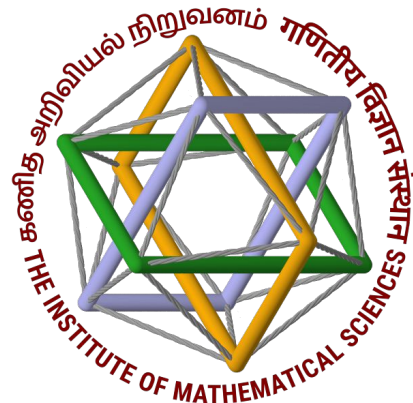


Bits & Scripts

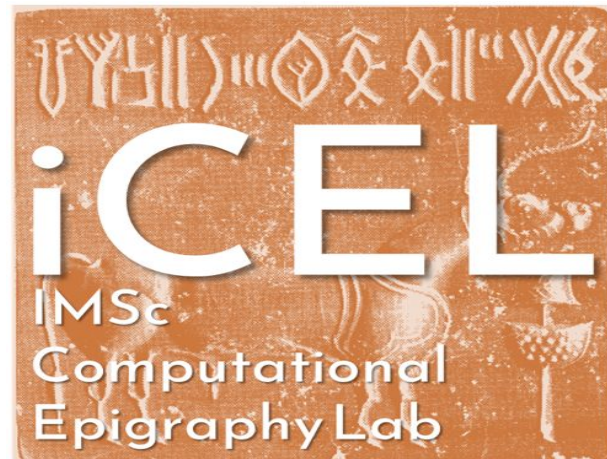
iCEL, IMSc, Chennai

March 25-30, 2024



Decipherment as a Network Enterprise: the Case of Brahmi

Nandini Mitra



Why Brahmi?



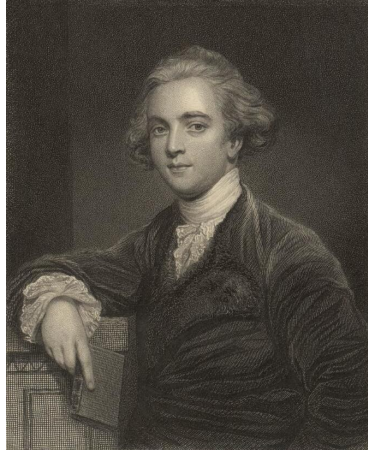
James Prinsep

- Arrived in India around 1819.
- Initially began his career as an assay master at the Calcutta mint.
- The publication of JASB began from 1832.
- Initially he wrote on coins.
- His first article was, *On the Ancient Roman Coins in the Cabinet of the Asiatic Society* (September)
- However, from 1834 onwards he started publishing on Inscriptions.

Shaping the Past

- Investigation and reconstruction of India's past began with the arrival of the English Civil Servants.
- The historiographical pattern of Indian past which took shape in the colonial period was probably similar to the patterns which emerged in the histories of other colonial societies.
- The 19th Century witnessed the development of these studies not only in India but also in various corners of Europe.
- The study of Sanskrit language and literature, especially the Vedic Sanskrit gradually became an important tool to trace the linguistic connections between Indian and Indo European Society.

