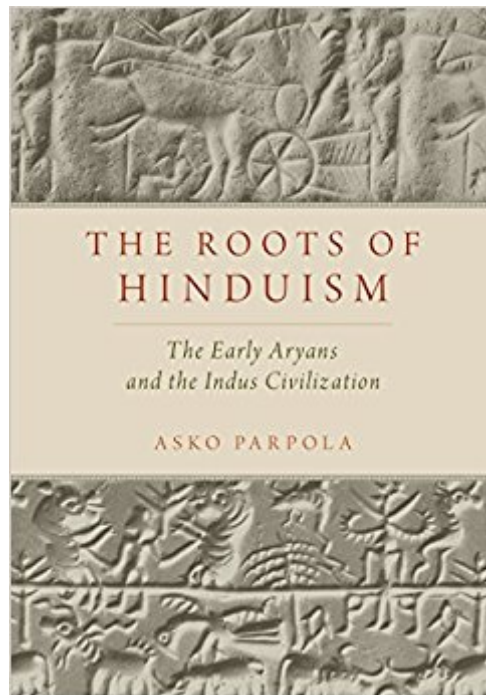




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The Roots Of Hinduism: The Early Aryans And The Indus Civilization



Synopsis

Hinduism has two major roots. The more familiar is the religion brought to South Asia in the second millennium BCE by speakers of Aryan or Indo-Iranian languages, a branch of the Indo-European language family. Another, more enigmatic, root is the Indus civilization of the third millennium BCE, which left behind exquisitely carved seals and thousands of short inscriptions in a long-forgotten pictographic script. Discovered in the valley of the Indus River in the early 1920s, the Indus civilization had a population estimated at one million people, in more than 1000 settlements, several of which were cities of some 50,000 inhabitants. With an area of nearly a million square kilometers, the Indus civilization was more extensive than the contemporaneous urban cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Yet, after almost a century of excavation and research the Indus civilization remains little understood. How might we decipher the Indus inscriptions? What language did the Indus people speak? What deities did they worship? Asko Parpola has spent fifty years researching the roots of Hinduism to answer these fundamental questions, which have been debated with increasing animosity since the rise of Hindu nationalist politics in the 1980s. In this pioneering book, he traces the archaeological route of the Indo-Iranian languages from the Aryan homeland north of the Black Sea to Central, West, and South Asia. His new ideas on the formation of the Vedic literature and rites and the great Hindu epics hinge on the profound impact that the invention of the horse-drawn chariot had on Indo-Aryan religion. Parpola's comprehensive assessment of the Indus language and religion is based on all available textual, linguistic and archaeological evidence, including West Asian sources and the Indus script. The results affirm cultural and religious continuity to the present day and, among many other things, shed new light on the prehistory of the key Hindu goddess Durga and her Tantric cult.

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Customer Reviews

Thanks to Parpola for this eminently readable book on the aryaans and indus script. I was bit skeptical when i bought this book as i thought the contents may go over the head of a lay person like me. However, the author has provided proper context and explained the prevalent view and his own view on various topics dealt in the book. His purported decipherment of the indus script sounds very plausible but it can only be an educated guess given the large number of assumptions that he makes. Overall a good book that leaves you yearning to know more about linguistics and ancient texts. The critical reviews seem to belong to a particular political hue and i would love to read a balanced review from an expert in this field.

This is an important book, one that attempts to cut through the mists that surround the Indo-Aryans and their provenance and the early Dravidians. Parpola uses archeological and linguistic evidence to trace the migrations of the Indo-Aryans and other IE groups in the second and third millennia BCE, and he puts forward some fascinating and cogent ideas about the settling of northwest South Asia by waves of Indo-Aryan speakers. He argues persuasively that the Indus Valley people were Dravidians, though unfortunately there is no evidence that clinches this. I would recommend this book highly, especially for the way it traces various Indo-European groups on their way to India and for Parpola's ideas about the Indus-Valley civilization. I found his ideas about the changing composition of northwest South Asia in the second millennium BCE especially enlightening and compelling.

