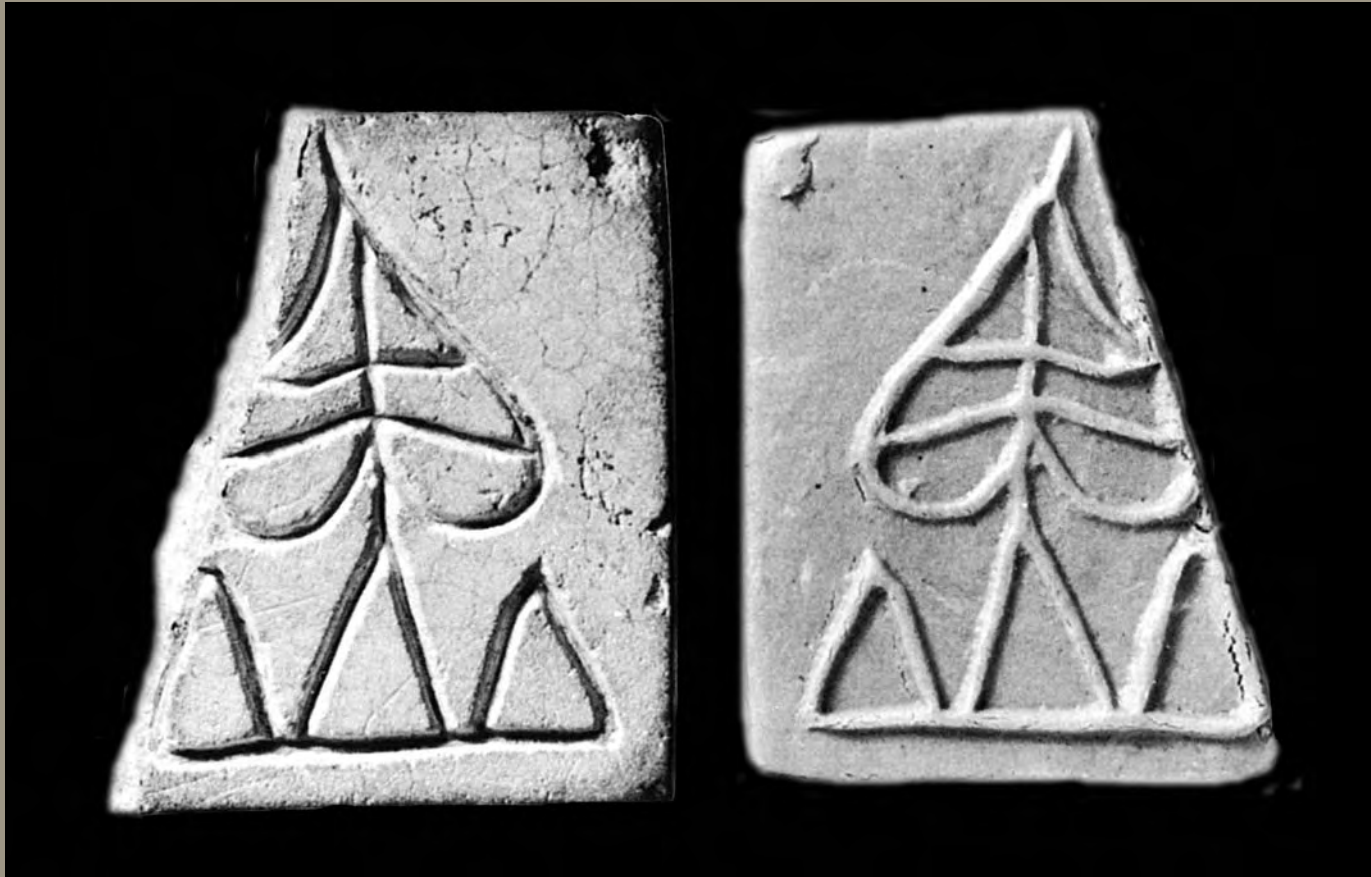


HARAPPAN SEALS: IMAGES FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION



Professor John C. Huntington

Iconographic precursors to the Indus Valley Civilization

In the late Neolithic, ca. 7000-3500 BCE, mortuary interments included ceramics with symbols that continued into the Indus period. These include:

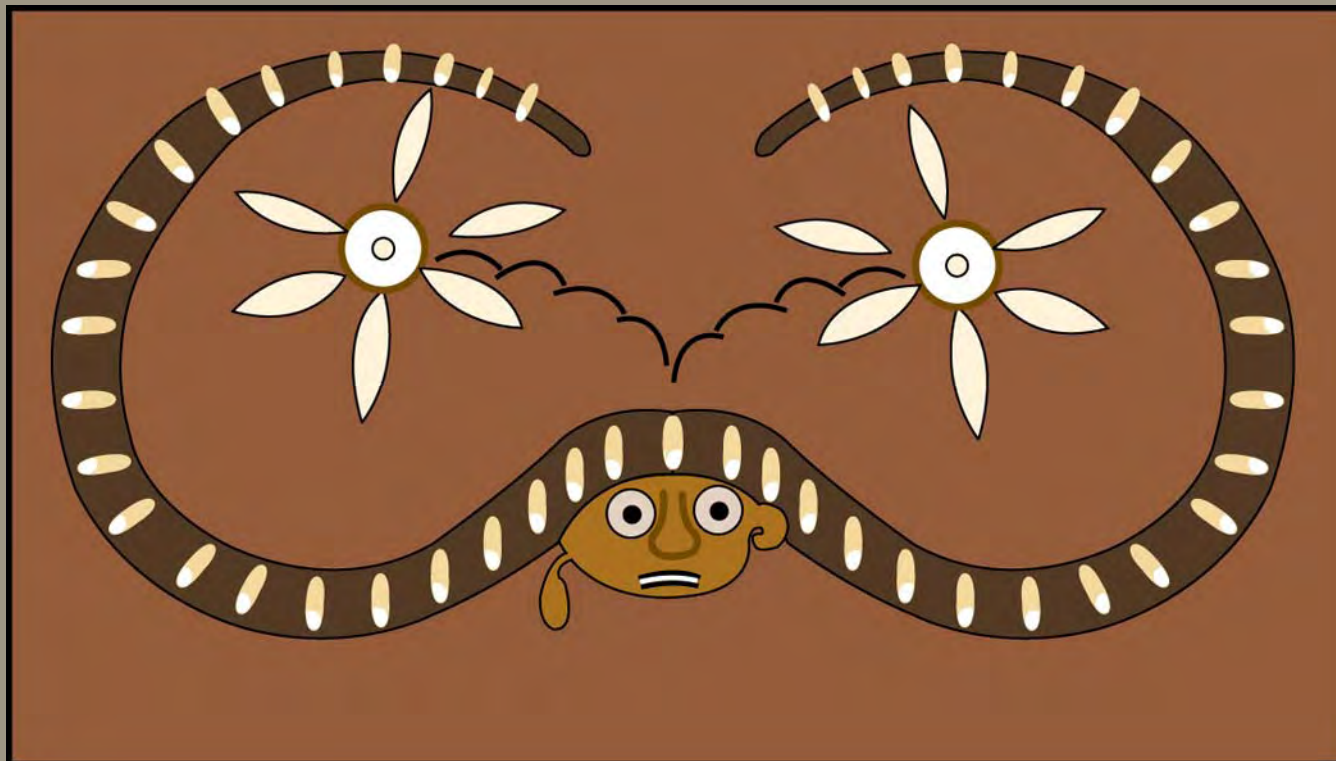
Iconographic Precursors

Kot-diji burial vessel: human face with water buffalo horns and foliate motifs



Iconographic Precursors

Kot-diji burial vessel: Illustration of human face with water buffalo horns and foliate motifs. Drawing composed from both sides of the pot. In short, the horned human predates the Indus Civilization as a religious phenomenon.



Iconographic Precursors

Kot-diji shard from a burial vessel: Leaves on a branch of the *ficus religiosa* tree, also known as the the Ashvattha, Pippul or Bodhi tree.



Iconographic Precursors

The *ficus religiosa* has remained a sacred tree to the present day. Commemorative Bodhi tree leaves from Bodhgaya, India (left) and the Doi Suthep, Thailand, both ca. mid-1980's.



Iconographic Precursors

Using the Bodhi tree leaf from the Doi Suthep, which was carefully selected for its perfect shape before it was gilded, we will examine the characteristics of the leaf that make it distinctive and always identifiable.

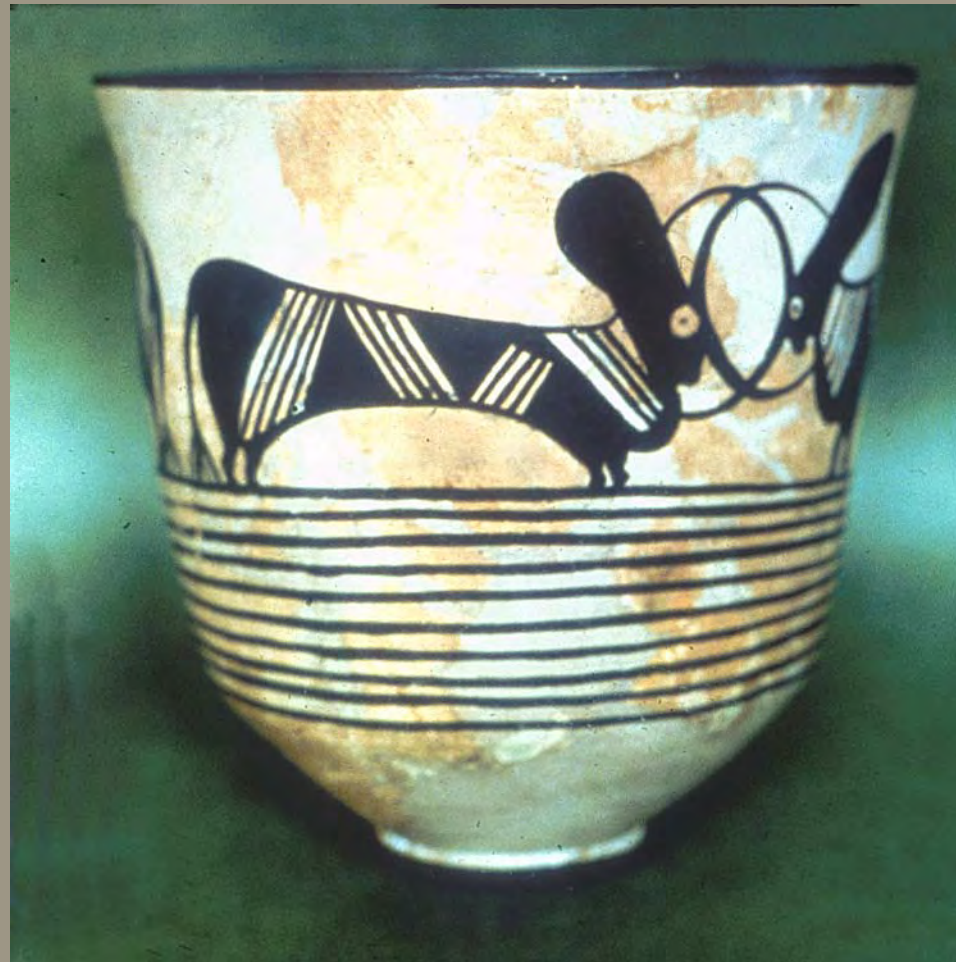


The “heart” shaped leaf is unusually symmetrical with nearly bilateral secondary veins emerging from a straight central vein. The leaf terminates in a very long drip tail. By means of this drip tail the tree efficiently moves all water that strikes the leaves to the perimeter of the tree where it falls to the ground soaking tiny feeder roots that nourish the whole tree.

