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Meluhha and Agastya: Alpha and Omega of the Indus Script

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1. Introduction:

1.1 It is now generally accepted that Meluhha was the ancient name of the Indus Civilisation as written in early cuneiform records[1]. I propose that the Harappan equivalent of the name and its connection with ancient Indian historical tradition are revealed by two signs which I shall designate here as the 'alpha and omega' of the Indus Script.

1.2 There is as yet no agreed sign list for the Indus Script. Not only the numbers, but also the order of signs vary widely in different lists. However, I shall provide the following definition for the present purpose, which should be acceptable to all scholars in the field, whichever sign list they choose to follow[2]:

'**alpha**': the most frequent initial sign in Indus texts.

'**omega**': the most frequent final sign in Indus texts.

1.3 The 'alpha' sign occurs 298 times at the commencement of texts, more than double the number of times for the next most frequent initial sign. The 'omega' sign occurs 971 times at the end of texts, three times more than the next most frequent final sign. The relative preponderance of the two signs in the initial and final positions respectively becomes much more pronounced if one looks only at the seals, the 'identity cards' of the Harappan ruling classes. In short, the 'alpha' and 'omega' signs introduce and identify the affiliation of the seal-holder whose name and/or titles stand 'bracketed' between them.

1.4 This is the second occasion when the 'alpha and omega' signs have led to an important result. The first was way back in 1977, when these two signs helped to clinch the argument in favour of a generally right to left direction in the Indus texts. I had then pointed out that, as the most frequent right-end sign (alpha) occurs at the

provided by Asko Parpola, that I could have more appropriately interpreted the 'alpha' sign as Dr. *mēl-akam*, lit., 'the high (or great) place (or house) inside (the citadel)'. While adopting this nomenclature and interpretation in the present paper, I shall take the opportunity to summarise and update my earlier studies on the 'alpha and omega' signs, reiterating how important it is to understand them before proceeding with interpreting or deciphering the Indus Script.

3. The 'alpha' sign

3.1 Place signs

In accordance with universal usage, the Indus seals depict owners' names and titles. We know from historical inscriptions, especially Dravidian, that place names precede personal names. Most seal texts commence with one of five frequent 'opening signs' listed below in the order of frequency:

These are too few to denote personal names, but can be place names preceding personal names. Since the same set of opening signs occurs at all major Harappan sites, they cannot be identified with the names of cities like Harappa or Mohenjodaro. The opening signs must then refer to important places or institutions present in every major Harappan settlement, like for example, 'temple, palace, citadel, walled city' etc. Some of the frequent opening signs may also represent important titles or offices, which would be much fewer in number than personal names, like for example, 'ruler, chief, priest, lord' etc. Judging from the extreme brevity of the Indus texts, it is much more likely that place names and common titles would be represented by single ideograms rather than by phonetic syllabic writing. In particular, the most frequent opening 'alpha' sign appears to depict the ground plan of a building with a forecourt inside a fortified place, in other words, what is popularly known as the 'citadel'. I identify the 'alpha' sign with the Harappan Citadel and interpret it as Dr. *mēl-akam* lit., 'high inner place', the 'address' most members of the ruling class preferred to prefix to their personal identification. Through constant use, the expression *mēl-*

akam (*melahha* of the cuneiform records) came to represent the people and the land of the Indus Civilisation.

3.2 Graphic evolution of place signs

Sign No.	Rectangular Forms	Rhomboid Forms	Oval Forms
261-373	5090	2119	4379[1] 4087[2]
267	8106	1057	1022
284	2001[3]	2579	2522

Fig.2 Graphic evolution of Place Signs in the Indus Script (Schematic) (Cf. Mahadevan 1977:List of Sign Variants)

Notes:

(1) Oval form (373) now recognised as a variant of rectangular or rhomboid forms (261) .

(2) The oval is sometimes split as 'brackets' to accommodate one or two signs inside to form compound signs.

(3) This form does not occur as a sign, but is inferred from seal- motifs as in 2001.

