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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INDUS CIVILISATION SCRIPT AND INDIAN SCRIPTS: A HISTORICAL AND EPIGRAPHIC INQUIRY

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Abstract: *The relationship between the Indus Civilisation script and the later writing systems of the Indian subcontinent constitutes one of the most significant and debated questions in Indian historical research. The Indus Civilisation, which flourished approximately between 2600 and 1900 BCE, developed a distinctive system of signs found on seals, pottery, tablets and other archaeological objects. Despite extensive archaeological discoveries and numerous attempts at decipherment, the script remains undeciphered. The emergence of historically identifiable writing systems, particularly Brahmi and Kharosthi, during the middle of the first millennium BCE raises important questions concerning the possible transmission, transformation or independent development of writing traditions in the Indian subcontinent.*

This paper examines the characteristics of the Indus script, the chronological and geographical distribution of early Indian scripts, and the arguments concerning possible connections between them. It evaluates the theories of continuity, discontinuity and independent development by drawing upon archaeological evidence, epigraphic studies, linguistic research and the contributions of prominent scholars. Particular attention is given to the relationship between the Indus sign system and Brahmi, the earliest widely attested deciphered writing system in India. The paper argues that although the Indus Civilisation demonstrates an early and sophisticated tradition of graphic communication, there is presently insufficient evidence to establish a direct genealogical relationship between the Indus script and later Indian scripts. Nevertheless, the possibility of indirect cultural transmission and the preservation of certain symbolic traditions deserves continued scholarly investigation.

Keywords: *Indus Civilisation, Indus Script, Brahmi, Kharosthi, Indian Epigraphy, Harappan Civilisation, Ancient Indian Writing, Historical Linguistics, Archaeology.*

Introduction

The history of writing in the Indian subcontinent is closely associated with the development of urban societies, administrative institutions, trade networks, religious traditions and cultural exchanges. Among the earliest archaeological examples of written or symbolic communication in South Asia are the inscriptions of the Indus Civilisation, also known as the Harappan Civilisation. The civilisation developed along the Indus River and its tributaries, extending across present-day Pakistan and north-western India. Its principal urban centres included Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Dholavira, Rakhigarhi, Kalibangan and Lothal.

The Indus Civilisation reached its Mature Harappan phase around 2600 BCE and maintained an extensive network of settlements and commercial relationships. Its inhabitants developed sophisticated urban planning, drainage systems, standardised weights and measures, craft production and long-distance trade. The inscriptions found on seals, pottery, tablets and other objects provide evidence of an organised system of signs used in different social and economic contexts (Kenoyer, 1998; Possehl, 2002).

The relationship between this early sign system and the subsequent writing traditions of India is an important historical question. The Brahmi script, which became the foundation for numerous later Indian scripts, is securely attested in the inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka during the third century BCE. Kharosthi, another early Indian script, was used primarily in the north-western regions of the subcontinent. These scripts differ considerably in their structural characteristics from the Indus sign system (Salomon, 1998).

The chronological gap between the decline of the Mature Harappan urban system and the appearance of the earliest securely dated Brahmi inscriptions has generated competing historical interpretations. Some scholars have explored the possibility of cultural or graphic continuity, while others maintain that the Indus writing tradition disappeared and that Brahmi emerged through a separate process of development, possibly influenced by West Asian writing systems.

The central concern of this research is therefore to investigate whether the Indus script contributed directly or indirectly to the formation of later Indian scripts, particularly Brahmi and its descendants.

Statement of the Problem

The Indus script represents the earliest substantial corpus of signs associated with an urban civilisation in the Indian subcontinent. However, its undeciphered character prevents historians from establishing its linguistic identity, phonetic structure and precise social functions. Although the Brahmi script occupies a central position in the history of Indian writing, its origin continues to be debated.

The principal historical problem concerns the absence of demonstrable evidence connecting the Indus script with Brahmi. The chronological separation, differences in sign structures and lack of intermediate inscriptions make it difficult to establish a direct evolutionary relationship. The research therefore examines the following questions:

1. What were the principal characteristics and functions of the Indus script?
2. What are the major similarities and differences between the Indus script and Brahmi?
3. Did the Indus writing tradition survive after the decline of the Harappan urban centres?
4. To what extent did external influences contribute to the emergence of Brahmi?
5. Can the later Indian scripts be historically connected with the Indus script through direct or indirect cultural transmission?