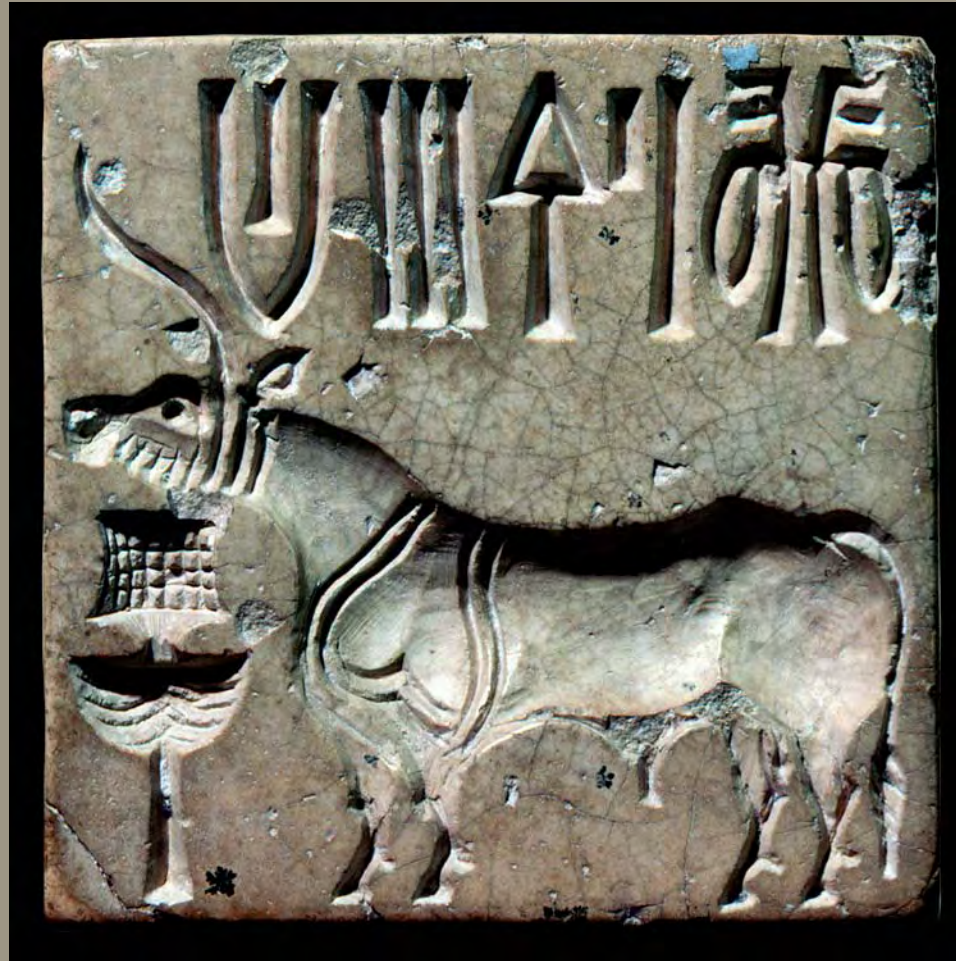
Fortunately for iconographers, this shape is distinctive among Indian flora and we can trace the history of the image back approximately 6000 years.

Iconographic Precursors

Dam Sadat/Quetta: Burial vessel depicting two (probably) male *bos indicus* in apparent combat. Like the Bodhi tree, the *bos indicus* has been part of the Indic sacred landscape for approximately 5000-6000 years.



Harappan Civilization Seals



According to Parpola's survey,
the vast majority of seals depict a unicorn.

Scale of a typical seal



For the most part, seals are between 1 inch and 2 inches square.

ANIMALS: REAL AND IMAGINED

Given the limitations of scale, the depiction of animals is fairly realistic

Indus Seals

Animals: *Chinkara* “Indian Gazelle”



Indus Seals

Animals: *Chinkara* “Indian Gazelle”



