo writing is comparatively a new invention. It is certainly not older than 500 years. If the Easter Islanders would have obtained any knowledge of a script in their former homeland, it could either be a derivative of Chinese or one of the many branches of the Brāhmī script that is based on the Indus script (cf. Richter-Ushanas 2012b; 223). Petroglyphs found in the Marquesa islands can be related to the Old Javanese Kawi script that is derived from the Brāhmī script. Even if there would be a closer relation between the Indus script and Rongorongo, it would not be helpful in the decipherment of each of the two, because we would only compare the unknown with the unknown.

A decipherment of one or both of them can only be afforded by studying the two scripts in their own surroundings. This has been done here in the case of the Indus script by comparing it with verses of the Ṛg- and Atharva-Veda, the oldest books of the Indian tradition. These books have been transmitted orally until our time, but nonetheless they contain several words related to writing and writer. The word for 'sign' is well known in the Ṛg-Veda already and is once even used in connection with word (ṚV X.71.2). In the Atharva-Veda, charms in relation with amulets are common.

The Indus script has survived the oral tradition and probably been adopted by another writing, the oral tradition of Easter Island has survived the knowledge of writing and it has never given rise to another tradition. There exist the readings of four tablets of the islanders Metoro and Ure Vaeiko. Metoro's readings are not as incoherent as was thought hitherto by the scholars in this field. Several inscriptions and motifs of the Indus seals and tablets and the inscriptions of two Rongorongo artefacts as well as two lines of Metoro's reading of the tablet called Aruku Kurenga are presented here to the general public for information and further discussion.

A word script, with which we have to do in both cases, can be understood even by people who do not speak the same language or dialect, as is obvious from the Chinese script. It is not necessary to write grammatical forms, if the oral tradition is known to the writer and the reader alike. Even a letter script cannot dispense with the oral transmittance, otherwise we could close our schools and universities.

There is a great amount of disbelief and distrust, if somebody ventures to read these inscriptions as word scripts. In addition to those people who believe in the incomprehensiveness of all symbolic writings, there is another group who tries to mould them into a letter script under the influence of a way of thought that is associated for more than thousand years with letters.

We have heard in the Biblical tradition that the letter kills, but nobody cares for this. I was myself no exception to this rule. So I tried to read the Indus signs as syllables. The results thereof have been published in 1997. Only after I was sure that the Rongorongo script can be read as a word script indeed, I came back to my former logographic word readings of the Indus script published in 1992 under the title the Fifth Veda. In the present form of this study the reader will only find these word readings, but improved sometimes through the results of the syllabic readings. Thus, the endeavour to read the Indus script syllabically was not entirely fruitless.

The author of the present book does not pretend that his readings of each or of both the two writings are final, but after it has been in a process for about 25 years most of the signs of the Indus script and a great number of inscriptions have been made readable in a way that it can be called a decipherment. The same can be said in regard to the Rongorongo script. Not a decipherment in the narrow sense of the word, however, which is impossible in the case of word-scripts that do not consist of ciphers or letters. In spite of their inherent ambiguity the pictograms can be made intelligible for the modern mind.

If the word 'decipherment' could be altogether discarded in regard to these readings, I would do so. We do not possess a better word in modern languages, however, and the newspapers

and magazines want to have their headline. At any rate, the word 'decipherment' should not be used by those who have nothing more to tell, but that symbolic writings are no writings at all. The reader who takes the time will find that a word script is very well understandable and that it can even open new insights to a mind that is not only occupied with economical or technical problems or to a merely analytic scientific approach. If I make use of a synthetic heuristic method including yoga and meditation, it does not mean that I am a pseudo-scientist or a crank, as I am called in Wikipedia. If Wikipedia is really a free encyclopedia, as it pretends, it should follow the basic rules of any scientific discussion and refrain from personal defamation and not quote from a long out-dated review. It should also accept that yoga and meditation can be part of a scientific approach as it has been shown by many famous scientists before. This is no reason of putting them and their books on a virtual index as the catholic church has done it hundreds of years before and is still doing in praxis. It may be correct to call me a 'spiritual' scientist, if this is not confined to Christianity, but the best would be to dispense with such labels altogether, whose only purpose is to discriminate and even criminalize all efforts that do not follow the main stream of science which means that they do not apply the standards the Western neo-colonialism.

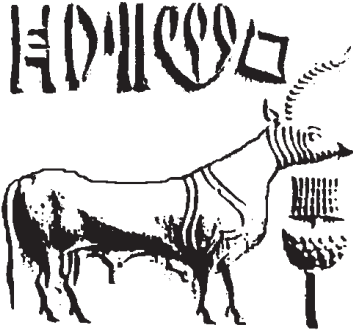
The discussion of this issue should not be confined to the internet, but there should be held a symposium, where the protagonists of the different ways of deciphering can present the results of their investigations to each other and to an interested public. To facilitate the discussion and to open the opportunity of continual revision also of the main work of the Message of Indus Seals and Tablets this study has now published as an E-Book. On this occasion I could improve the grammatical renderings of the inscriptions of seal 9702 (§ I.2), 2606 (§ I.4) and tablet 2807 (§ I.9) and present a better suitable Vedic verse for the inscription of seal 6208 (§ I.4).

The rules that have been applied for the decipherment of the Indus script and the Easter Island script have also been proved successful in reading the disk of Phaistos, which is inscribed by another unknown symbolic writing, the Cretan hieroglyphs (cf. Egbert Richter-Ushanas, *Der Diskus von Phaistos und die Heilige Hochzeit von Theseus und Ariadne*, Nordhausen <sup>2</sup>2012c).

