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Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions. Volume 3.3 Indo-Iranian Borderlands

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TiTLE OF BOOK: *Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions. Volume 3: New material, Untraced Objects, and Collections Outside India and Pakistan. Part 3: Indo-Iranian Borderlands (Eastern Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan).(Figure. 1)*

Editors: *Asko Parpola and Petteri Koskikallio*

Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Helsinki 2022. https://tiedekirja.fi/en/corpus-of-indus-seals-and-inscriptions-3-3

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Article Type: Book Review

This is the fifth volume of the series 'Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions' and the first one dealing with artefacts not from the Indus valley but from the territory of the Indo-Iranian borderland (Figure. 2 & 3).

In the preface to the book Asko Parpola explains why non-Indus seals and other small objects are published in a series about Indus seals and inscriptions. The author's intention is to supplement the corpus of Indus inscriptions with foremost geometric seals that predated the Indus civilization and were also found in the Indus valley. Some of the signs or symbols that can occasionally be found on the objects from the Indo-Iranian borderlands are generally considered as the forerunners of the Indus script. Thus, the book appears to be an important contribution to the study of the origin of Indus writing and seal production.(Figure. 4)

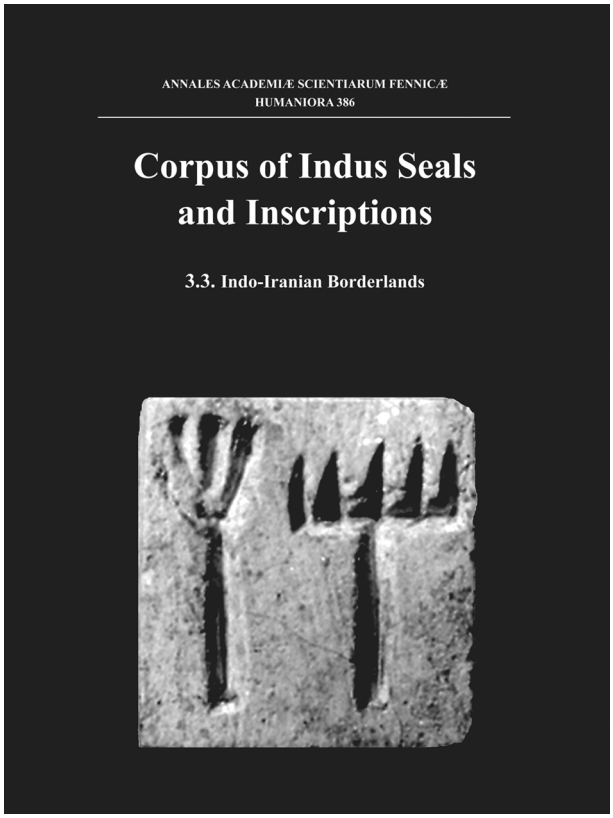


Figure. 1: *Cover page of the Book*

The book includes 11 contributions by scholars who work in the region and gives the descriptions of various excavations and artefacts. First comes the discussion of Proto-Elamite, Linear-Elamite and a "geometric script" by François Desset. These writing systems from the Iranian plateau contribute to our understanding of literacy in this region. They are, as far as we can tell, not directly related to Indus writing, since there is no overlap between the sign inventories of both regions. But the idea of writing and the general way of creating pictographic and abstract graphemes representing a language and transmitting meaning may have come from this region at the beginning of the Bronze age, around 3300 BCE.

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Figure. 2: *Content pages of the Book*

Annales Academiæ Scientiarum Fennicæ is part of the publishing co-operation between the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters and the Finnish Society of Science and Letters. The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters is a broad-based learned society founded in 1908 with the principal aim of promoting scientific research and acting as a bond between those engaged in advanced research. It currently has over 700 Finnish members and 180 external members, distinguished academics on whom membership has been conferred in recognition of their achievements. The Academy arranges meetings, discussions and educational events, distributes some two million euros in grants every year, chiefly to young researchers, and also produces scientific publications, issues comments on questions of research and researchers with regard to matters of current interest in society at large and makes proposals concerning science and those engaged in it, thus taking an active part in the long-term planning of science policy.

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Cover photograph: A Harappan-type stamp seal from Altyn-depe, Turkmenistan, Alt-90 A (600%) (after V. M. Masson 1988, pl. 22, no. 1a). The seal inscription consists of two commonly occurring signs of the Indus script, yet forming a unique sequence not attested in South Asia.

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Figure. 3: *Detailes of the publishing*

Other contributions deal with specific sites - such as Konar Sandal, Kharasan, Tepe Hissar, Sarazm and Shortugai - describing excavations, chronology and providing general observations about the objects of each site. Evidence from Tepe Yahya and its potential relation to Indus signs is discussed by Daniel T. Potts, in an article which is a reprint of his 1982 paper "The role of Indo-Iranian borderlands in the formation of the Harappan writing system".