Indus Seals

Animals: Bovids

Gaur, Parpola M-238 A



Indus Seals

Animals: Bovids

Bos Gaurus



Indus Seals

Animals: Bovids

Bos Indicus, Parpola # unknown



Indus Seals

Animals: Bovids

Bos Indicus



Indus Seals

Animals: Bovids

Water Buffalo, Parpola # B-007



Indus Seals

Animals: Bovids

Water Buffalo



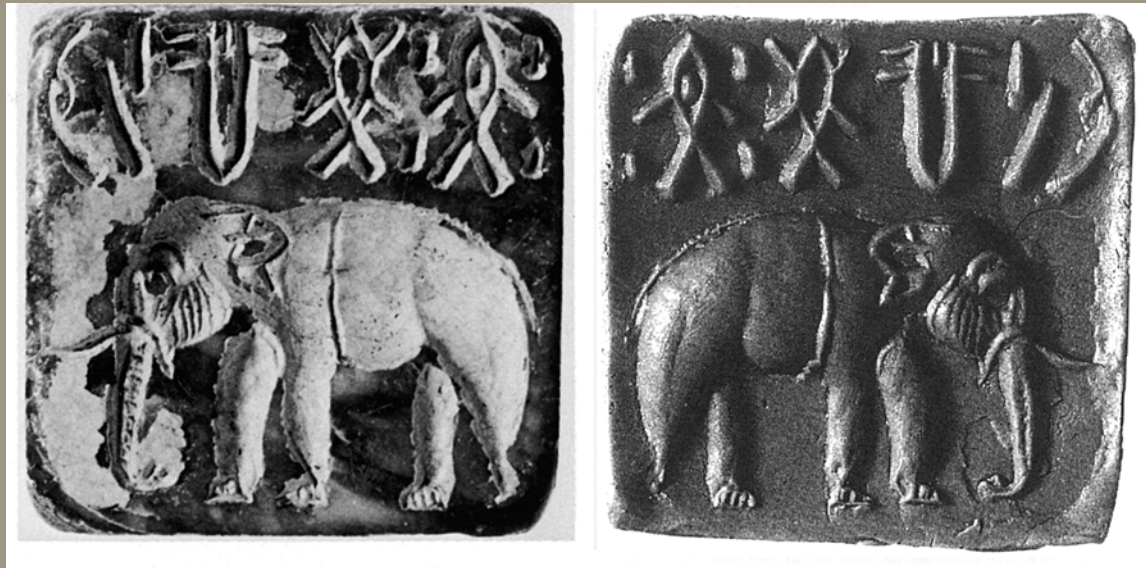
Indus Seals

Animals: Asian Elephant, Parpola # none



Indus Seals

Animals: Asian Elephant, Parpola # H-089 A/a



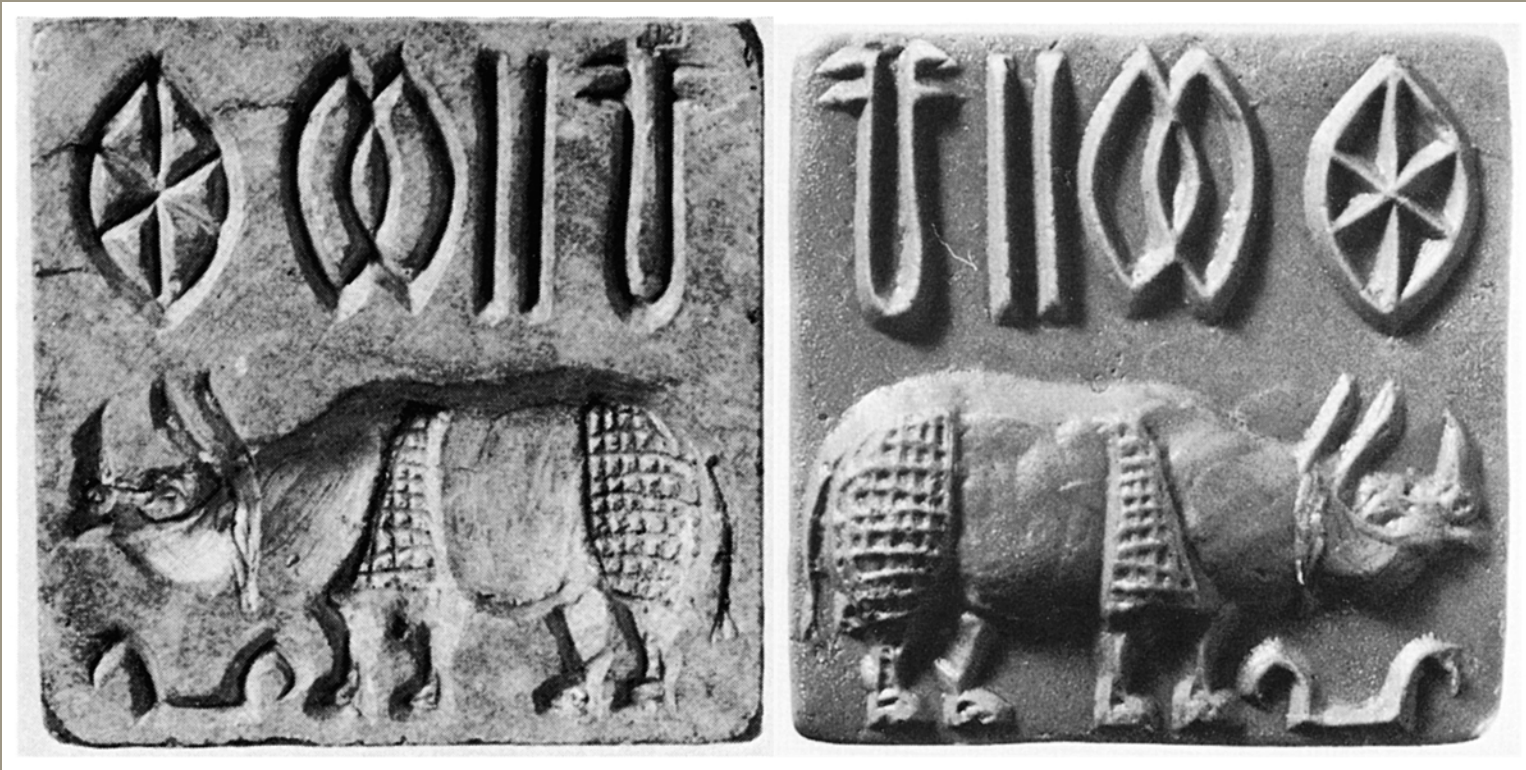
Indus Seals

Animals: Juvenile Asian Elephant



Indus Seals

Animals: Indian Rhinoceros, Parpola # H-088 A/a



Indus Seals

Animals: Indian Rhinoceros



Indus Seals

Animals: *Markhor*, Parpola # X-B 009



Indus Seals

Animals: *Markhor*



Indus Seals

Animals: Markhor, *Capra falconeri heptneri*

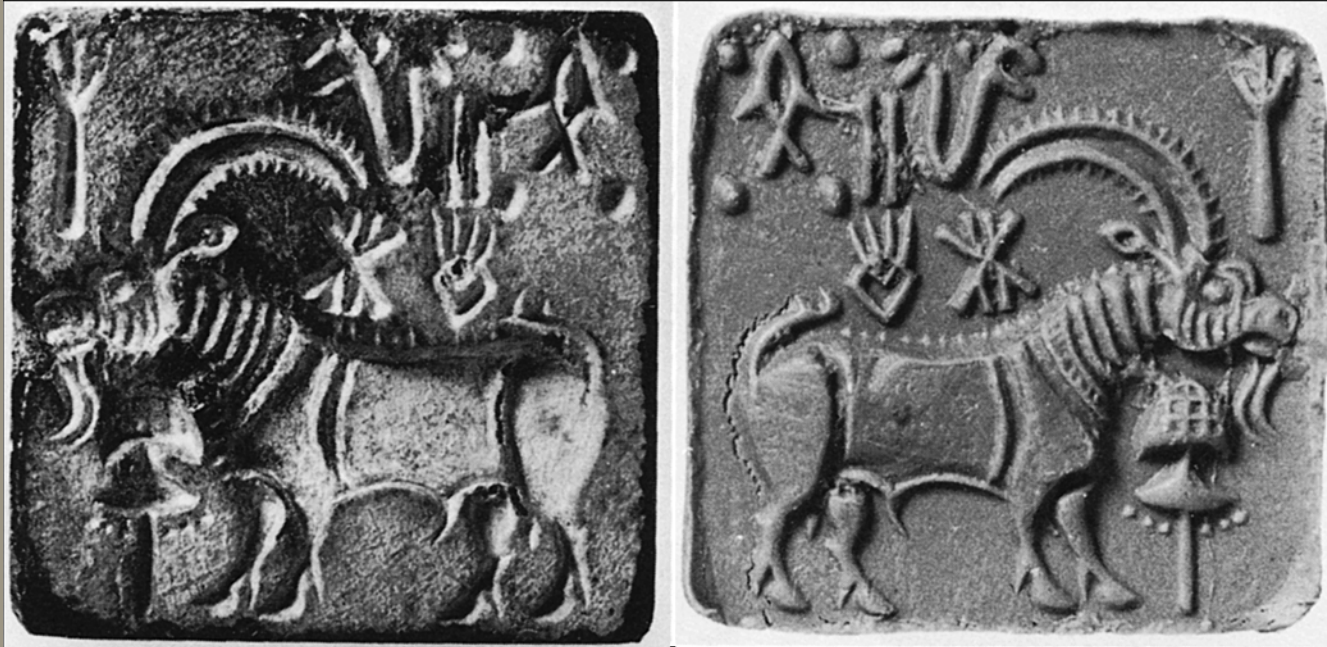
Since the Markhor goat is less well known than some other of the animals in this series, I include the following from:

http://www.wildsheep.org/sheep/capra/bukharan_markhor.htm

Formerly [meaning in the previous century. This does not refer to its ancient range which is unknown to me but must have included parts of what is now Pakistan. JCH] in most of the mountains along the north banks of the upper Amu Darya and Pyandzh rivers from Turkmenistan to Tajikistan. Now reduced to scattered populations in the Kugitang range of extreme eastern Turkmenistan and south-eastern Uzbekistan, in the area between the Pyandzh and Vakhsh rivers in southwestern Tajikistan, and in the northwestern part of the Darwaz Peninsula of northeastern Afghanistan near the Tajik border.

Indus Seals

Animals: Ibex, Parpola # L-048



Indus Seals

Animals: Ibex



Photo Credit: Mr. Yash Veer Bhatnagar via Nausherwan Ahmed

Common Name: Himalayan Ibex

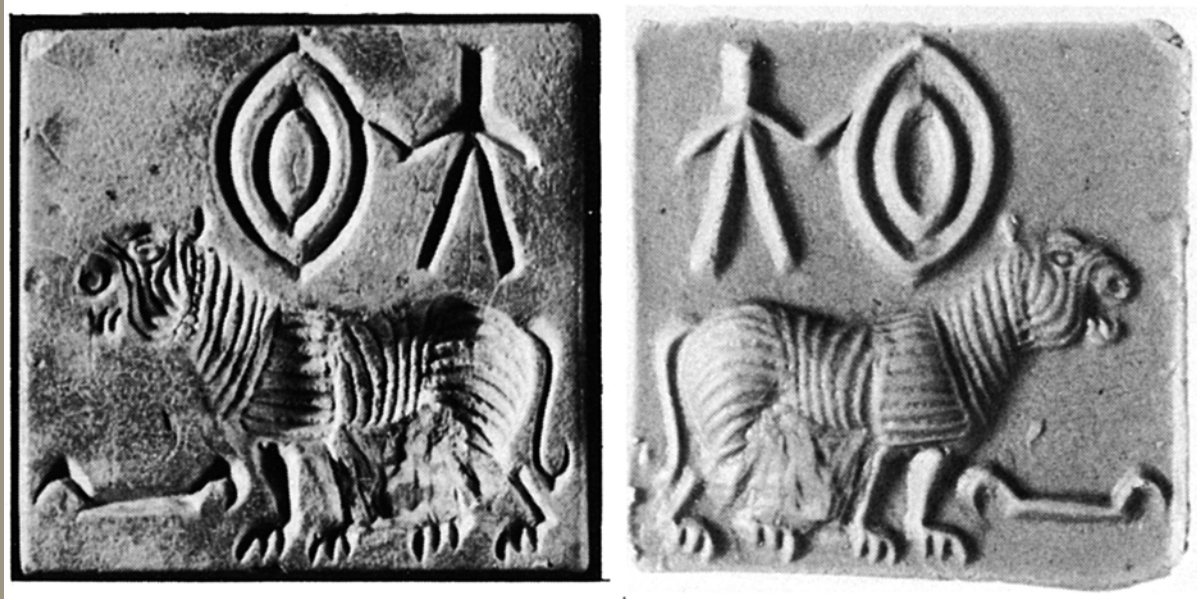
Scientific Name: *Capra sibirica hemalayanus*

Location: Both sides of the western Himalayas from Chitral in Pakistan, eastward to Leh and the upper Shyok River in Ladakh, and southeastward to the upper Sutlej River in northern India.

A big ibex of near 200 pounds. Coat is thick and woolly in winter, being shed in early summer. Color ranges from pale brown to dark brown, with a darker dorsal stripe. http://www.wildsheep.org/sheep/capra/himalayan_ibex.htm

Indus Seals

Animals: Tiger, Parpola # H--94 A/a



Indus Seals

Animals: Tiger



Photo Credit:

<http://dls.fws.gov/DATA/files/48036F78-1957-4ED9-8A635FDB8578BAF3.jpg>

Indus Seals

Animals: *Gharail*, Parpola, MD-602 (A three-sided prism seal)