Enclosures serving as place signs in the Indus Script exhibit three characteristic variant forms viz., rectangular, rhomboid or oval, whose equivalence can be demonstrated from parallel texts. It appears that acute pressure on space available on the seals caused the variation in shape in order to conform to the general space-saving pattern of tall and narrow signs in the Indus Script. The graphic evolution of the three related place signs is shown in Fig.2 with one example for each form from the texts.

3.3 Egyptian ideographic parallels to Indus place signs

Ideographic interpretation of place signs inferred from their shapes is corroborated by a set of remarkably close parallels from the Egyptian hieroglyphic script (Gardiner 1978: Sign List). The comparison and the resulting broad interpretation of the Indus signs is shown in Fig.3.

3.4 The Egyptian parallel goes beyond mere graphic resemblances. 'Pharaoh', the generic name of the Egyptian rulers, is traced to the expression 'Great House'. Originally, 'Great House' referred only to the 'palace' or to the 'court', and not to the person of the king. Later, the term 'pharaoh' became a respectable designation for the king, "just as the head of the Ottoman government was termed the Sublime Porte" (Gardiner 1978:75). As in the Egyptian script, the generic name of the rulers of Harappan cities was also derived from the expression 'High House' (conventionally called the 'citadel').

Egyptian		Indus		
Sign No.	Sign	Sign No.	Sign (nearest variant with text No.)	Broad Interpretation
0.1		261-373	5090	'house'
0.6		267	8106	'fortified house'
0.49		284	2522	'city, town'

Fig.3 Indus Place Signs and Egyptian Ideographic Parallels (Schematic) (Egyptian : Gardiner 1978. Indus : Mahadevan 1977.)

3.5 The Egyptian parallel should not, however, be stretched too far. The low-profile Harappan rulers (with no grandiose palaces or rich tombs) can in no way be compared to the vainglorious pharaohs. There is also no archaeological evidence for contacts between the Egyptian and Indus civilisations. It is, however, not unlikely that the two great contemporary civilisations had at least indirect contacts through the intermediary Sumerian-Akkadian city states in West Asia.

3.6 Interpretation of place signs in the Indus Script

In the light of the foregoing discussion, we may interpret the three related place signs in the Indus Script as follows:

: *akam* 'house, place, inside' (DEDR 7)

: *mēl-akam* 'High House (citadel)' (DEDR 5086 & 7)

: *pāḻi* 'city' (probably, the 'lower city' in the Harappan context).

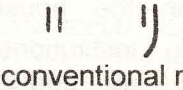
Cf. *pāḻi* 'town, city'; (DEDR 4112)

pāḻi 'row, line, regular order' (DEDR 4113)

The expression *pāḻi* thus indicates a 'planned city'.

3.7 Strokes attached to 'opening' signs

The opening signs are typically followed by one of three short superscript strokes, attached to them. They are shown below in the order of frequency:



These strokes are conventional markers which cannot be 'read'. But their function as attachments to nouns (names of places, institutions or persons) can be broadly understood as suffixed case-endings. Most probably, they represent the genitive or locative cases with the meanings 'of, belonging to, among or in'. When followed by a case suffix, the preceding noun may be either in direct or oblique form, the latter with seemingly no overt marker.

3.8 Role of Place Signs in the Indus Texts

Positional - statistical analysis of the three related place signs with the attached case suffix yields significant results **(Fig.4).**

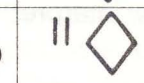
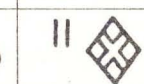
Sign Pair		Occurrences		Dr. interpretation	Meaning
		Initial	Total		
(a)		254	291	*mēl-aka(-tt-)iṉ/-il*	'of / in the High House'
(b)		nil	2	*aka(-tt-)iṉ/-il*	'of / in the house'
(c)		7	8	*pāḻi -iṉ /-il*	'of / in the (lower) city'

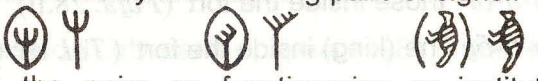
Fig.4 Interpretation of opening pairs with place signs

I interpret the data as follows:

(a) *mēl-aka(-tt-)iṉ/-il* 'of / in the High House' is the address of the rulers of the Harappan City. This accounts for the high frequency as well as initial occurrence of this pair. It is of course not necessary that all members of the ruling classes resided actually within the citadel. The opening pair is more an assertion of their identity as being associated with the citadel and the institutions within. We know from archaeological evidence that there were large houses in the lower city where we may presume many of the ruling classes resided.