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the historical background and development of the Indus script.
2. To analyse the characteristics of Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts.
3. To investigate the possible relationship between the Indus script and early Indian writing systems.
4. To evaluate the major theories concerning the origin and development of Brahmi.
5. To identify the continuities and discontinuities in the history of writing in the Indian subcontinent.
6. To assess the contributions of archaeological, epigraphic and linguistic research to this subject.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a historical, analytical and comparative methodology. It is primarily based on secondary sources, including books, scholarly articles, archaeological reports and epigraphic studies.

The research examines the available evidence from excavated Harappan objects, Indus inscriptions, Ashokan edicts and early historical inscriptions. A comparative approach is employed to analyse the graphic characteristics, structural features, chronological distribution and geographical contexts of the different writing systems.

The study also considers the interpretations of scholars such as Asko Parpola, Iravatham Mahadevan, Richard Salomon, Gregory Possehl, Jonathan Mark Kenoyer and Romila Thapar.

Since the Indus script has not yet been deciphered, the research distinguishes between established archaeological evidence, scholarly hypotheses and interpretations that remain controversial.

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Historical Background of the Indus Civilisation and Its Script

The Indus Civilisation was one of the major urban civilisations of the ancient world. Its Mature Harappan phase, approximately 2600–1900 BCE, witnessed the development of planned cities, specialised crafts, commercial activities and extensive regional networks.

The discovery of the Indus script has provided important evidence of the intellectual and administrative practices of this civilisation. Alexander Cunningham published an account of an inscribed Harappan seal in 1875, marking an early stage in the modern study of the Indus signs. Subsequent excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro brought to light a much larger collection of inscribed objects. The signs occur on several categories of archaeological materials:

- Steatite seals and sealings.
- Pottery and ceramic objects.
- Small tablets and amulets.
- Copper and other metal objects.
- Ivory and other craft materials.

The inscriptions are generally brief. Many consist of only a few signs, and longer inscriptions are relatively uncommon. The signs frequently occur in association with animal representations, particularly the so-called unicorn, humped bull, elephant, rhinoceros and other animals.

According to Parpola (1994), the major difficulties in deciphering the Indus script include the absence of bilingual inscriptions, the brevity of the texts and the uncertainty surrounding the language represented by the signs.

The direction of writing is generally considered to be right to left, although variations and more complicated arrangements have also been discussed. The sign system contains several hundred distinct signs, depending on the method of classification and treatment of variants (Mahadevan, 1977; Wells, 2015).

The exact nature of the Indus sign system remains disputed. Some scholars regard it as a logo-syllabic writing system, while others question whether it represents a complete linguistic writing system. Farmer, Sproat and Witzel (2004), for example, challenged the conventional interpretation that the signs necessarily encoded language. Their argument has generated considerable scholarly debate.

Thus, the Indus script is an important subject of historical investigation, but its precise linguistic and functional character cannot yet be regarded as conclusively established.

The Major Characteristics of the Indus Script

The Indus sign system possesses several distinctive characteristics that are important for comparison with later Indian scripts.

Pictographic and Symbolic Nature

Many Indus signs resemble recognisable objects, geometric figures, plants, animals and other visual forms. Some signs appear to represent abstract concepts rather than identifiable physical objects. However, visual resemblance alone cannot establish the meaning or phonetic value of a sign.

Short Inscriptions

Most known Indus inscriptions are extremely short. Their limited length creates difficulties in identifying grammatical structures, repeated words and phonetic patterns. The absence of long historical or literary texts further complicates decipherment.

Absence of Bilingual Inscriptions

Unlike the Egyptian hieroglyphic script, which could be deciphered with the assistance of the Rosetta Stone, the Indus script has not yielded a comparable bilingual inscription. Consequently, researchers lack an independent linguistic key to its interpretation.

Standardisation of Signs

The recurrence of particular signs and their combinations across different archaeological sites suggest the existence of shared conventions. Such standardisation may indicate communication networks and common practices among Harappan communities.

Administrative and Commercial Context

The frequent occurrence of signs on seals and sealings has encouraged scholars to investigate their possible connection with trade, ownership, identification and administrative activities. However, their exact functions remain uncertain (Parpola, 1994; Kenoyer, 1998).

The Emergence and Development of Brahmi Script

The Brahmi script occupies a central position in the history of Indian writing because numerous later scripts of the subcontinent developed from its regional and historical forms.

The earliest extensive and securely dated corpus of Brahmi inscriptions is associated with Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan dynasty in the third century BCE. His inscriptions are distributed across a wide geographical area, demonstrating the use of writing for imperial communication, administration and the dissemination of royal messages.