A *gharail* is a crocodile with a very narrow snout; shown here holding a fish



Indus Seals

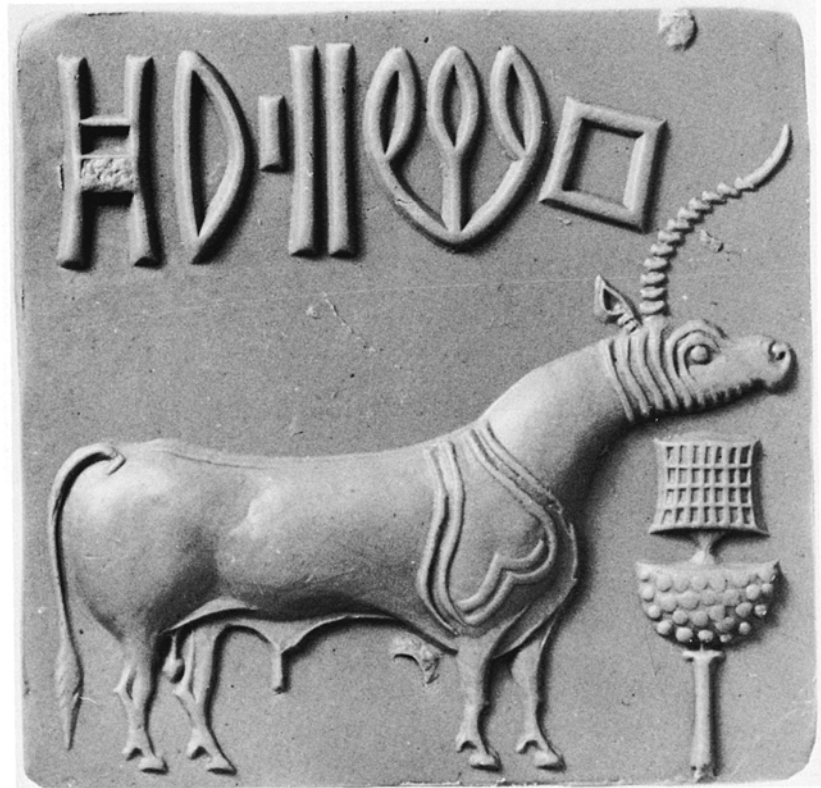
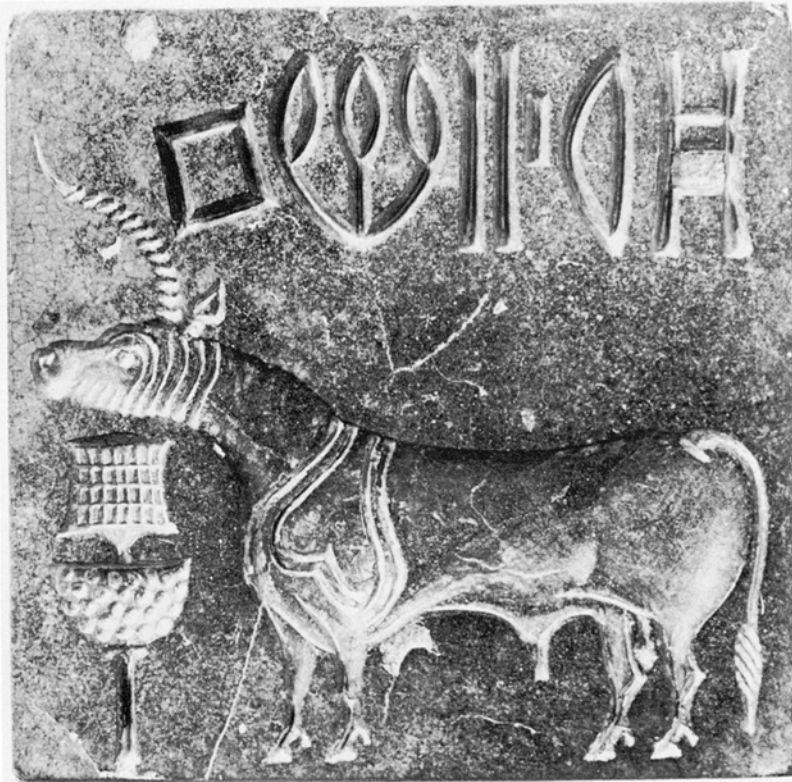
Animals: *Gharial*



Indus Seals

Imagined Animals: Bovids

A) Unicorn Parpola H-006



Indus Seals

Imagined Animals: Bovids

A) Unicorn Parpola (unknown)



Indus Seals

Imagined Animals: Composite, Parpola # M-299 A/a



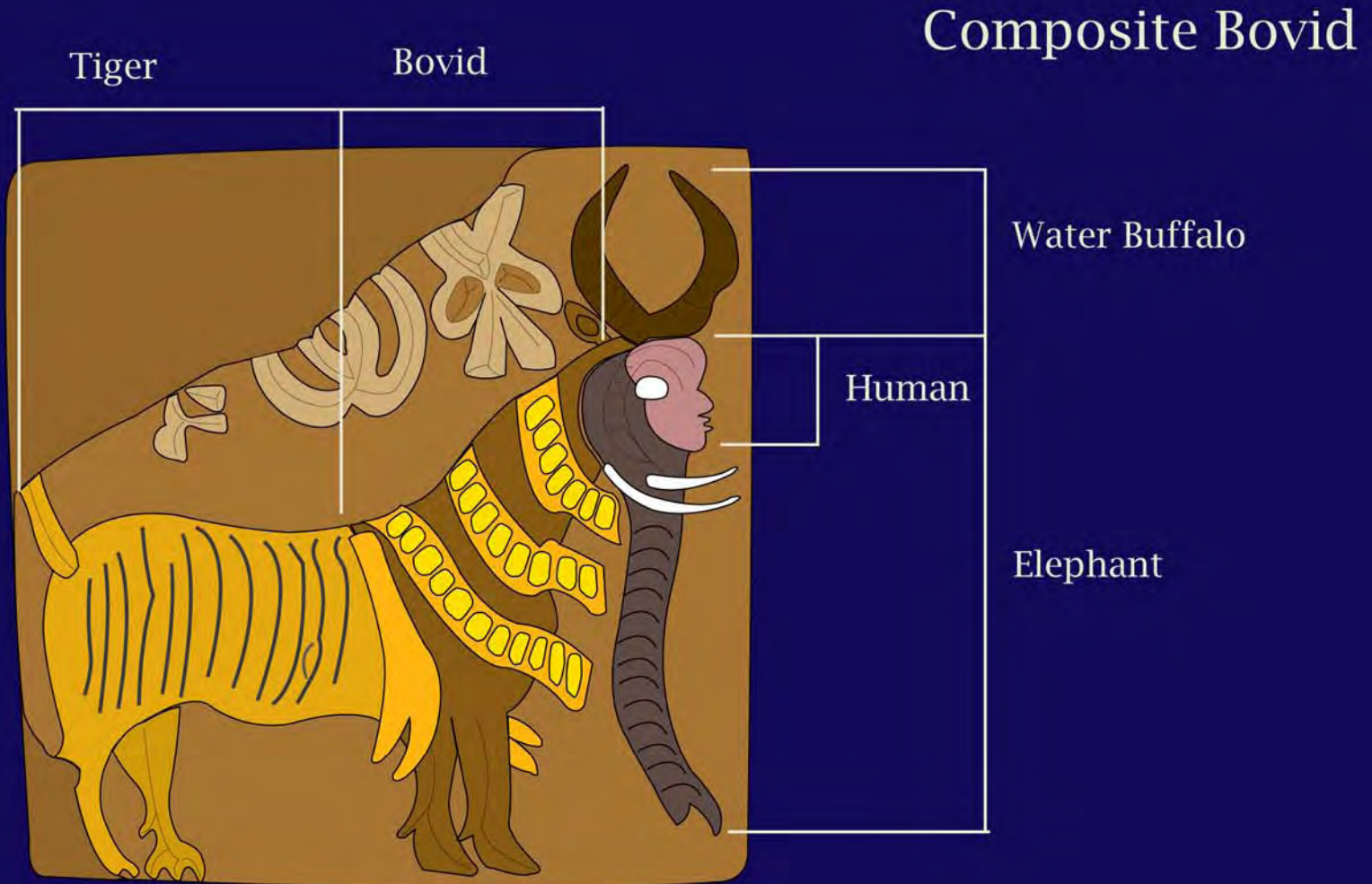
Seal



Seal Impression

Indus Seals

Imagined Animals: Composite , Parpola # M-299 A/a



Indus Seals

Imagined Animals: Various composite animals

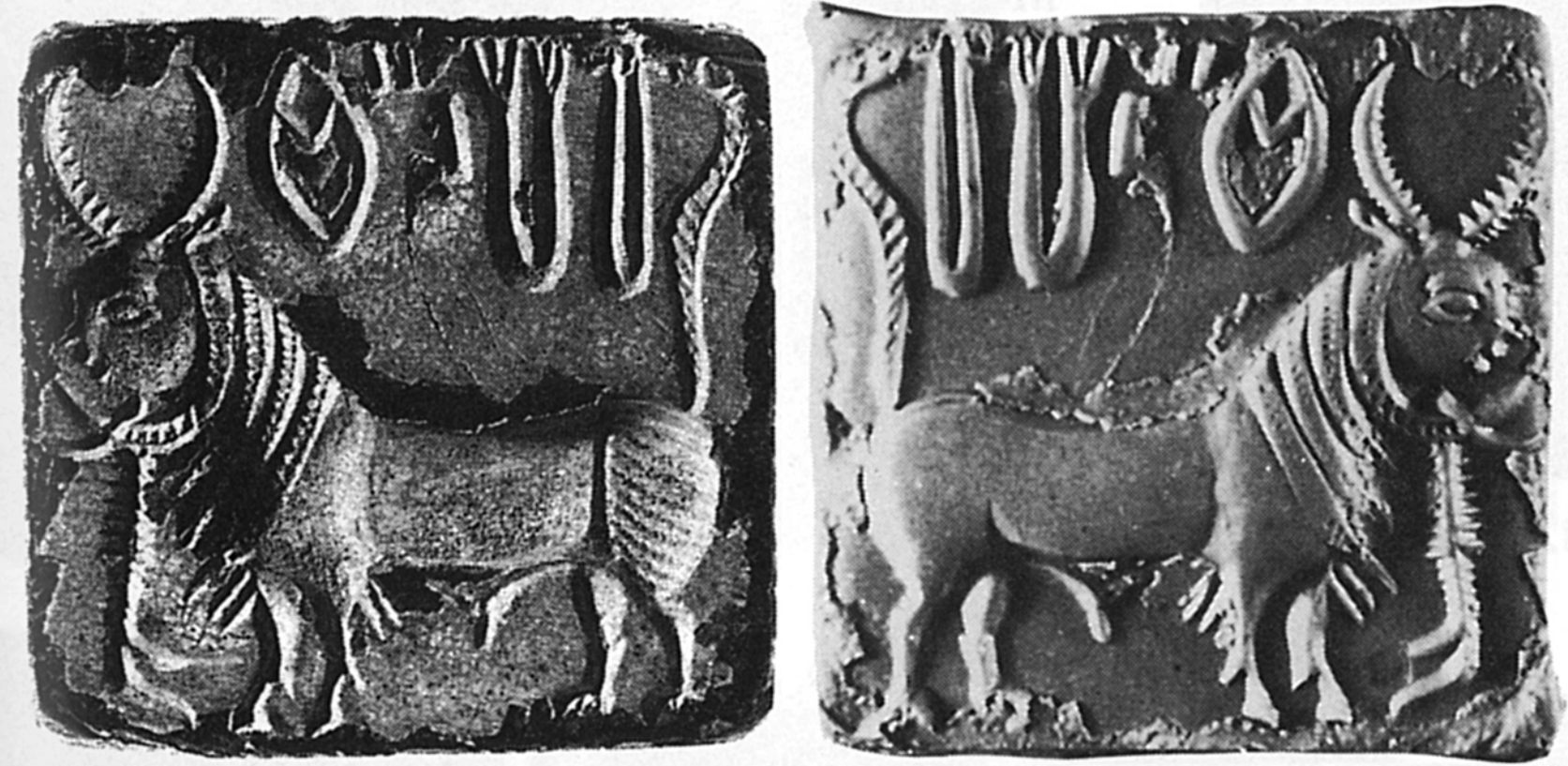
Parpola # H-096 A/a



Indus Seals

Imagined Animals: Various composite animals

Parpola # M-1177 A/a



Indus Seals

Imagined Animals: Various composite animals

Parpola # M-1179 A/a



Indus Seals

Imagined Animals: Various composite animals

Parpola M-? A



Indus Seals

Imagined Animals: Various composite animals

Parpola K 050 A/a



Indus Seals

3 bovine heads on a single body

Parpola # K-043 A/a



Reversed from the usual directions

Indus Seals

2 bovine heads on a single body

Parpola # M-298 A/a



Reversed from the usual directions

Indus Seals

“Mandala” of six heads: tiger and 5[?] bovines emanating from a “core”