(b) *aka(-tt-)iṉ/-il* 'of / in the house' relates to those who served the rulers in institutions inside the citadel like palace, temple, etc., as guards, attendants and other lower functionaries. This accounts for the absence of the pair in the initial position and its very low frequency. The data regarding frequency is, however, deceptive in this case. A close study of the enclosure signs reveals that there are more than 30 compound signs comprising enclosures surrounding the basic signs within. The enclosures are mostly oval in form, but may also be

rectangular or rhomboid and may also be split up into two halves like 'brackets' to accommodate the signs within as illustrated by the following pairs of signs::



I interpret the pairs as functionaries or institutions within, or associated with the citadel as distinguished from those outside.

(c) *pāḻi-iṉ /-il* 'of / in the (lower) city'. This seems to be the 'address' of the residents of the city not directly involved with the citadel either as rulers or as lower functionaries. The low frequency of the pair especially at the commencement of the texts can be quite simply interpreted as showing that the authority in the Harappan city did not vest with the citizens of the lower city but with the rulers of the higher citadel, the seat of authority.

3.9 The discussion shows that the frequency of the three related place signs is directly proportional to the importance of the institutions or the persons concerned, and inversely proportional to the population. It can hardly be doubted that the rulers would be less in number than the functionaries who served them, who in turn would be less in number than the common people of the lower city.

3.10 Parallels from Old Tamil traditions

Old Tamil literature contains several references to *akam* in the sense of 'fort, palace or inner place'.

(e.g.) *akam* 'palace' (*Peruṅ*.1.32.100)

aka-nakar 'the inner city' (*Cil.* 2.15.109; *Maṇi.* 1.72)

aka-p-pā 'inner fortification' (*Naṟ.* 14.4; *Patiṟ*.22.26; *Cil.*28.144)

aka-p-pā '*matil-uḷ uyar mēṭai*: high terrace inside the fort' (*Tivākaram* 5.198)

matil-akam lit., 'fortified house'; (*Cil.*2.14.69); the palace of the rulers of Kerala.

A clear distinction is drawn in Old Tamil literature between those who ruled from inside the forts and those who served them, even though the expressions for either group have the same base *aka-tt-u* 'in the house'. The rulers of the forts were known as:

(e.g.) *aka-tt-ar:* '(princes) of the palace' *(Kali.* 25.3)

aka-tt-ār 'those inside the (impregnable) fortification' (*Kuṟaḷ* 745)

aka-tt-ōr 'those inside the fort' (*Puṟa.* 28.11)

aka-tt-ōṉ 'he (king) inside the fort' (*Tol.* III: 68.4, 69.5)

Those who served as palace or temple attendants were known as follows:

(e.g.) *aka-tt-aṭimai* , *aka-t-toṇṭar, aka-mp-aṭiyar* etc.,

(*Tamil Lexicon*).

The palace or temple service was generally called:

(e.g.) *aka-p-paṭai, aka-p-paṇi, aka-p-parivāram* etc.,

(*Tamil Lexicon*).

Another important set of Old Tamil expressions for palace and temple attendants is derived from the root *cūḻ* 'to surround' > *ūḻiyam* 'service, especially in palace or temple', *ūḻiyar* 'palace or temple servants' (DEDR 2698 > 758).

Cf. *uḻi, uḻai* 'place esp. about a king' (DEDR 684) which also ultimately looks to *cūḻ* 'to surround, surrounding area'. Note the distinction between *uḻai-y-iruntāṉ* 'minister of state, companion of the king' and *uḻai-y-āḷ-aṉ* 'attendant (in the palace)' (*Tamil Lexicon*).