A great synthesis of Indian History using Archaeology, Vedic Philology and Linguistics. This work is a summary of 50+ years of the wide-ranging research that Prof. Asko Parpola has done and published in specialized articles and brings up to date his 1994 book. For unraveling of the ancient

history of India, three significant discoveries are brought together: (1) Discovery of Indo-European languages and Sanskrit's place in it (2) Dravidian language family and its oldest texts, called Sangam literature of Tamil (3) Discovery of Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) in the 1920s. This book shows an earlier form of Dravidian language was spoken by the authors and elites of IVC, even though like modern India, IVC was multi-lingual. This important book is an important contribution on par with Robert Caldwell's book on Dravidian language family (1856 CE) in demonstrating Tamil and other Dravidian languages' role in the formation of "Village Hinduism". A major factor in Indian society is Caste and the system which shows the formation is in Sangam texts [a]. The intertwining nature of the two classical languages of India - Tamil and Sanskrit - in the fundamental elements of ancient Indian society and religion is brought out beautifully. For example, Dravidian "niira" (water) becomes "niila" to denote blue/black color. Similarly, Parpola suggests Meru, the cosmic mountain's name is from Dravidian "Melu-" ('upper, top, peak'). Also, Vaac, cognate with Latin "vox", is Sanskrit. In Hinduism's concept, Vaac is a loan translation of Dravidian viL/veL, connected with vEL, a name of god Murukan, chieftains and land lords in Tamil. Genetics also proves the language shift in North India around 3000 years ago with small number of Indo-European speakers ingressing, just as it happened 400 years ago in Central and South Americas. Parpola's work discusses two major waves of Aryan language speakers entering via the Northwest of India from Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC). This happened around 1800 BCE ("Atharvavedic") and then ~1400 BCE ("Rgvedic"). The first wave of "Atharvavedic" folks connected with VaruNa worship merged with the earlier Harappan crocodile god [b & c]. In the Post-Harappan phase, when BMAC folks moved in and the language shift in North India was going on, the continuity of Harappan religion can be shown using the bronze Anthropomorphic Axe sculptures found from Haryana to Uttar Pradesh. Yamuna and Ganga doab valley with Yamuna river name connected with Yaamai 'turtle' in ancient Dravidian and IVC's gharial god is the symbol of the Ganga river. Post-Harappan "Anthropomorphic Axe" sculptures are made as huge monolithic sculptures in south India during the Early Iron Age "megalithic" period. This continuity of crocodile worship from Indus civilization to Iron Age Tamil country shown from archaeology and Sangam era coins gives clinching evidence that the IVC authors were Dravidian language speakers.[a] Early Evidence of Caste from Sangam literature,<http://www.tamilnation.co/caste/hart.pdf>[b] Gharial god and Tiger goddess in the Indus valley, Some aspects of Bronze Age Indian Religion, 2007https://archive.org/stream/IVCReligionByNagaGanesan2007/IVC_religion_by_Naga_Ganesan_2007#page/n0/mode/2up[c] A Dravidian Etymology for Makara - Crocodile, 2011https://archive.org/stream/MakaraADravidianEtymology2011/Makara_a_Dravidian_etymology_

This extremely thought-provoking book is a must for anyone interested in the development of early Hinduism. His interrelating of evidence from both linguistics and ethnography provides much to think about and research further.

Riveting book. Every page has new ideas.

Parpola's new book successfully brings his many years of thinking and research into a coherent whole for the less scholarly reader. He discusses a lot of new evidence about the BMAC culture in Central Asia and steppe migration all over the region in the fourth and fifth millenniums (5000-3000 BCE). Lots of great new research. Central Asian and European archaeology have moved far ahead in the last decades and it is getting much easier to date things. Technology like isotope analysis is enabling new facts to appear. Visual evidence like seals and inscribed Indus objects are analyzed in detail by Parpola. One may not know enough to follow some arguments, but the tracing back of certain themes to Mesopotamian ones, the decipherment of the fish and star (suggested before Parpola, and which others like Iravatham Mahadevan concur with), the growing morsels of evidence connecting Indus icons to the earliest history of Tamil South India (some Tamil tribes, as is well known, claim lineage from Punjab) - all of this still amounts to a fragmented and incomplete picture, but no one is better at taking you through it than Asko Parpola. Word and root affinities between Sanskrit and steppe languages are diverse and well-evidenced. Many of the seal interpretations seem reasonable, but are not proven until there is a compelling bilingual inscription, of which there are as yet none. Sometimes it all falls together so nicely as with Parpola's derivation of squirrel and its connection to Sanskrit and Dravidian etymologies and Tamil words used today. A humble, so well-informed and deeply thoughtful picture. A must read for anyone who wants to understand the Indus script and the latest research.

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