The Ashokan inscriptions were composed predominantly in Prakrit and written in Brahmi in most regions of the subcontinent. In the north-western regions, Kharosthi was also employed. Greek and Aramaic were used in certain inscriptions in the north-west (Thapar, 2011).

Brahmi is structurally different from the Indus sign system. It is an abugida, in which consonant signs carry an inherent vowel and other vowels can be represented through additional marks. It also possesses systematic arrangements for representing consonants and vowels.

The script was subsequently adapted to different languages and regional writing practices. Its historical descendants include several major writing traditions of India and neighbouring regions.

These include: Devanagari, Bengali-Assamese, Gujarati, Gurmukhi, Odia, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam.

The development of these scripts took place over many centuries, through distinct regional transformations rather than through a single uniform process (Salomon, 1998).

Theories Regarding the Origin of Brahmi Script

The origin of Brahmi is one of the most debated subjects in Indian epigraphic history. Broadly, three interpretative approaches have received attention.

The Indigenous Origin Theory

According to the indigenous origin theory, Brahmi developed within the Indian subcontinent through local cultural and intellectual processes.

Supporters of this interpretation emphasise the possibility that India possessed earlier traditions of graphic communication and symbolic representation. The long history of the Indus sign system is sometimes discussed in this context.

However, the existence of an earlier indigenous sign system does not automatically demonstrate that Brahmi developed from it. There is no established sequence of intermediate inscriptions demonstrating the transformation of Indus signs into Brahmi letters.

Consequently, the indigenous-origin argument remains a hypothesis requiring stronger archaeological and palaeographic evidence.

The Semitic Origin Theory

The Semitic origin theory suggests that Brahmi was influenced by West Asian writing systems, particularly Aramaic or related scripts.

Georg Bühler made an important contribution to this debate through his comparative study of early Indian and Semitic alphabets. The theory considers the historical contacts between north-western India and the Persian Empire, especially during the Achaemenid period.

The use of Aramaic in the Achaemenid administrative system provides an important historical context for the possible transmission of writing practices into the north-western subcontinent.

However, Brahmi was not simply a reproduction of Aramaic. Its vowel notation, consonant organisation and systematic representation of Indian phonetic distinctions reflect substantial adaptation to the linguistic requirements of South Asia (Bühler, 1898; Salomon, 1998).

The Hybrid or Cultural Adaptation Theory

A further interpretation considers Brahmi to have emerged through a process of adaptation involving external influences and indigenous innovations.

Pillai (2023), for example, proposes a hybrid origin involving Aramaic, Phoenician and Greek letter forms. This is a particular scholarly argument rather than an established consensus.

The wider significance of the adaptation approach is that the development of Brahmi may have involved interaction between different writing traditions and the linguistic requirements of Indian society.

The available evidence therefore supports serious consideration of external influences, although the precise mechanism through which Brahmi originated remains debated.

Comparative Study of the Indus Script and Brahmi Script

A comparison of the Indus script and Brahmi is essential for understanding the historical relationship between the earliest known sign system of the Indian subcontinent and the later writing traditions.

Although both are associated with the cultural history of South Asia, they differ in their chronology, structure, linguistic characteristics and archaeological contexts.

Table 1. Comparative Characteristics of the Indus Script and Brahmi Script

Feature	Indus Script	Brahmi Script
Approximate period	c. 2600–1900 BCE (Mature phase)	Securely attested by 3rd century BCE
Geographical distribution	Indus and adjoining regions	Widely distributed across the Indian subcontinent
Nature	Undeciphered sign system	Deciphered writing system
Writing direction	Generally, right to left	Left to right
Sign structure	Several hundred distinct signs, depending on classification	Systematic consonant and vowel signs
Linguistic identification	Unknown	Used for Prakrit and subsequently several languages
Nature of inscriptions	Mostly short inscriptions	Short and extensive inscriptions
Materials	Seals, tablets, pottery and other objects	Rocks, pillars, caves, copper plates and other materials
Main functions	Possibly identification, administration and commercial communication	Administration, royal proclamations, religious and commemorative records
Historical descendants	No demonstrated direct descendants	Numerous South and Southeast Asian scripts

Source: Compiled from Mahadevan (1977), Parpola (1994), Salomon (1998), Thapar (2011) and Wells (2015).

The comparison demonstrates that the Indus sign system and Brahmi represent substantially different forms of graphic communication. While the Indus signs remain undeciphered, Brahmi possesses an identifiable phonetic and structural organisation.