3.11 From Etymology to History

The critical link between Dravidian etymology and history is brought out by the following two sets of entries: DEDR 7:

aka-m 'inside, house, place'

aka-tt-u 'within, inside the house'

aka-tt-āṉ 'one who is in, a householder'.

C.W.Kathiraiver Pillai's Dictionary (1910) (gloss in English added by me):

aka-tt-i: (1) *akattiya muṉivaṉ* ('Agastya, the sage')

(2) *uḷḷ-irukkiṟa-vaṉ* ('one who is in')

(3) *oru maram* ('Agasti grandiflora').

Note how *akatti* in (1) and (3) get transformed to *agasti* in Indo-Aryan loanwords.

3.12 I have suggested in my earlier papers (1981, 1986) that *aka-tt-i* 'he of the (High) House' was the prototype of Indo-Aryan Agasti (Agastya) as well as Dravidian Akatti (Akattiyaṉ) of the Old Tamil legends (who led the southern migration of the Vēḷir and other tribes from Dvārakā in the Gujarat region to the southern peninsula). I shall revert to this theme when dealing with the 'omega' sign in the next section.

4. The 'Omega' Sign

4.1 The 'omega' or JAR sign is by far the most frequent in the Indus texts, accounting for about ten percent of the total sign occurrences. The pictorial identification of the sign as a 'vessel with handles and a tapering bottom', is no longer in doubt, especially after the publication of the pottery graffiti from Kalibangan with a realistic depiction of the sign (Lal 1979). See Fig.5.

Fig.5: JAR Sign incised on pottery from Kalibangan

4.2 I admit that I have not been quite consistent in my earlier attempts to interpret the JAR sign. I have sometimes identified it as a grammatical suffix (1970), and at other times, as an ideogram added to the names and titles of priestly and ruling classes (1982, 1986). However, after nearly three decades of intensive study, I have arrived at the conclusion that both identifications are complementary, and that the JAR sign has indeed a dual function in the Indus texts (1998). As I have dealt with both aspects in detail in my earlier writings, I shall present here only a very brief summary of the essential evidence to harmonise the two

interpretations. However, I shall emphasise the ideographic aspect more as it holds the key to the true import of the alpha and omega signs of the Indus texts.

4.3 The JAR Sign as a Grammatical Suffix

The most marked characteristic of the JAR sign is its almost constant final position in the texts. It can also be shown that even when it occurs in the middle of a text, it acts as a terminal sign. The high frequency and final position of the sign have led to the reasonable presumption that it is a grammatical marker of some kind. The most common supposition has been that the JAR sign represents the genitive case with the meaning 'of, belonging to'. However, the sign is found to be more closely attached to its preceding signs than would be the case if it were a case-ending. Further, early Dravidian inscriptions in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada, do not have case-endings in text-final positions. That leaves only the possibility that the sign is a nominal suffix marking the gender and number of the preceding nouns. Considering the very high frequency of the sign, it can only be equated with the masculine singular nominal suffix in Dravidian, viz., *-(a)nṟ* . This interpretation is corroborated by the evidence of earliest Dravidian inscriptions which have the corresponding masculine singular suffix attached to names and titles.

(e.g.) *neṭiñcaḻiyaṉ sālakaṉ iḷañcaṭikaṉ* (Old Ta., 2nd cent. BCE) (Mahadevan 2003:No.2)

aṁkka-pāsunṟu (Old Te., ca.600 CE) (Lockwood 200l:p.l99)

Nageṇṇan (Old Ka., ca.675 CE) (Narasimhia 194l:No.3)

4.4 The phonetic value of the JAR sign can also be discovered through the rebus method by comparing the likely 'vessel' words in Dravidian languages:

Cf. Ka. *aṇḍige;* Te.*aṇḍemu, aṇḍiyamu, aḍigamu* 'pannier' (DEDR 127).