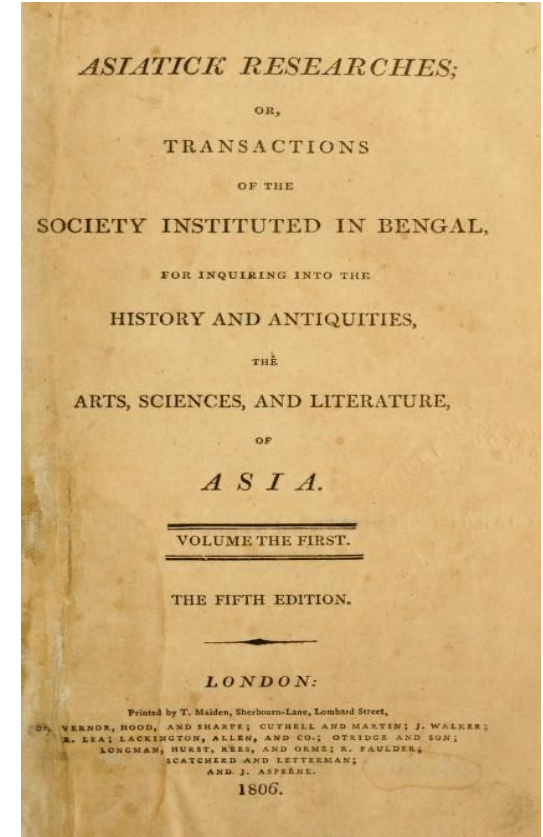
Asiatc Society of Bengal



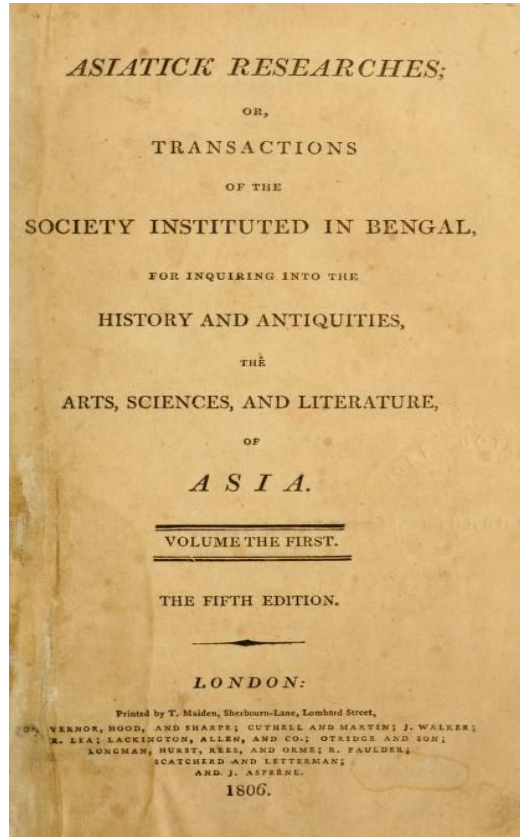
William Jones



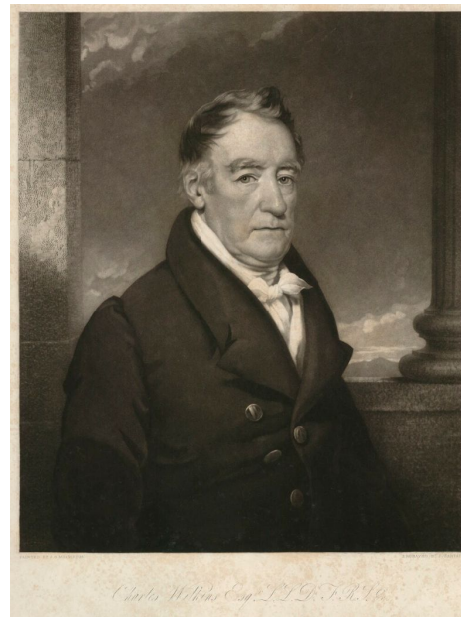
Asiatic Society of Bengal



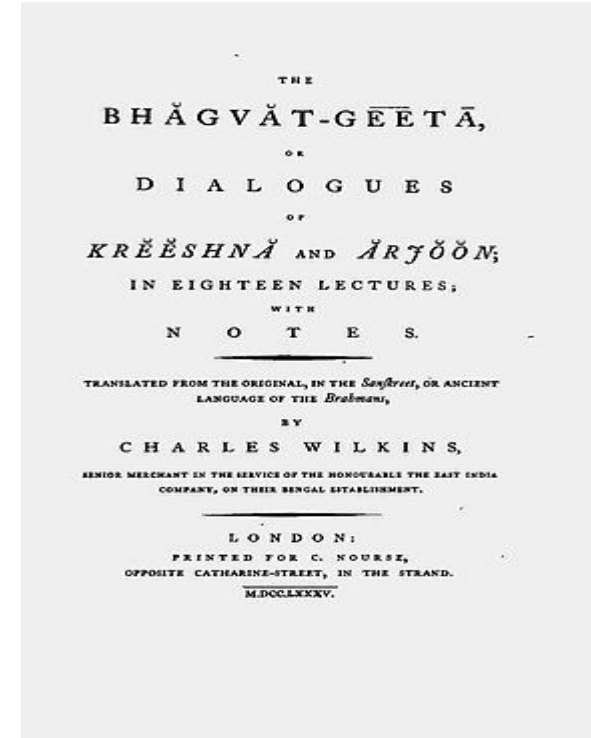
Asiatic Researches



Asiatic Researches



Charles Wilkins



The translation of *Bhagavad Geeta*. (1784)

Beyond Bengal

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BLÄTTER FÜR MÜNZKUNDE. HANNOVERSCHE NUMISMATISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT. N^o 26.