Parpola # M-417 A/



Human constructions and artifacts

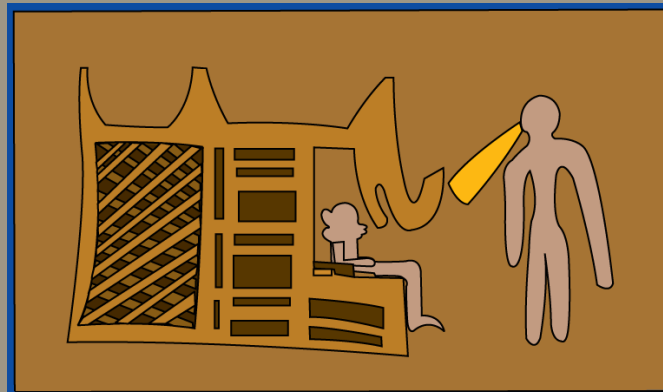
Indus Seals

Human Constructions: House

Parpola # H176 a (Seal) (Inverted and manipulated for greater clarity)



Signs Person seated in front
 of a house Standing
 Human Gaur



Indus Seals

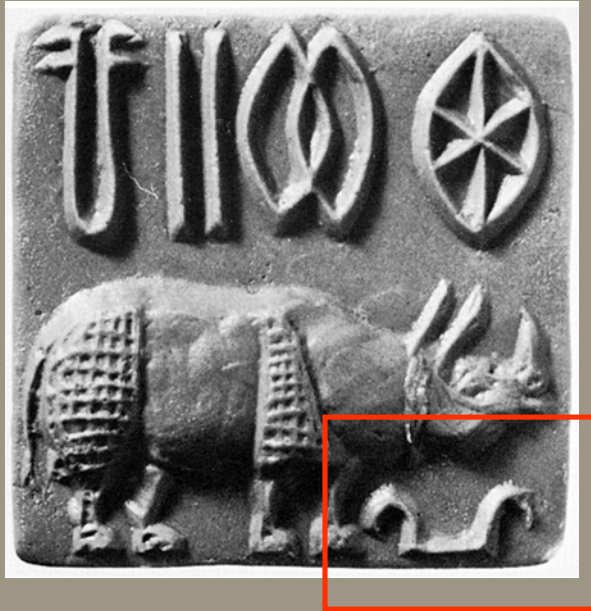
Human Constructions: House Parpola, MD-602 (A three-sided prism seal)

Large boat with double rudder and central super-structure

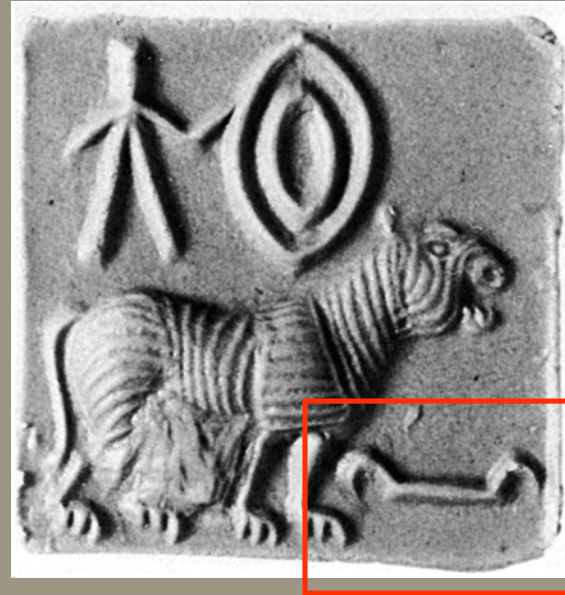


Indus Seals

Human Constructions: Feed Trough



H-088 a: rhino at feed trough



H-094 a: tiger at feed trough

Indus Seals

Human Constructions: Feed Trough



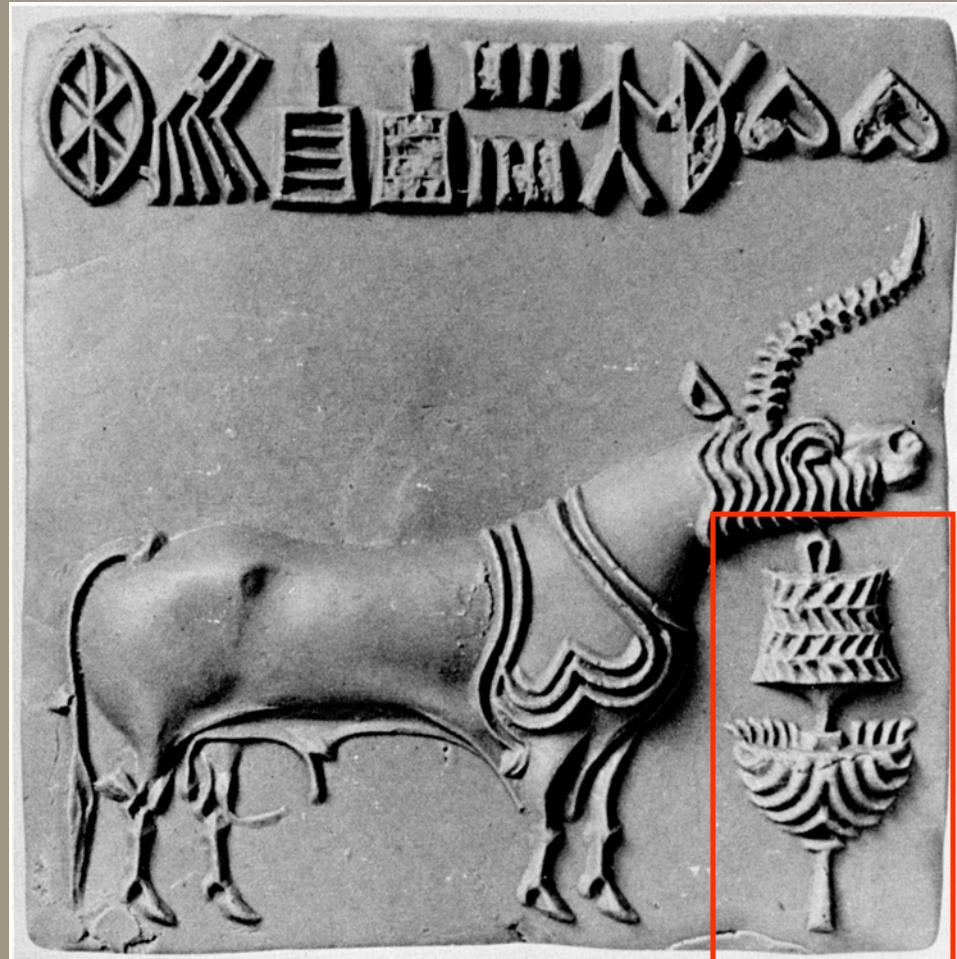
M-238 a: *gaur* at feed trough



H-076 a: *gaur(?)* at feed trough

Indus Seals

Human Constructions: “Manger” [possibly a ceremonial feeding trough?]



H-010 a: unicorn in front of a “manger”

Indus Seals

Human Constructions: There are many variations of the two part standard or “manger”



H-006 a



P # unknown



M-018 A



H-087 A

A collection of randomly selected “mangers”

Indus Seals

Human Constructions: Because there are “stand alone” versions, it is reasonable to surmise that the “mangers” have some meaning in their own right.



Three “mangers” from Hargreves



H-098 a



H-195 B



Part of a gold fillit

Human Activities

In these complex seals, the limitations of scale are difficult to overcome, which leads to considerably ambiguous interpretations. Over the years, I have made photographs of several of the ones containing human figures and have collected the best images I could of others. The two most important are the two largest; the “yogin” seal and, what I have deemed, the “sacrifice” seal. We shall examine each and similar ones in turn.

Indus Seals

Seal depicting a “yogin” figure: Parpola # M-304 A



Indus Seals

Seal depicting a “yogin” figure: Parpola # M-304 A. The seal has been reversed and inverted to provide a positive image. This is the basis of what we will be looking at for the next several slides.



Indus Seals

I know of no strong disagreement about the main elements of the composition. They are the human figure, an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros and a water buffalo. Below the human's platform are two ibex, one of which is missing due to damage.



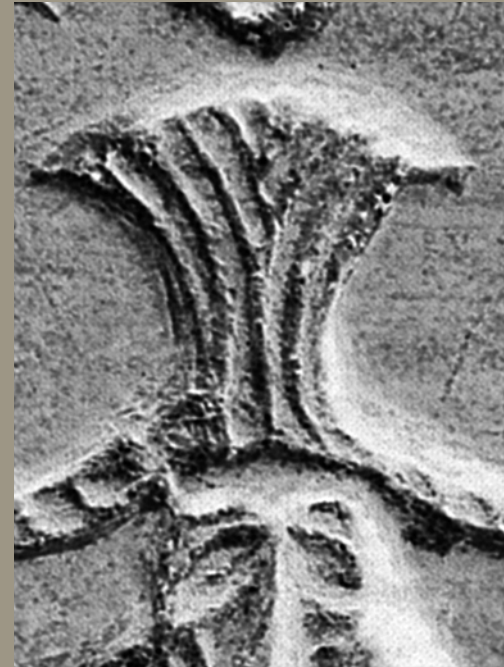
Indus Seals

The headdress of the human figure is composed of two identifiable elements: water-buffalo horns and a “fan-shaped” element in the center. This is interesting because all other central elements appear to be botanical.



Indus Seals

Harappan female figures commonly have a fan-shaped headdress. However, the “yogin” figure does not have any gender markings, thus producing the assumption that the figure represents a male because female figures invariably have pronounced breasts.