Ka. *aṇḍu* ' bottom of a vessel' (DEDR 129).

Ta. *aṇṭai* '(bamboo) squirt for festival occasions'; Ka. *aṇḍe* 'bamboo vessel, generally with a handle'; Ko. *aṇḍy* 'milk pot,

bamboo pot'; To. *aḍy* 'clay pot'; Tu. *aṇḍe* 'bamboo or nutshell vessel' (DEDR 130).

Ta. *antai* (lex.) 'a weight' (?) (*Tamil Lexicon*), (included in a list of weights and measures; prob., 'a measure' (Tol. *eḻu.* 170; commentary).

Hence, by phonetic transfer, the JAR sign is equated with *-(a)nṟ-/ -(a)nt-,* the masculine singular suffix added to names and titles in the nominative case.

4.5 Paradigm of Gender-Number suffixes in the Indus script

The ARROW sign

The ARROW sign is known to function exactly like the JAR sign (including having dual functions) except for its much lower frequency (about one-sixth of that of the JAR sign). It is therefore likely that the ARROW sign is also a grammatical suffix indicating gender and number. Considering its much lower frequency, it is probably the non-masculine (feminine and / or neuter) singular suffix (Mahadevan 1998). The most common word for 'arrow' in Dravidian is *ampu* (Ta., Ma.) or *ambu* (Te., Ka.) (DEDR 178). This immediately leads, by the rebus method, to the non-masculine singular suffix *-(a)mb(u)*, attested in the earliest Old Telugu inscriptions (Mahadeva Sastri 1969:135-138). The gender suffixes *-(a)nṟu and -(a)mbu* are attested in the Old Telugu inscriptions of Mahendra Pallava assigned to ca.600 CE (Lockwood 2001:199). See Fig.6.

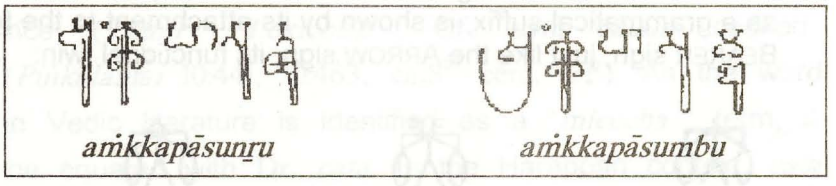


Fig.6 : Old Telugu inscriptions with gender suffixes *–(a)nṟu and –(a)mbu*

As Early Dravidian had only two genders in the singular number, namely, masculine and non-masculine, they match the frequency-distribution of JAR and ARROW signs respectively. The paradigm of

gender suffixes in the Indus Script including the plural marker already recognised by Heras (1953:83) is shown below:

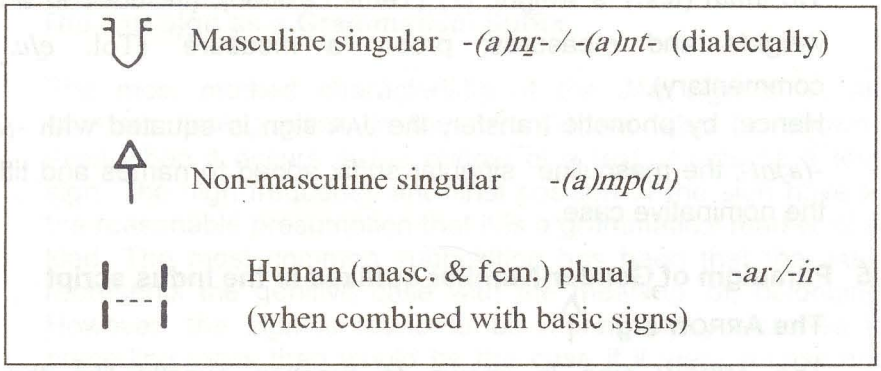


Fig. 7 Paradigm of Gender Suffixes in the Indus Script

When the Indus script became extinct, the memory of its grammatical elements should have been lost; but it did not quite happen that way. Since most of the Harappan ruling classes had names or titles ending in *-(a)nṟ*, that sound was borrowed by Indo-Aryan as an ethnic name to denote the neighbouring Non-Aryan people. Thus, Dr. *-(a)nṟ* > IA *andr* > *andhra* (attested in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* VII:18).