The chronological gap is particularly important. The Mature Harappan writing tradition declined along with the urban system around 1900 BCE, whereas Brahmi becomes securely visible in the epigraphic record approximately sixteen centuries later.

Therefore, the existence of similarities in individual graphic forms cannot, by itself, establish a direct historical connection.

The Relationship Between the Indus Script and Later Indian Scripts

The possible relationship between the Indus script and later Indian scripts can be examined through three major historical perspectives.

Possibility of Direct Continuity

The theory of direct continuity suggests that certain elements of the Indus writing tradition might have survived the decline of Harappan urban centres and contributed to the development of later writing systems.

The argument is based partly on the long-standing presence of indigenous cultural traditions in the Indian subcontinent. The survival of communities, craft practices, religious symbols and other cultural elements after the decline of Harappan urban centres makes the possibility of some cultural transmission historically worth investigating.

However, cultural continuity does not necessarily imply script continuity. To establish a direct relationship, historians would require intermediate inscriptions, identifiable correspondences between sign forms, evidence of phonetic development and a chronological sequence demonstrating the gradual transformation of the earlier system.

At present, such evidence has not been established.

Possibility of Indirect Cultural Transmission

The second possibility is that the Indus Civilisation influenced later Indian cultural traditions without necessarily transmitting its writing system.

Certain symbols, artistic conventions, religious practices and material traditions may have survived through different communities and historical periods.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the survival of symbols and the survival of a script. A visual motif can continue in religious art or pottery without retaining its original linguistic meaning.

Kenoyer (1998) emphasises the importance of examining Harappan material culture within its broader social and archaeological context. This approach allows historians to investigate cultural continuities without assuming that every later resemblance represents direct descent.

Discontinuity and Independent Development

The discontinuity interpretation maintains that the Indus sign system disappeared with the decline of the Harappan urban centres and that the subsequent emergence of Brahmi represented a separate historical development.

Thapar (2011) discusses the disappearance of the Harappan system of writing or communication and the later emergence of phonetic writing in early historic India.

Farmer, Sproat and Witzel (2004) advance a more radical interpretation, questioning whether the Indus signs constituted a full linguistic writing system in the first place. Their position remains contested, but it highlights the importance of distinguishing between symbolic communication and writing that systematically represents language.

The discontinuity interpretation is strengthened by the absence of a documented sequence connecting Harappan signs with Brahmi letters.

Nevertheless, the lack of surviving evidence cannot establish that no form of graphic communication existed in the intervening centuries.

The Indus Script and the Development of Regional Indian Scripts

The historical significance of Brahmi extends beyond its earliest inscriptions. It became the foundation for a large family of writing systems that developed in different regions of the subcontinent.

Northern Indian Scripts

The northern Indian writing traditions developed through several stages of Brahmi-derived scripts. Gupta Brahmi and its subsequent regional forms contributed to the development of Nagari and later Devanagari.

Devanagari became widely used for Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, including Hindi, Marathi and Nepali.

Eastern Indian Scripts

The eastern writing traditions developed through regional varieties of eastern Brahmi and subsequent scripts.

The Bengali-Assamese, Odia and related writing traditions emerged through a long process of regional palaeographic transformation.

Southern Indian Scripts

Southern India witnessed the development of several important writing traditions, including Tamil-Brahmi, the southern varieties of Brahmi, Grantha, Vatteluttu and the later Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam scripts.

Tamil-Brahmi is particularly important because it demonstrates the adaptation of the Brahmi writing system to the phonological requirements of Tamil.

The early Tamil inscriptions found in caves and on pottery provide evidence of literacy and the use of writing in early historic South India.

Kharosthi and the North-Western Tradition

Kharosthi represents another important early writing system. It was used primarily in the north-western regions of the Indian subcontinent and was written from right to left.

Unlike Brahmi, Kharosthi is generally regarded as having developed from Aramaic. It was employed in inscriptions, documents and coins, particularly in the regions associated with the Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian political traditions.

Its geographical distribution and structural features demonstrate the influence of international contacts on the history of writing in ancient India (Salomon, 1998; Thapar, 2011).