Indus Seals

While the face is agreeably human, even if misproportioned, the side appendages have been the cause of much speculation. Featured are profile faces, bovine ears and the like. (Maybe the lower appendages are Frankenstein's electrodes? [sorry]). There are several profile human faces in the composite animal section and none of them even remotely resembles these. At this point, it would be the best call to say we don't know what they are. (and may never....)



Indus Seals

Examples of other faces in profile



Indus Seals

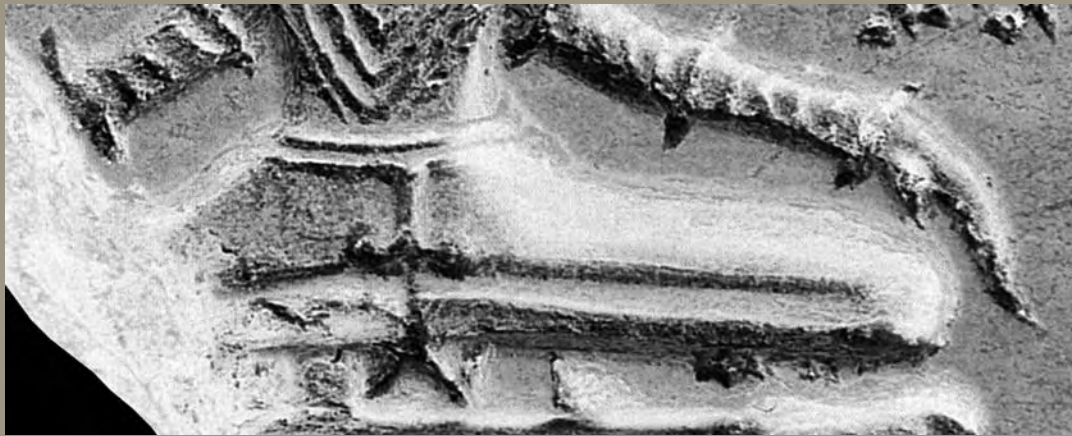
To me, the torso is clearly enveloped in some sort of garment and the putative ithyphallic nature of the figure is simply a part of the ties around the waist of the figure.



Indus Seals

Much of the controversy about this figure centers around the position of the legs and of the hands relative to the legs.

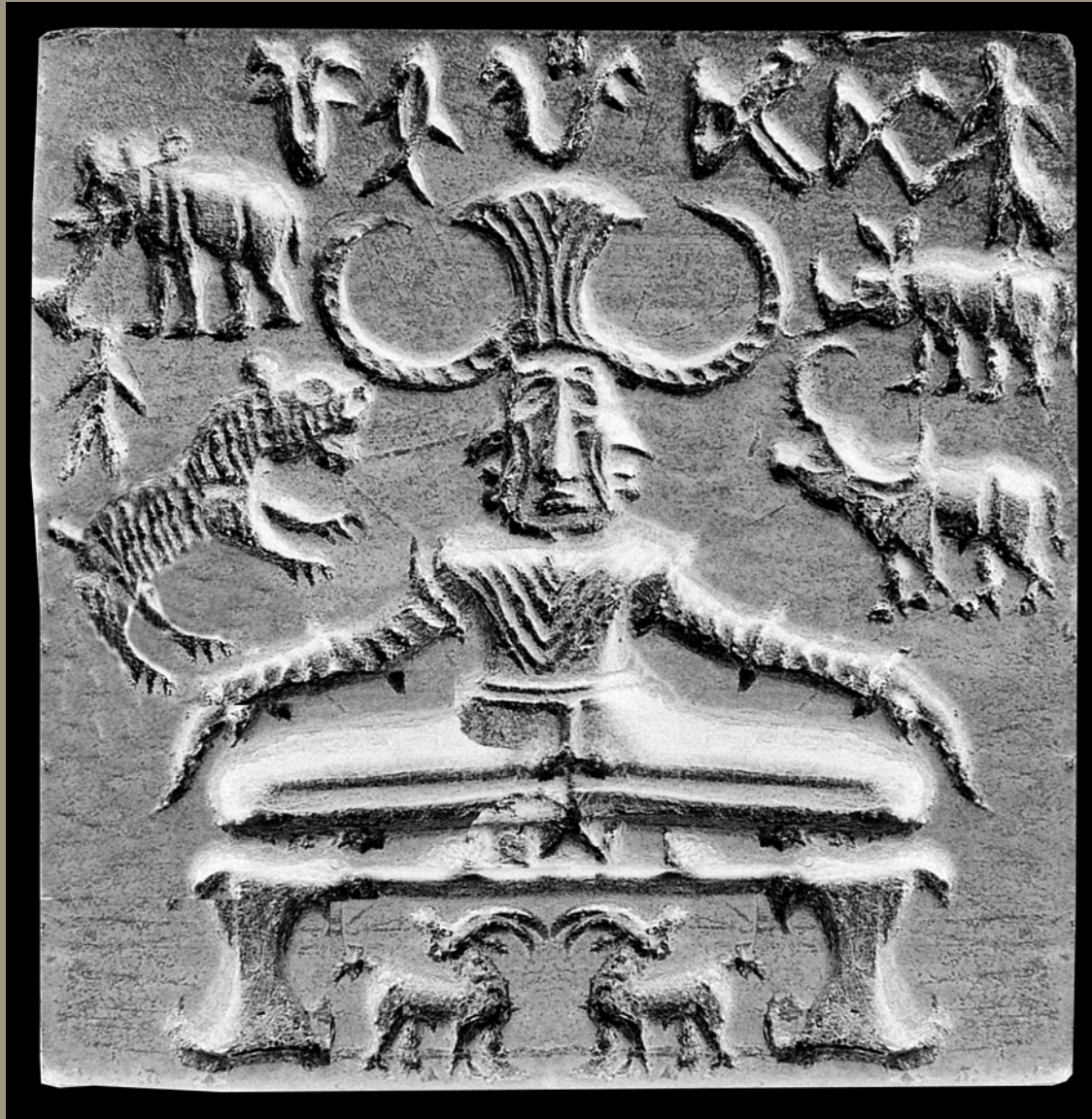
1) The left hand of the figure balances on the left thumb and gracefully follows the line of the knee with a distinct space between the hand and the knee



2) The feet and legs are neither crossed (scribe style) nor are they in *padma asana* with the lower legs crossed the the soles up above the knees. (This, by the way, is not a natural or comfortable posture as some have suggested.) The legs are sharply extended to the sides and the soles of the feet touch. (Also neither a natural nor comfortable posture as has been suggested.)

Indus Seals

The full effect is best understood from the restored view of the seal.



Indus Seals

Another question we might ask at this point concerns how the figure functions and how the animals relate to him.



Indus Seals

To review briefly, the human, the tiger, the elephant and the water buffalo are all elements of several of the composite animals. While this does not explain the rhinoceros in the “yogin” seal, it may be that the group of animals is another way of explaining the same basic concept



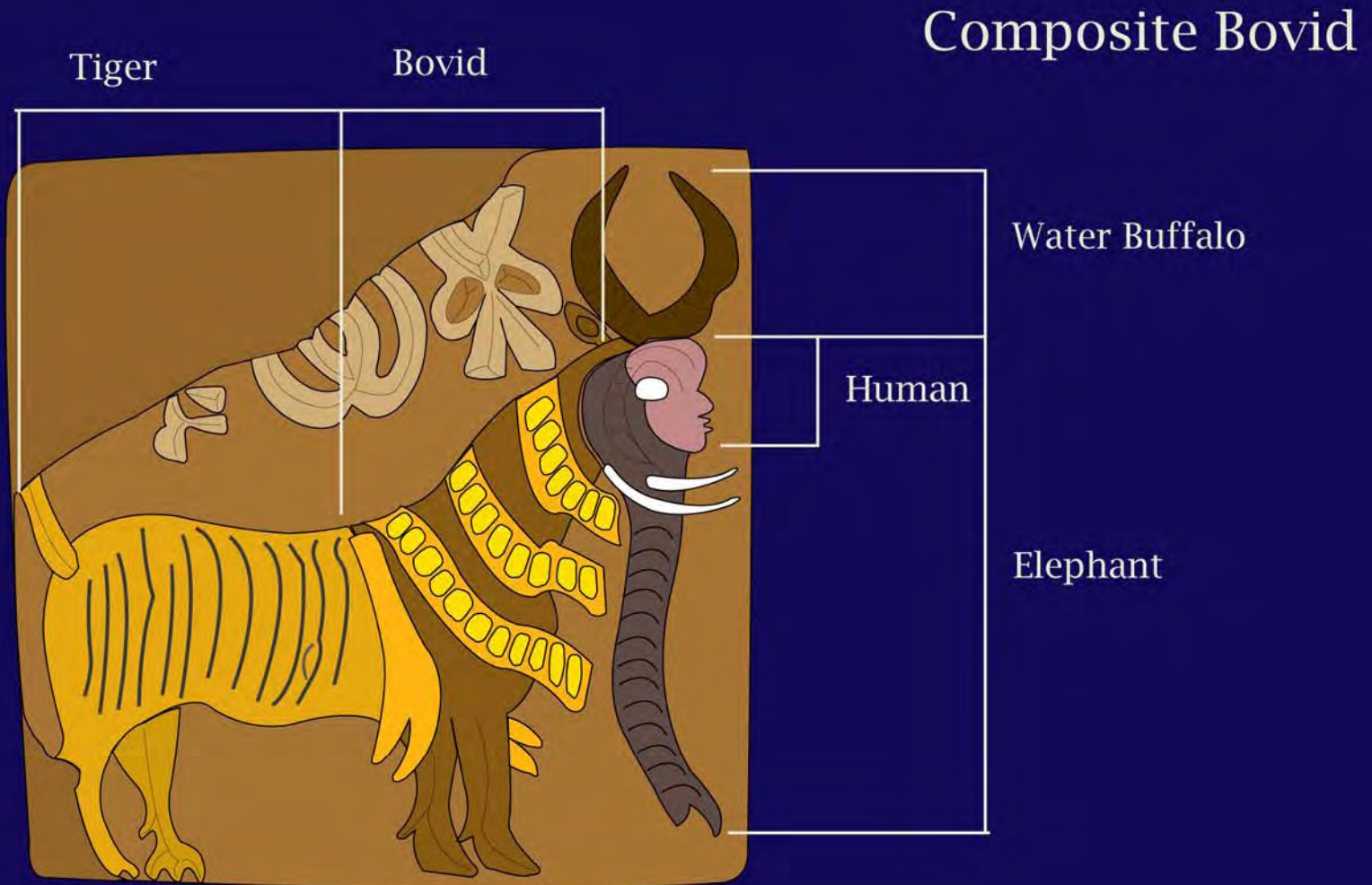
Seal



Seal Impression

Indus Seals

Imagined Animals: Composite, Parpola # M-299 A/a



Indus Seals

In a variant of the composite being, the human, the tiger and the ungulate, which, in this case, is the *markhor* appear as a unified being without any elements of the pachyderms. In other words, it seems that there is a degree of flexibility in creating images composite animals.