4.6 JAR Sign as an ideogram

The fact that the JAR sign has another value, apart from its function as a grammatical suffix, is shown by its attachment to the top of the BEARER sign, just like the ARROW sign, its functional twin:

There is no reason not to follow the normal practice of reading the compound signs from top to bottom. We must therefore assume that the JAR and ARROW signs have their literal pictographic values in these compound signs, especially as such interpretation is meaningful and productive:

JAR-BEARER: 'one who carries ceremonially a sacrificial vessel with offerings'
ARROW-BEARER: 'one who carries the arrow' (a 'warrior').

The ideographic symbolism, especially of the JAR sign, would have survived and continued to be associated with the descendants of the Harappan ruling classes re-emerging in the new social order in later periods.

4.7 Linguistic interpretation of JAR ideogram

In Vedic literature and ritual treatises, *sata* is mentioned as some kind of a sacrificial vessel (*VS*.xix:27,88; *SÖB.* xii : 7.2.13). Śabaraswamin identifies *sata* as a '*mleccha*' term for a 'round wooden vessel with a hundred holes' *Mīmāṁsa-sūtra-bhāṣya* 1.3.10). Numerous perforated jars have been found at the Harappan sites. It is probable they served a ritual purpose. My ongoing studies indicate that *sata / sāta* in Prakrit and later borrowed into Telugu and Tamil refer to the food offerings as well as to the sacrificial vessel itself. Cf.*sata* 'food' in a Pkt. cave inscription at Kanheri assigned to ca.2nd cent. CE (Nagaraju 1979). Nagaraju has identified *sata* as 'food' , contrasting with *pāniyaka* 'drink' occurring in the same inscription. I have connected the term *sata* occurring here with Sata- / Sāta-, names of the Andhra kings as well as with Te. *sādamu,* Ta. *cātam* 'food, lit., cooked rice' (*Tamil Lexicon).* Cf. *cati, cātam* 'cooked rice' (*Piṅkalantai* 10:441, 10:463, ca.8th cent. CE). As the word *sata* in Vedic literature is identified as a '*mleccha* ' term, it may be equated with Dr. *cata.* In the Harappan context, *cata* may be broadly interpreted as 'food or beverage in a sacrificial vessel (offered to the deity)'.

4.8 'Jar –born' myths in Northern Traditions

The symbolism of 'water-pitcher' has always been closely associated with priestly ritual. The legend of 'jar-born' sages

is very ancient and is found even in the Ṛgveda (7.33.10-13). There it is said that Vasiṣṭha and Agastya were generated by Varuṇa and Mitra in a 'sacred pitcher' or 'water-jar used in sacrifice'. Agastya is especially known as the 'jar-born' sage (*kumbha-yoni, kuṭa-muni* etc.). The myth of miraculous birth from jars was shared by priestly as well as royal families. Droṇa, the priest-warrior, was generated in a 'wooden trough' by Bharadvāja (*Mbh.)* The Kauravas were born from pots filled with clarified butter in which Gāndhārī's foetus was stored (*Mbh.*)