Many of the objects were excavated at small sites with just one or two objects listed in the book. Among the bigger sites with more than ten objects the following can be listed: Tepe Yahya, Konar Sandal, Shahdad, Chegerdak, Spidej, Shahr-i Sokhta, Tepe Chalow and Tepe Hissar in Iran; Anau, Kara-depe, Altyn-depe, Geoksyur, Taip, Adji Kui and sites in the Murghab Delta in Turkmenistan; Sapalli-tepa and Džarkutan in Uzbekistan; Dashly and Shortughai in Afghanistan. In total, 2357 objects are shown in black and white photographs, but only three of them have a text with signs belonging to the Indus writing system (Alt-90, Sh-69, and TY-106; see Figure. 5). Most objects are from Iran (1624), the second largest collection is from Turkmenistan with 476 objects all-together. Lesser number of

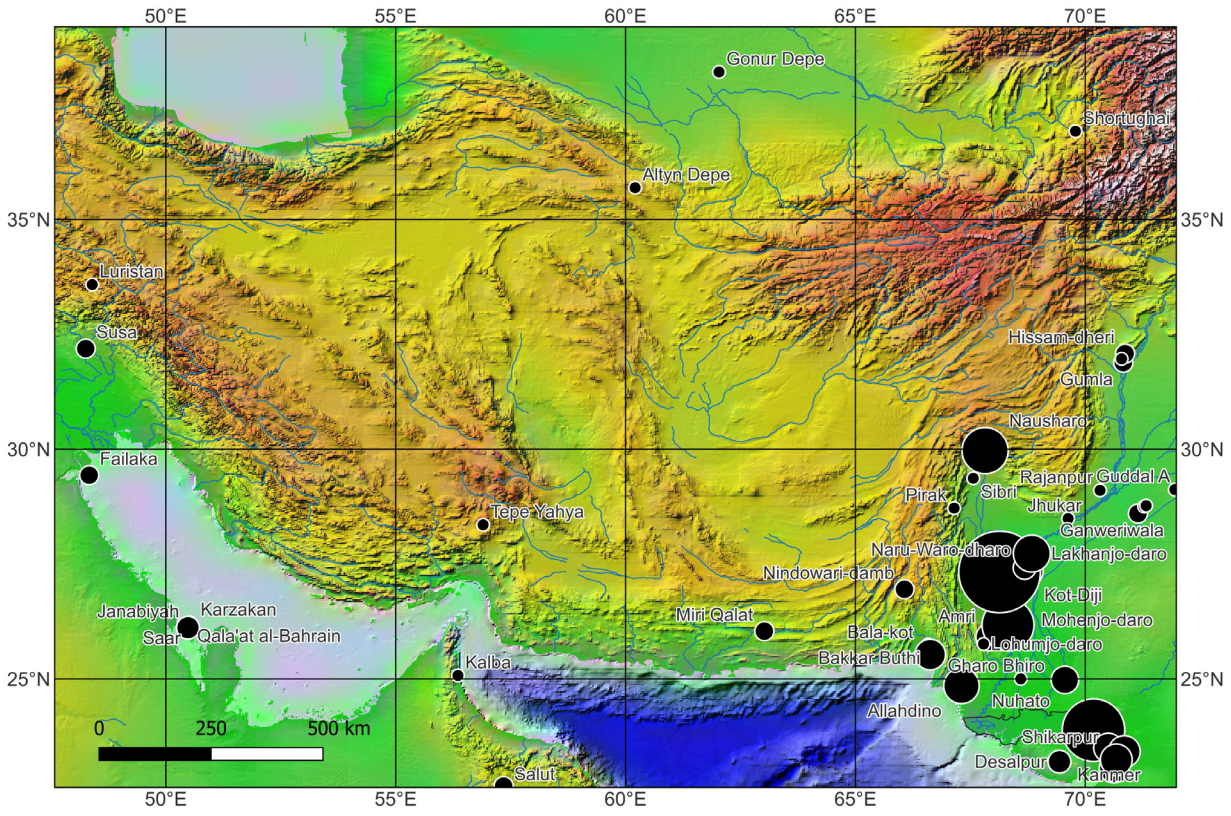


Figure. 4: *Spatial distribution of artefacts inscribed with Indus signs. Circle size is given according to the number of artefacts in a logarithmic scale for each site.*

objects are from Afghanistan (130), Uzbekistan (122) and Tajikistan (5). The photos of the objects are grouped first by region, and then by site and artefact type, but not in alphabetical order. The book mainly contains cylinder seals, stamp seals, seal impressions and graffiti on pottery, but also a few different objects such as figurines, beads, animal heads from Altyn-Depe as well as a few miscellaneous objects from Shadad. The only tablets available in the book come from Konar Sandal South (with Linear Elamite inscriptions) and from Tepe Yahya (with Proto-Elamite inscriptions). The scale of the photos and line drawings of the object side with inscriptions and iconography is, in most cases, 200%. Other sides of the objects are shown in real size (100%). This allows the reader to examine all visual details. Many of the objects, however, are fragmented and incomplete, especially seal impressions in lumps of clay.