Table 2. Historical Development of Major Indian Scripts

Script	Approximate period of attestation/development	Historical significance
Indus signs	c. 2600–1900 BCE	Earliest major undeciphered sign corpus of South Asia
Brahmi	Securely attested by 3rd century BCE	Foundation of numerous later Indian scripts
Kharosthi	c. 3rd century BCE onward	Important north-western script with Aramaic connections
Tamil-Brahmi	c. 3rd century BCE onward	Adaptation of Brahmi to early Tamil
Gupta script	c. 4th–6th centuries CE	Important transitional stage in northern Indian palaeography
Siddham	c. 6th–8th centuries CE	Important in Buddhist textual and cultural transmission
Nagari	Developed through early medieval forms	Historical precursor of Devanagari
Grantha	Early centuries CE onward	Important for writing Sanskrit in South India
Kannada and Telugu	Developed through regional southern Brahmi-derived traditions	Major regional writing systems
Bengali-Assamese and Odia	Developed through eastern regional traditions	Major eastern Indian writing systems
Malayalam	Developed through southern regional writing traditions	Major literary script of Kerala

Source: Based on Salomon (1998) and the historical development of Indian palaeography.

The historical development of these scripts demonstrates that the Indian subcontinent possessed a rich and diverse tradition of writing. However, the established genealogy of these later scripts through Brahmi does not provide evidence of a direct genealogical connection with the Indus sign system.

Archaeological Evidence and the Problem of Script Continuity

Archaeological evidence is central to determining whether the Indus script influenced later Indian writing systems.

The decline of the Mature Harappan urban centres around 1900 BCE was followed by significant regional transformations. Settlement patterns changed, large urban centres lost their earlier prominence, and populations increasingly occupied smaller settlements in different parts of the subcontinent.

The Late Harappan and post-urban phases are particularly important for investigating possible cultural transmission.

Archaeological discoveries at different sites have demonstrated that Harappan cultural practices did not disappear simultaneously throughout the region. Certain pottery traditions, technologies and settlement practices continued or underwent local transformation.

However, the continuity of material culture should not be confused with the continuity of writing. The identification of a direct relationship requires evidence that specific signs continued to be used and that their functions or phonetic values developed into those of later scripts.

The absence of a substantial corpus of intermediate inscriptions makes this difficult.

Wells (2015) examines the structure and distribution of Indus inscriptions and highlights the methodological difficulties involved in interpreting the available material.

The archaeological evidence therefore supports the existence of a sophisticated Harappan sign tradition, but it does not establish a direct line of development from that tradition to Brahmi.

Contributions of Major Scholars to the Study of the Indus Script and Indian Writing

The relationship between the Indus script and later Indian scripts has attracted the attention of archaeologists, historians, linguists and epigraphists.

Iravatham Mahadevan

Iravatham Mahadevan made a major contribution to the systematic study of the Indus inscriptions through the compilation of a comprehensive sign list and concordance.

His publication *The Indus Script: Texts, Concordance and Tables* (1977) remains an important reference for researchers examining the distribution and frequency of Indus signs.

Mahadevan also investigated the possibility of a Dravidian linguistic background for the Indus script. His interpretations have been influential, although the proposed decipherment has not achieved general scholarly acceptance.

Asko Parpola

Asko Parpola has made significant contributions to the comparative and linguistic study of the Indus script.

In *Deciphering the Indus Script* (1994), he examined the signs, their possible linguistic associations and the difficulties associated with decipherment.

Parpola developed a sustained argument for a Dravidian interpretation of the language underlying the Indus signs. His work remains one of the most influential approaches to the subject.

Richard Salomon

Richard Salomon's *Indian Epigraphy* (1998) provides a systematic account of the development, use and interpretation of inscriptions in ancient India.

His research is particularly important for understanding Brahmi, Kharosthi and the evolution of Indian epigraphic traditions.

Salomon's work also helps distinguish the history of early Indian writing from the still unresolved question of the relationship between the Indus signs and Brahmi.

Jonathan Mark Kenoyer

Jonathan Mark Kenoyer's archaeological research has contributed substantially to the understanding of Harappan urban society, material culture, craft production and trade.

His work emphasises the importance of examining the Indus signs within their archaeological and social contexts rather than attempting to interpret them solely through visual comparisons with later scripts.

Romila Thapar

Romila Thapar's research on early Indian historical writing examines the transition from Harappan symbolic or writing traditions to the epigraphic practices of the early historic period.

Her analysis of Ashokan inscriptions demonstrates the political, administrative and communicative importance of Brahmi and Kharosthi in the Mauryan period.

Steve Farmer, Richard Sproat and Michael Witzel

Farmer, Sproat and Witzel (2004) challenged the conventional assumption that the Indus signs represented a complete writing system.

Their argument stimulated further debate concerning the distinction between linguistic writing and non-linguistic symbolic systems.