Worpswede, in October 2012

# I. The interpretation of the Indus script in relation to the Ṛg- and Atharva-Veda

## 1. The historical setting of the Indus script



Like the Sumero-Akkadian pictographic writing the Indus script has been engraved on seals. In Mesopotamia cylinder seals were used, whereas in the Indus Valley stamp seals prevail. Far more important for the reading is, however, that in case of the Indus Valley, there are only these seals and a few terracotta tablets and graffiti, there are no inscribed clay tablets of larger size as were found in Mesopotamia. Accordingly, the inscriptions on the Indus seals are very short, on an average they consist of only 5 signs.


On account of their pictographic character the signs of the inscriptions can and must be read in a symbolic way. That a symbolic interpretation is subjective, can only be maintained to a certain extent: Symbols have to be regarded subjectively like old and modern art. We have to consider the cultural environment, however. Nearest or even contemporaneous to the Indus civilization is the Vedic tradition, whose oldest and holiest book is the Ṛg-Veda. It consists of about 1000 hymns addressed to different gods and goddesses. The Atharva-Veda, that is said to be of a younger age, has many hymns in common with the Ṛg-Veda. Its main subject are charms which are to be expected to be found on the Indus seals too.

The language of the Vedas is an ancient type of Sanskrit. Western science dates the origin of the Ṛg-Veda between 1500 to 1200 BC, but since some of the Vedic gods are mentioned in a Hittite contract of 1350 ante, the Āryans, the people to whose tradition these gods belonged, must have lived in the area of the Indus Valley already at an earlier time (Richter-Ushanas 2012b;13-19).

It is highly unlikely that the remembrance of the Indus civilization and the script in particular was lost all of a sudden after the end of the Indus cities. Certainly, the production of seals stopped henceforward, but the Indus pictograms could be and were written or painted on pottery and bangles and also on perishable materials. Contrarily to the opinion of most of Western and Indian scholars, there are also words for to write and writer in Vedic times and in the Veda itself, they have only not been registered as such in the dictionaries.

Thus Ṛbhū, the name of three Vedic artisans, may mean writer too. Its root *rabh* is related to Greek *rhaptein*, to knit together, and *glyphein*, to write, from which hieroglyph, sacred sign, is derived. Synonymous and homophonous with *rabh* is the Sanskrit root *grabh* corresponding to Greek *graphein* for to write. The root *grabh* is not used in this sense in the Veda, but we come across the roots *ṛ*, to let flow (the line of writing) and *ṛṣ*, to pierce, which can also mean to write. From the latter root *ṛṣi*, seer, singer, is derived. It is synonymous with the root *rad*, to scratch, that was explained as to write by Geldner (1901 III; 26). Another root that is used for to


write is *piś*, to carve (in stone). It can hence be supposed that the early Vedic poets could, if not write themselves, at least understand the pictographic meaning of the Indus signs.

There are about 400 signs in the Indus script. The most frequent pictogram  that served as a marker for the end of a verse or a quarter (*pada*) of it, may have been compared to a cup or vessel in the symbolical language of the Veda. The Celtic grail may have the same mythological origin. In several hymns the Ṛbhus are said to have made the cup of the creator Tvaṣṭṛ into four. This can be explained in relation to the quarters of the universe and the *yugas*, the cosmic periods, but it could also contain a hint to the development of the script that consisted of simple signs in the beginning as it is found on early graffiti and in neolithic cave paintings. In a second step diacritic strokes were added to it. In fact, there exist cup-signs with one, two, three or four additional strokes.

Divine and urban origin is also ascribed to the modern Sanskrit script, the Devanāgarī, (the script) of the town of the gods, and the Brāhmī script that comes chronologically between the Indus script and the modern Sanskrit script. The Brāhmī is probably named after the daughter of the god Brahmā, who is the creator of the world, whereas his daughter Brāhmī has invented all the sciences. Brahmā is the successor of Tvaṣṭṛ in the later Indian tradition. Western scholars believe that the Brāhmī alphabet is based on the Old Semitic script going back to the Phoenicians who are said to have developed it from the Egyptian script at a time when it was still pictographic. It is more likely, however, that it is based on the Indus script, whose geometric signs have much more similarity with the Brāhmī alphabet than the Egyptian.



It can further be objected that it is not very likely that the Indus inscriptions or even some of them are contained in the Ṛg-Veda, since Sanskrit, its language, is Āryan, whereas the so-called priest-king illustrated at the left and other human figures excavated in the Indus towns have no Āryan features at all. The thick lips make the figure appear like a eunuch who had a leading function in the government and the army in Mesopotamia. The functions of the priest and the

king were separated there as in the Vedic tradition. The denomination priest-king cannot be correct hence. It may be an image of a leading priest, however, indicated by the ribbon with a third eye he wears round the head, which corresponds to the fish-sign  with a stroke or eye. The language of the Veda that has been transmitted orally for at least two thousand years, is an early type of Sanskrit, no doubt, but we do not know, whether the Veda was transmitted in this language from the very beginning. It is much more likely, that its original language was a Prakrit idiom. Certainly, the founders of a high civilization can also be credited with the ability of developing a refined language like Sanskrit, that was from the very beginning the language of a small group of people, for the common people a Prakrit language like Pali, that served this purpose for the Buddhists, is better suitable.

The Veda consists of an older and a younger part. It is possible that the older hymns were translated into Sanskrit from a Prakrit language, and that only the younger hymns were originally composed in Sanskrit. This would imply to give up the idea that Sanskrit is older