All the data of the illustrated objects are tabulated and presented at the end of the book. This includes the size of the objects, findspot, material, information about museums and collections and related publications.

The five volumes of the series 'Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions' are published by Joshi and Parpola (1987), Shah and Parpola (1991), Parpola, Pande and Koskikallio (2010, 2019), and now Parpola and Koskikallio (2022). They contain photographs and drawings of 4093 objects inscribed with at least one Indus sign and are the base for epigraphical studies of Indus writing with about 10457 images altogether (Table 1). Most inscriptions were found in the Indus valley (89.2%) and the Gujarat/Kutch region (9.6%), while only 60 inscribed objects were found beyond the core area of the Indus civilization (Figure. 4).

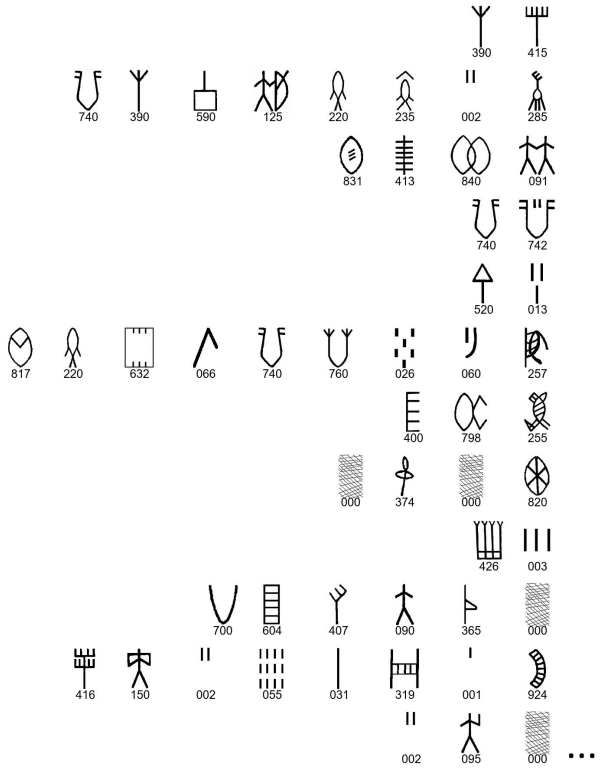
IDicit	CISI	Site	Direction	Type	Complete	Text
16	Alt-90	Altyn Depe	L/R	SEAL:S	Y	
4155	-	Gonur Depe	R/L	SEAL:S	Y	
2153	-	Luristan	R/L	SEAL:C	Y	
5442	MQ-11	Miri Qalat	L/R	SEAL:S	Y	
5444	MQ-12	Miri Qalat	L/R	SEAL:S	Y	
3858	Nd-1	Nindowari-damb	BUS	SEAL:S	Y	
3859	Nd-2	Nindowari-damb	R/L	SEAL:S	Y	
5405	-	Ornach area	R/L	SEAL:S	N	
3874	Sh-69	Shortughai	R/L	SEAL:S	Y	
3881	-	Susa	R/L	SEAL:C	N	
3882	-	Susa	R/L	SEAL:CY	Y	
3886	TY-106	Tepe Yahya	-	POT:T:s	N	

Figure. 5: *Indus texts from the Iranian plateau and Central Asia. IDicit refers to the artefact identifier of the ICIT database (Fuls 2022). Artefact types are square seals (SEAL:S), circular seals (SEAL:C), cylinder seals (SEAL:CY), and seal impression on pottery (POT:T:s). Completeness of inscription is either yes (Y), no (N), or unknown due to a fragmentary artefact (?). Sign numbers are listed according to the sign list defined by Wells (2015: 19-22) and extended by Fuls (2022: 21-24). Sign 000 represents an eroded or illegible grapheme. All sign sequences are shown as to be read from left to right, but the original direction of reading is from left to right (L/R), from right to left (R/L), or boustrophedon (BUS) as indicated in column four.*

Table. 1: *Statistics of objects inscribed with Indus signs and published in CISI volumes 1, 2, and 3.1 to 3.3.*

Volume	Inscribed objects	Images of inscribed objects	Sum of Indus signs
CISI 1	1244	3293	5745
CISI 2	1358	4010	5474
CISI 3.1	1290	2827	4847
CISI 3.2	198	315	533
CISI 3.3	3	12	7
Sum	4093	10457	16606

At present, however, the corpus of Indus inscriptions contains at least 4674 objects with 19869 sign positions (17990 signs are legible). The objects not published so far will be listed in the expected final CISI volume 3.4 (Asko Parpola, personal communication 2023).

As emphasized in the preface of the book, no such rich collection of photographs has ever been published for the region of the Indo-Iranian borderlands before. It is, therefore, an important contribution to the field that may allow us to study potential relations of this region with its two major contemporary neighbours, Mesopotamia in the west and the Indus valley in the east.

Acknowledgment

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