Im 3ten Hft. Bd. mit Juni. 1837 erscheinen zu können, werden die im letzten Quartale 1836 ausgegebenen N^o 25en Hft. beigefügt.

I. Die unbekanteste Schrift der Weltzigen Münzen.

(Von Dr. G. F. Grotefend jun. zu Hannover.)
26 Jahre hindurch hat die Weltzigen Münzenkunde auf der Suche nach der unbekantesten Schrift auf dem Planeten verweilt, es aber nicht gelang, an deren Entzifferung zu gehen. Da mehr der Charakter der Münzzeichen, auch die Sprache der Aufschriften bekannt war, auch die Abbildungen der Münzen nicht ganz so jämmerlich fehlten, als es bei Entzifferung einer unbekantesten Schrift möglich ist. Durch die Publication der spanischen Münzplättchen zu der: Notice sur quelques médailles grecques inédites de la Bibliothèque de la Harleiana et de l'Hôtel par M. Rinaldi-Buccheri (im Anzeig. des Sav. Juin 1835) und deren Befund bei der Pariser 1838. 4) ist die Zeit guter Abbildungen von Münzen mit der erhabenen unbekantesten Schrift aus ein Schatzreue permitirt und bei einer genaueren Vergleichung der Münzzeichen unter einander, schon nur so man doch möglich, die Entzifferung derselben vorzunehmen. *) Folgende sind die Münzen eines bereits veröffentlichten Verzeichnisses, die, wenn sie auch bei unserer Untersuchung der Sprache, wenn die Münzplättchen überhaupt nicht veröffentlichte sein können, doch wenigstens dazu dienen werden, auf das Richtige hinzuweisen.

1. Die Münzzeichen der Münzen sind aus einer, mehrtheils vollständig, kleiner theilweise überlappenden der Zeichnungen des Verzeichnisses.
2. Die Schrift der Münzen wird aus den Zeichen der Münzen zu sein, die die Münzen darstellen.
3. Die Münzen sind in drei Klassen zu theilen, je nach die Art, wie sie die Münzen darstellen.
4. Die Münzen sind in drei Klassen zu theilen, je nach die Art, wie sie die Münzen darstellen.
5. Die Münzen sind in drei Klassen zu theilen, je nach die Art, wie sie die Münzen darstellen.

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*) Die Münzen sind in drei Klassen zu theilen, je nach die Art, wie sie die Münzen darstellen.
1. Die Münzen sind in drei Klassen zu theilen, je nach die Art, wie sie die Münzen darstellen.
2. Die Münzen sind in drei Klassen zu theilen, je nach die Art, wie sie die Münzen darstellen.

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XXIV.

Paläographisches Alphabet.

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Beyond India

- *Société Asiatique de Paris* was established in 1821 following the Calcutta model of Asiatic Society and the same was also established in London after two years.
- Offered the official teaching of Sanskrit.
- Wilkins, Wilson, and Colebrooke from England and Kosegarten, Klaproth, the Humboldts, Bopp, and Wilhelm Schlegel from Germany.
- The scholars like Sacy, Chézy, Rémusat, and Champollion, were a number of newcomers to the field were also associated with this institute.

092.06
J86

JOURNAL ASIATIQUE;

OU

57701

RECUEIL DE MÉMOIRES, D'EXTRAITS ET DE NOTICES

RELATIFS

A l'Histoire, à la Philosophie, aux Sciences, à la Littérature
et aux Langues des Peuples Orientaux;

Rédigé par MM. CHÉZY, — COQUEBERT DE MONTEBT, —
DEGÉRANDO, — FAUCIET, — GARCIN DE TASSY, — GRAN-
GENT DE LAGRANGE, — HASE, — KLAPROTH, — RAOU-
L-ROCHETTE, — ABEL- RÉMUSAT, — SAINT-MARTIN, —
— SILVESTRE DE SACY, — et autres Académiciens et
Professeurs français et étrangers;

ET PUBLIÉ

PAR LA SOCIÉTÉ ASIATIQUE.