4.9 'Jar-born' myths in Southern Traditions

The earliest reference to the myth in Old Tamil is found in *Puṟanāṉūṟu,* a collection of four hundred poems compiled in the early centuries CE, but containing much older oral bardic tradition, a fact emphasised in this very poem (201). Kapilar, the poet, narrates that 'fortynine generations' earlier, an ancestor of the Vēḷir ruled over Tuvarai, a city surrounded by soaring bronze walls. Kapilar also records that the Vēḷir arose in the *taṭavu* of a 'northern sage'. This extremely important historical reference has remained obscure, as the medieval commentator did not identify the 'northern sage' and misinterpreted *taṭavu* as the 'sacrificial fire-pit'. M.Raghavaiyangar (1907; 2004 reprint :26) has rightly interpreted *taṭavu* (variant *taṭā*) as a 'water pitcher', but missed the obvious connection between the vessel and Agastya, the 'jar-born' sage. The word *taṭā* occurs in a Tamil-Brāhmī inscription incised on an earthern storage jar excavated at Kodumanal, Tamilnadu, and assigned to ca.2nd cent. BCE (Y. Subbarayalu 1996:No.3) (see Fig.8). The word is also attested in this sense in Tamil literature. Cf. *taṭavu* (*Naṟ.* 227.7); *taṭā* (*Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* : 9.6). Once the meaning of *taṭavu* (*taṭā*) 'jar' is understood, it follows that the reference in *Puṟam* 201 must be to Agastya, the 'jar born' sage *par excellence.* U.V. Swaminathaiyar's identification of the 'northern sage' with 'Campu muṉi' (not known to Old Tamil tradition) from late sources is unconvincing. I have attempted to set the record straight

by identifying the 'northern sage' in *Puṟam* 201 with Agastya, *taṭavu* with his celebrated 'water-pitcher' and *tuvarai* with Dvārakā of the Gujarat region (Mahadevan 1986). This re-interpretation links the *Puṟam* 201 legend with another famous Old Tamil tradition regarding Agastya and the Veḷir (see para 4.11).

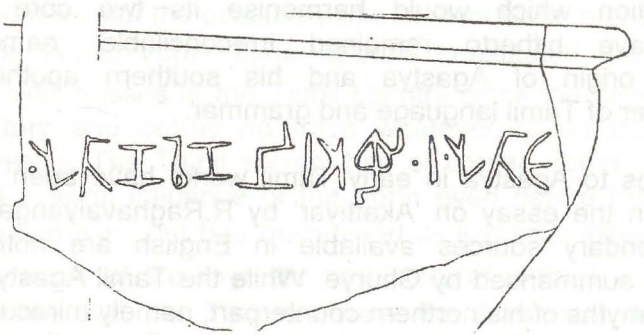


Fig.8 Pottery inscription from Kodumanal (ca.2nd cent. BCE). (*taṭā* 'jar' occurs as the last word at right)

The Pallavas of Kanchi belonging to the Bhāradvāja gotra and claiming Droṇa to be one of their remote ancestors, traced their descent from a water-pitcher (*pāttra- skhalita- vṛttīnām,* Pallankoyil Plates, ca.6th cent. CE). According to tradition, the Chalukyas were so-called as the dynasty sprang from a *suḷuka* ' water-pot ' (*Vikramāṅka-caritra* I.318.8*).*

4.10 Agastya legend in the Southern tradition

It has generally been held that Agastya led the earliest Aryan settlement of South India and introduced Vedic Aryanism there. (For a comprehensive treatment of this view, see Ghurye 1977.) This theory has, however, never been able to explain satisfactorily how the Tamils, proud possessors of an ancient culture of their own and a particularly strong tradition of love for their language, came to accept Agastya, an Aryan sage, as the founding father, not of the Brahmanical religion or culture in the south, but of their own Tamil language, literature and grammar. There is also

no linguistic evidence to support the theory of colonisation of the Tamil country by speakers of Indo-Aryan languages in pre-historic times. The interpretation of the Agastya legend in terms of the Aryan acculturation of the south was developed before the discovery of the Indus Civilisation, which is considered by most scholars to be pre-Aryan and probably Dravidian. It has now become possible to take a fresh look at the Agastya legend and attempt an alternative interpretation which would harmonise its two core features which have hitherto remained irreconcilable, namely, the northern origin of Agastya and his southern apotheosis as the founder of Tamil language and grammar.