Indus Seals

The “sacrifice” seal, M-1186, has probably had more interpretations than any other of the Indus seals.



Indus Seals

In a sincere effort to add to the confusion, let us see what a straightforward description reveals. I have used the same technique of a seal positive by inverting a B & W image so we can see as much detail as possible



Indus Seals

Obviously, the majority of the action is in the top half of the composition.



Imaginary composite creature with bovine body, human head & *markhor* horns

Kneeling supplicant with horns and botanical headdress

Imaginary being in tree - conceptually like a *yaksha*, but not necessarily known as such.

Indus Seals

Imaginary figure in tree

It is probably a manifestation of the pan-Asian animistic nature spirit, known in India as *yaksha-i*, Burma as the *nats*, China as the *shen* and Japan as the *kami*. Animism is of great antiquity and shares characteristics with shamanism; both of which spread throughout Asia and into the new world by no later than ca 10,000 BCE. The tree is clearly the *ficus religiosa* (bodhi tree) as evinced by the leaves displaying the characteristic long drip tail. The figure what appears to be bangles and a ladder-like head scarf. He also has bovine (Water-buffalo?) horns and a ficus sprouting from the top of his head.



Indus Seals

Ungulate

This imaginary creature is either a simple *markhor* with a human face or a bovine body with a ruff neck, a human face and *markhor* horns. Whatever the case, the being is clearly imaginary. Because it stands behind the supplicant, it acts as supporter or a “second” in the supplication. It is not a bull waiting to be sacrificed as has been suggested.



Indus Seals

Since neither the composite creature nor the tree-spirit are physical, the upper half of the image has to be in the plane of imagination. That is not to say that the imagined beings are unreal to the practitioners. On the contrary, I have witnessed practitioners moved to extreme emotional moments in front of shrines of what are understood to be meditational deities in Buddhism. I once asked a dear friend why he always cried in front of a Vajrasattva shrine (widely understood to be the purified practitioner himself). In other words, he was crying in front of himself. He turned away from the shrine and said softly, “If only I could really be that purified!”



Indus Seals

What, then, is the supplicant doing in his imagined environment? Oddly enough, it is rather easy to tell. With his bovid and botanical headdress, “ladder” head ornament, he is for all practical purposes dressed similarly to the figure in the tree. If we presume that the supplicant is in the phenomenal world and he is supplicating beings in the imaginary world, he is seeking the phenomenon known as identity transfer. One of the mainstays of religious phenomenology throughout the world, the practitioner becomes the spiritual being and assumes his or her characteristics.



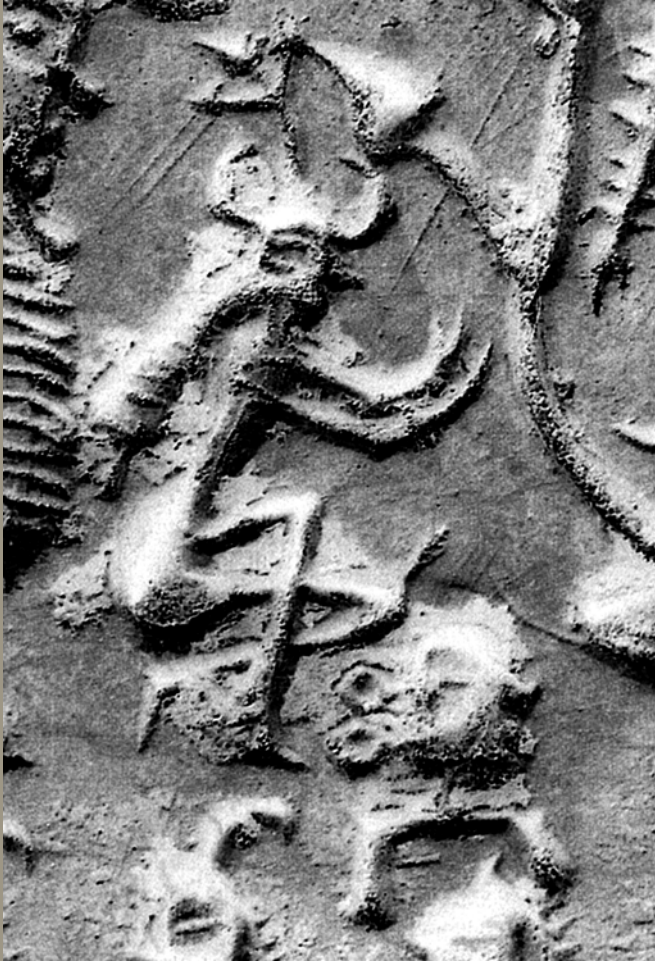
Indus Seals

In short, he is performing the only meaningful and real version of yoga; linking or joining with the deity. Identity transfer is the same as modern deity yoga, in which the practitioner becomes the sought-after deity. None of the accoutrements of Patanjali's yoga sutras are anything other than preliminary to the joining. Neither *asana*, *bija*, *japa*, *mantra*, nor any other aspect of the practice is fundamental to the "joining"—the true "yoga" of yoga.



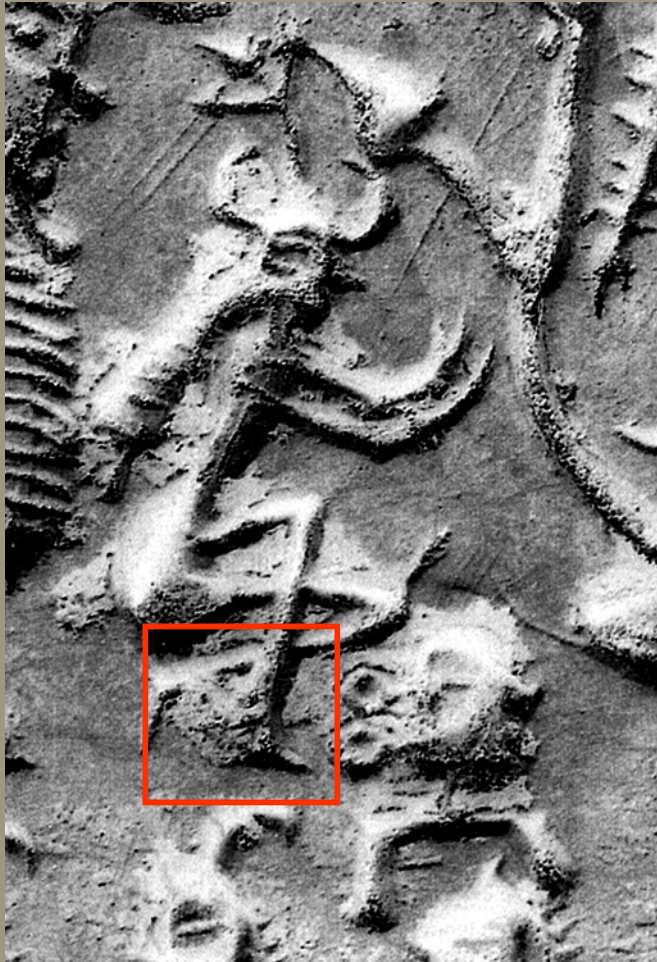
Indus Seals

The supplicant raises several issues in interpretation. One of the main issues is identifying the small stand in front of the supplicant. Part of the problem is that it is very difficult to read because granular calcium deposits (the white grains in the color photograph) and associated build up of other deposits.



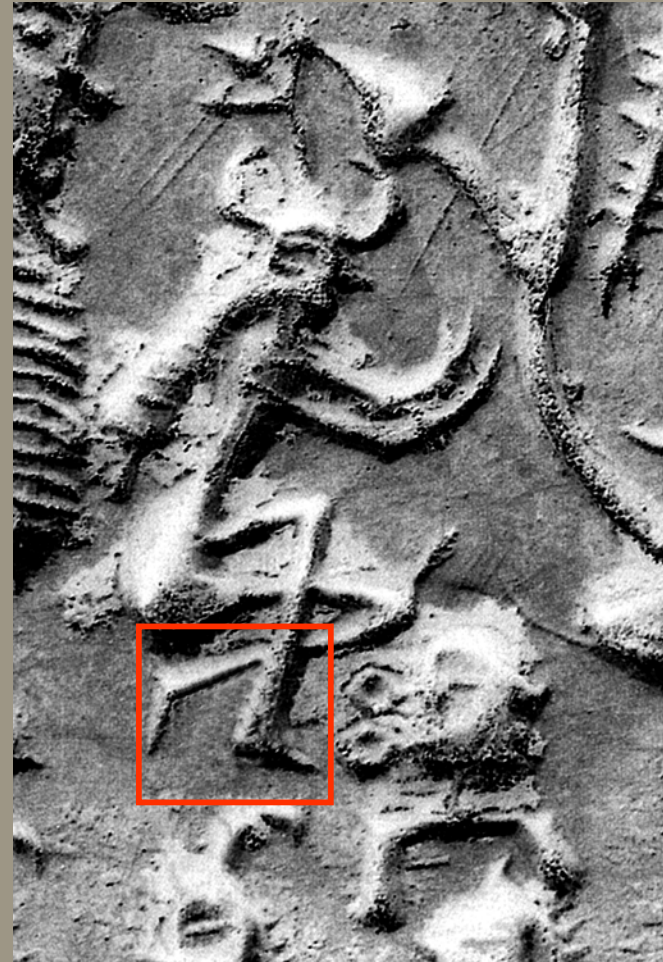
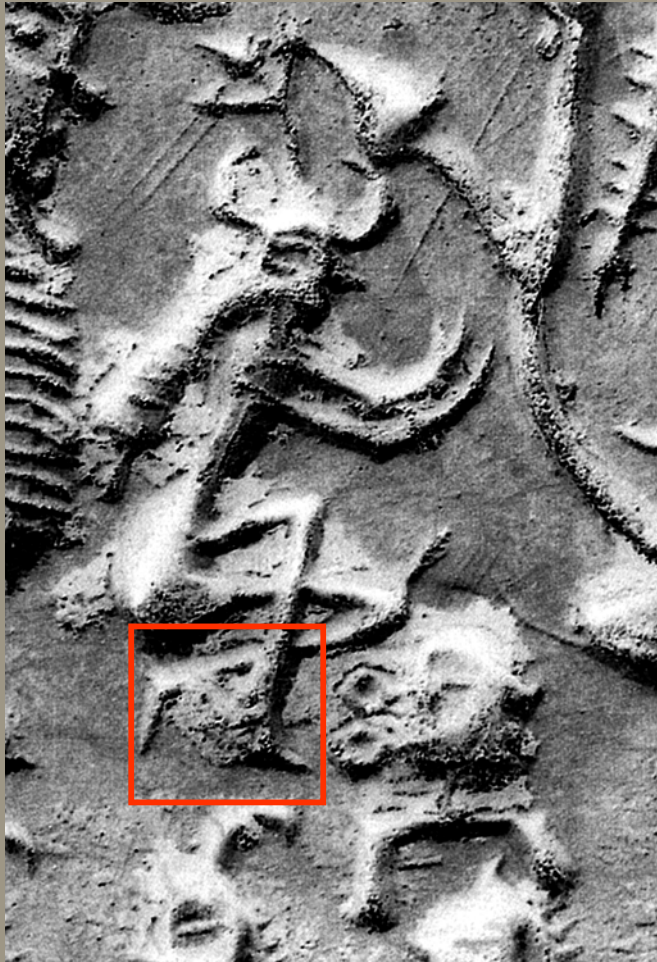
Indus Seals