Although their interpretation is not universally accepted, it is important because it questions some of the basic assumptions underlying proposed decipherments.

Critical Analysis and Historical Interpretation

The relationship between the Indus script and later Indian scripts must be examined through a critical evaluation of the available evidence.

Three important considerations emerge from the discussion.

First, the Indus Civilisation possessed a well-developed tradition of graphic communication. The repeated occurrence of signs on seals, tablets and pottery indicates that the signs were not merely isolated decorative designs. They formed a recognisable system of visual conventions. Nevertheless, whether that system encoded a particular spoken language remains a matter of scholarly debate.

Second, Brahmi represents a structurally organised writing system that is securely attested in the third century BCE. Its development demonstrates the interaction between external influences and indigenous linguistic requirements. The relationship between Brahmi and Aramaic has received considerable scholarly attention, although the precise details of its origin remain disputed.

Third, the chronological gap between the two systems presents a major challenge to the continuity hypothesis. There is no presently accepted series of inscriptions demonstrating the transformation of Indus signs into Brahmi letters.

It is therefore necessary to distinguish three different forms of historical relationship:

- **Graphic similarity:** Resemblance between individual signs or symbols.
- **Cultural continuity:** The transmission of artistic, religious or symbolic traditions between successive communities.
- **Script genealogy:** The demonstrable historical descent of one writing system from another.

These concepts are not interchangeable. Graphic similarity does not automatically demonstrate cultural transmission, and cultural continuity does not establish direct script genealogy.

A convincing historical argument for the direct relationship between the Indus script and Brahmi would require the discovery of securely dated intermediate inscriptions, systematic correspondences between signs, and evidence of continuity in their linguistic or structural functions.

Until such evidence becomes available, the direct connection between the two writing systems must be treated as an unproven hypothesis.

Major Findings of the Study

The historical investigation produces the following findings:

1. The Indus Civilisation developed an advanced system of graphic communication during the third millennium BCE, demonstrating the importance of symbolic representation in its urban society.
2. The Indus script remains undeciphered, and its linguistic identity has not been conclusively established.
3. Brahmi is the earliest widely attested and deciphered writing system of ancient India, with its earliest extensive securely dated inscriptions associated with Emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE.
4. There are considerable structural differences between the Indus signs and Brahmi letters, particularly in their organisation, direction and linguistic characteristics.
5. The theory of a direct historical connection between the Indus script and Brahmi has not been established through archaeological or epigraphic evidence.

6. The possibility of indirect cultural transmission remains worthy of investigation, although symbolic similarities cannot independently prove script continuity.
7. The development of later Indian scripts through Brahmi demonstrates the important role of regional linguistic and cultural adaptations in the history of Indian writing.
8. The origin of Brahmi continues to be debated, particularly regarding the extent of West Asian influence and the role of indigenous innovations.

Conclusion

The relationship between the Indus Civilisation script and later Indian scripts represents an important and challenging subject in the history of ancient India. The Indus Civilisation developed a distinctive system of signs during the third millennium BCE, reflecting the intellectual, commercial and administrative requirements of an advanced urban society. Its inscriptions on seals, tablets, pottery and other archaeological objects provide evidence of a standardised system of graphic communication.

However, the decline of the Harappan urban civilisation around 1900 BCE was followed by a substantial chronological gap before the appearance of the earliest securely dated Brahmi inscriptions in the third century BCE. This gap creates difficulties in establishing a direct relationship between the two writing systems.

Brahmi subsequently became the foundation for numerous writing traditions across the Indian subcontinent. Its regional adaptations contributed to the development of Devanagari, Bengali, Gujarati, Odia, Kannada, Telugu and several other scripts. Kharosthi, meanwhile, represented an important writing tradition in north-western India, demonstrating the influence of Aramaic and wider West Asian cultural contacts.

The comparative study of the Indus script and Brahmi reveals that both occupied important positions in the history of communication in ancient South Asia. Nevertheless, the available evidence does not establish that Brahmi directly descended from the Indus writing system. The possibility of indirect cultural transmission cannot be entirely excluded, but it requires further archaeological and epigraphic investigation.

Ultimately, the history of Indian scripts should be understood as a complex process involving indigenous developments, regional transformations and external cultural interactions. Future discoveries of archaeological inscriptions, particularly from the transitional period between the decline of the Harappan cities and the emergence of early historic writing, may provide new insights into this important historical problem.

The relationship between the Indus script and Indian scripts therefore remains an open field of historical research, requiring interdisciplinary cooperation among archaeologists, historians, linguists and epigraphists.

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