References to Agastya in early Tamil works have been collected together in the essay on 'Akattiyar' by R.Raghavaiyangar (1941). The secondary sources available in English are noticed and succinctly summarised by Ghurye. While the Tamil Agastya shares the basic myths of his northern counterpart, namely miraculous birth from a pitcher and southern migration from the north across the Vindhya, he is given a very different role by the Tamil tradition. Here Agastya is so totally identified with Tamil that he is termed the Tamil *muṉi* ('Tamil sage') and Tamil itself is named after him as *āgastyam.* Agastya received the Tamil language from Siva (or Skanda) and gave it to the world. The Tamil Buddhists claimed that Agastya learnt Tamil from Avalokitesvara (*Vīracōḻiyam* by Buddhamitra). Agastya wrote the first Tamil grammar called *Akattiyam* (not extant now). Even today, Tamilnadu has the largest number of Siva temples dedicated to the 'Lord of Agastya' (Agastyēśvara), a feature almost unique Tamilnadu, as noted by Ghurye. According to most competent scholars, it is from South India that the Agastya cult was carried to the South-East Asian countries.

4.11 Agastya and the Southern migration of the Vēḷir

The story of the southern migration of the Vēḷir from Dvārakā under the leadership of Agastya is narrated by Naccinarkkiniyar in his commentary on *Tolkāppiyam (pāyiram ; Poruḷ.*34). According to this legend, the gods congregated on Mount Meru as a result of which the earth tilted, lowering Meru and raising the southern quarter. The gods thereupon decided that Agastya was the best person to remedy this situation and requested him to

proceed to the South. Agastya agreed and, on his way, visited 'Tuvarāpati' (Dvārakā) and led the descendants of *neṭu-muṭi-aṇṇal* (Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa) including 'eighteen kings, eighteen families of the Vēḷir and the Aruvāḷar' to the south, where they settled down 'clearing the forests and cultivating the land'. The sage himself finally settled down on the Potiyil hill. The fact of Agastya's leadership of the Vēḷir clan rules out the possibility that he was even in origin an Aryan sage. The Vēntar-Vēḷir-Vēḷāḷar groups constituted the ruling and land-owning classes in the Tamil country since the beginning of recorded history and betray no trace whatever of an Indo-Aryan linguistic ancestry. The Tamil society had of course come under the religious and cultural influence of the north even before the beginning of the Caṅkam Age, but had maintained its linguistic identity. From what we now know of the linguistic prehistory of India, it is more plausible to assume that the Yādavas were the Aryanised descendants of an original non-Aryan people than to consider the Tamil Vēḷir to have descended from the Indo-Aryan speaking Yādavas as suggested by M. Raghavaiyangar (2004). As he has pointed out, *vēḷ* means 'one who performs a sacrifice' (namely a 'priest'). The Agastya legend itself can be re-interpreted as non-Aryan and Dravidian even in origin and pertaining to the Indus Civilisation.

4.12 Conclusion

The 'alpha and omega' signs have been so designated not only because they respectively commence and end most of the Indus texts, but also because they sum up the essence or most important feature of the Indus seal-texts, namely, the identity of the Harappan ruling class. This is shown below schematically (from left to right for convenience) :

'He of the (High) House
aka-(tt)-(i)

He with the JAR
kumbha-muṉi (Agastya)

akam ('High House') did not survive. But those who owned allegiance to the *mēl-akam*, the *akatt-u* people, did survive and, in

course of time, re-emerged in the Vedic period as the 'jar-born' priests typified by Agastya. A section of the Harappan ruling classes did not stay on, but migrated under the leadership of the Akattiyar clan to South India, where they founded the Early Historical kingdoms (of Andhras and their successors in the Deccan, and the triple kingdoms, Chera, Chola and Pandya, in the Tamil country).

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Notes

1. On identification of Meluhha with the Indus Civilisation, see: Asko and Simo Parpola 1975, Romila Thapar 1975, Simo and Asko Parpola and R. Brunswig 1977, Daniel Potts 1982, Asko Parpola 1994, and Gregory Possehl 1996, 1997, & 2008.

2. Sign and Text Numbers cited in this paper are from Mahadevan 1977.

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