The highlighted section shows a damaged area between the supplicant's feet. The appearance of the affected area is fairly obvious as to what it should have been.



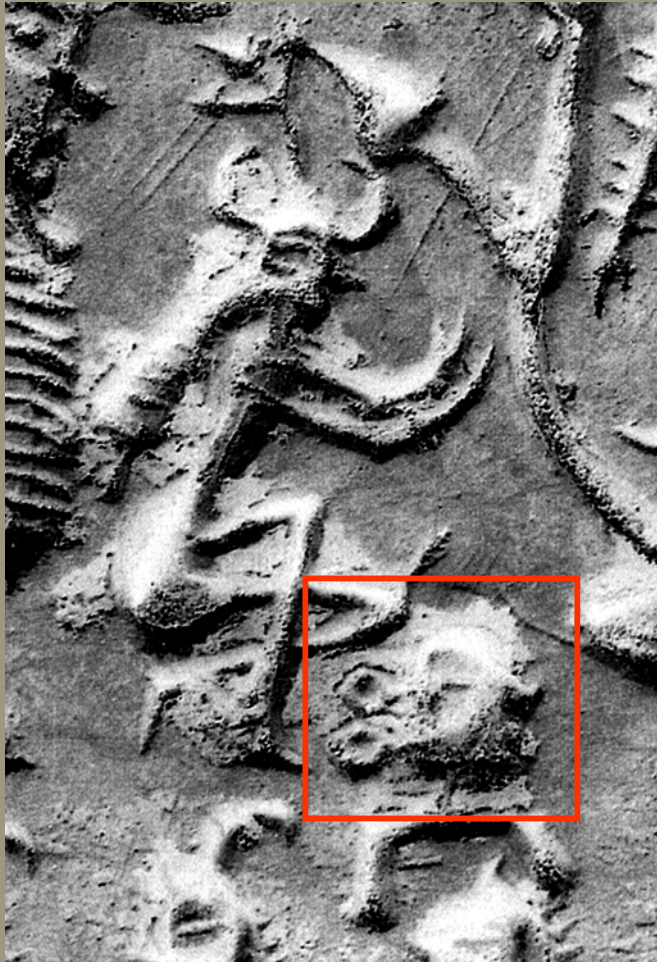
Indus Seals

The (quick and dirty) retouching of the area in question demonstrates what it would have looked like with out the damage. However, this is not the problematic area.



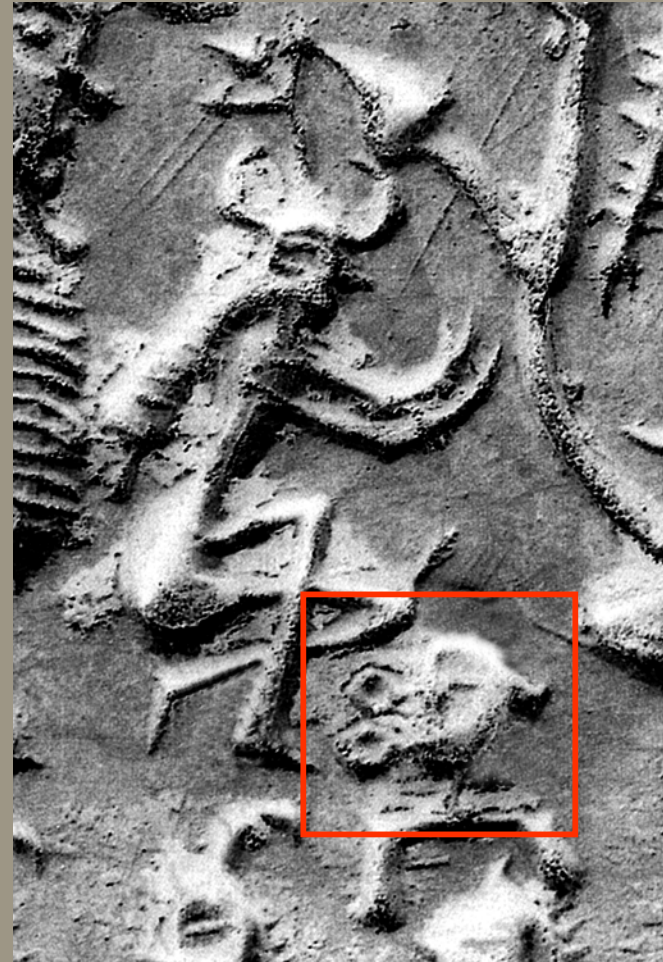
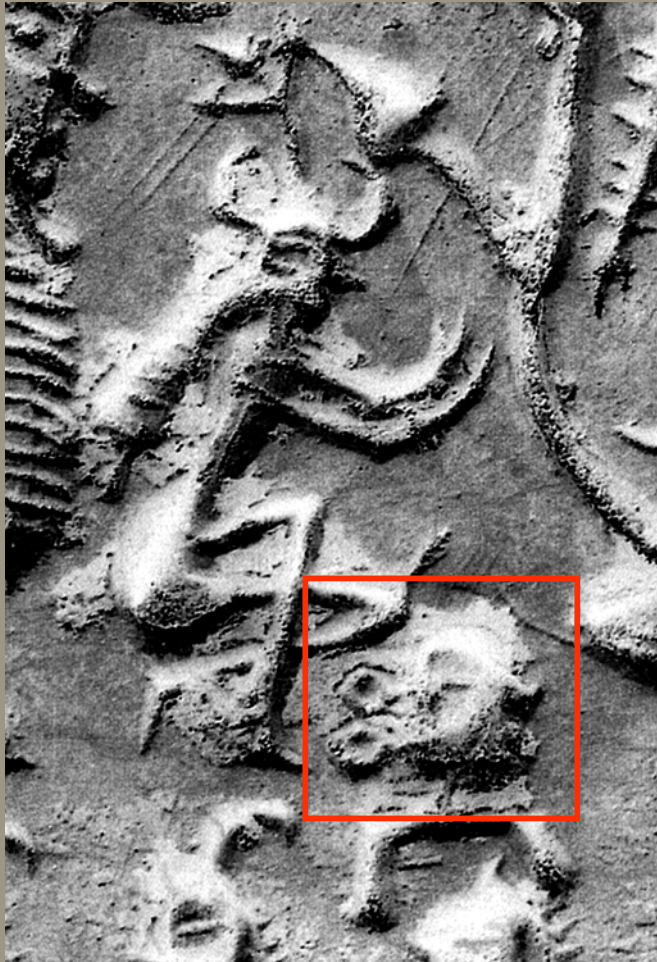
Indus Seals

The object on the stand is badly obscured by the same kind of damage. Some of the granular areas are raised and others are possibly damages to the surface. Without a good stereo pair, I cannot be 100% sure of the corrections, but I think the following slide is fairly accurate.



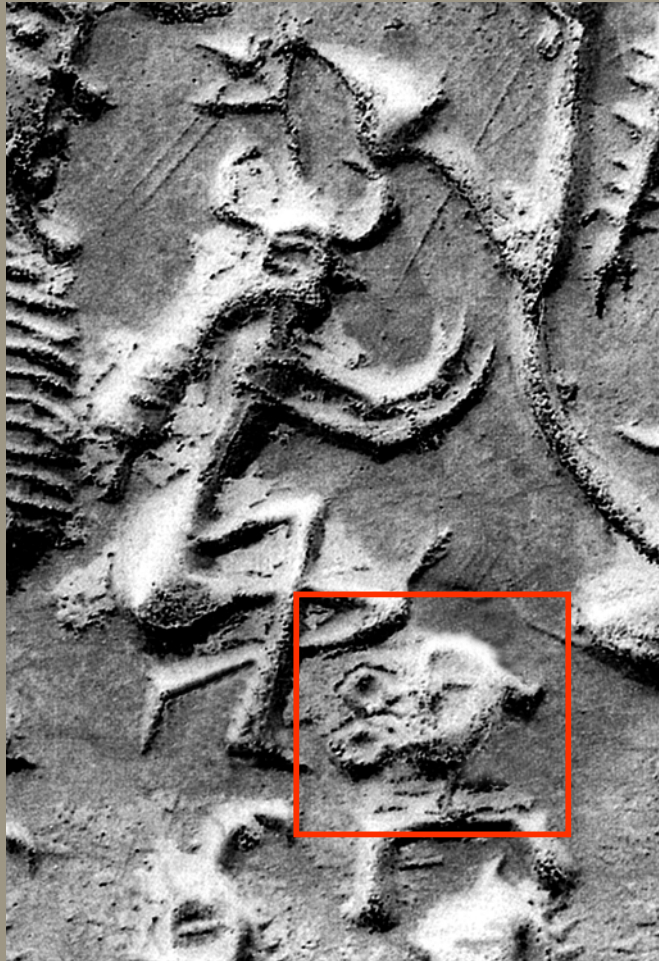
Indus Seals

Now, how does one interpret what is left?



Indus Seals

As a rather standard *pujari*'s offering tray.



The End

Enough for now! A subsequent PP may explore details of interest only to me.