TOME II.



A PARIS,

CHEZ DONDEY-DUPRÉ PÈRE ET FILS,

Imp.-Libraires, Propriétaires du Journal Asiatique,
Rue Saint-Louis, N°. 46, au Marais.

1823.



Publications by Prinsep

- Notes on the Jabalpur Fossil Bones.
- Determination of Constant of Expansion of the Standard 10 Feet Iron Bar of the great Trigonometrical Survey of India and Expansion of Gold, Silver, and Copper by the same Apparatus
- Experiments on the Preservation of sheet Iron from Rust in India
- Horary Meteorological Observations made at Calcutta on the 21st-22nd

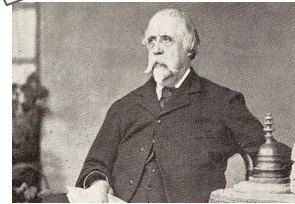


Lone Genius?



Brinley
P.R.S.
Secretary, Alpine Society &c

In these lively letters we see that the whole process of discovery occupied only **three days**, from the first receipt of Steuart's plates to the complete reading of all the ends.....

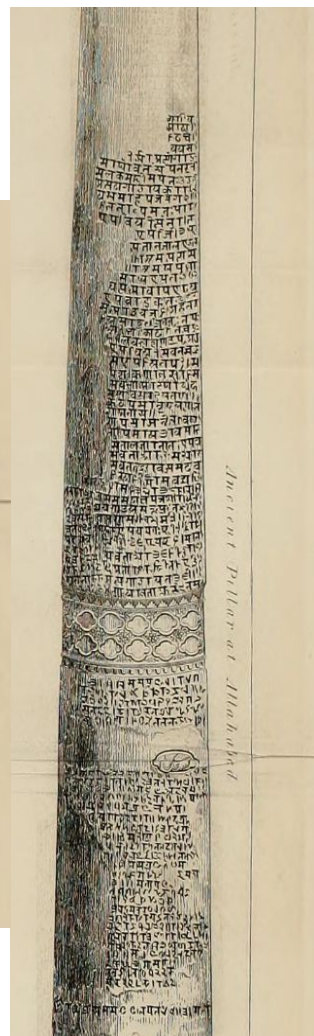
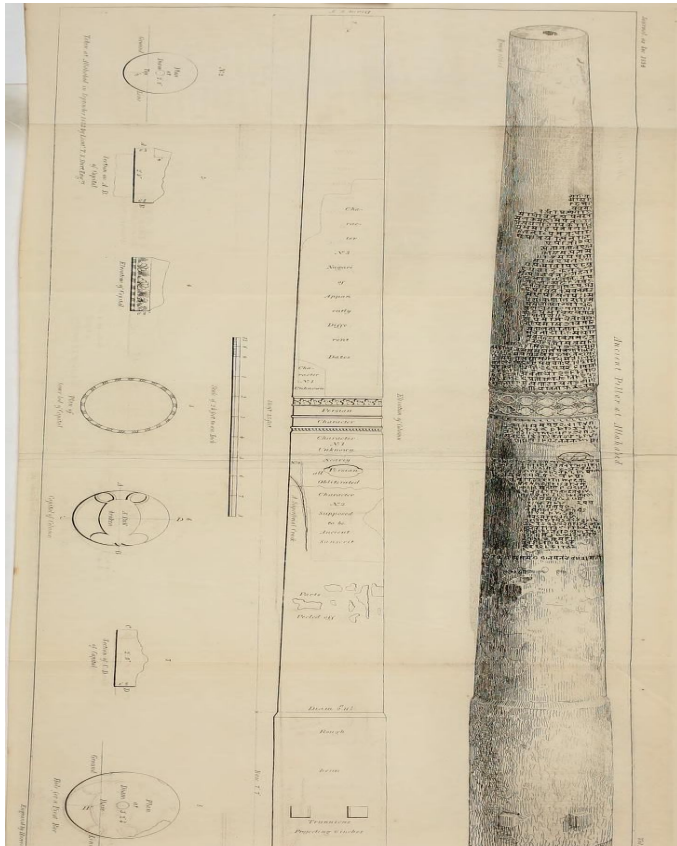


Alexander Cunningham
(First Director General of ASI)

Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal VoL- 1834

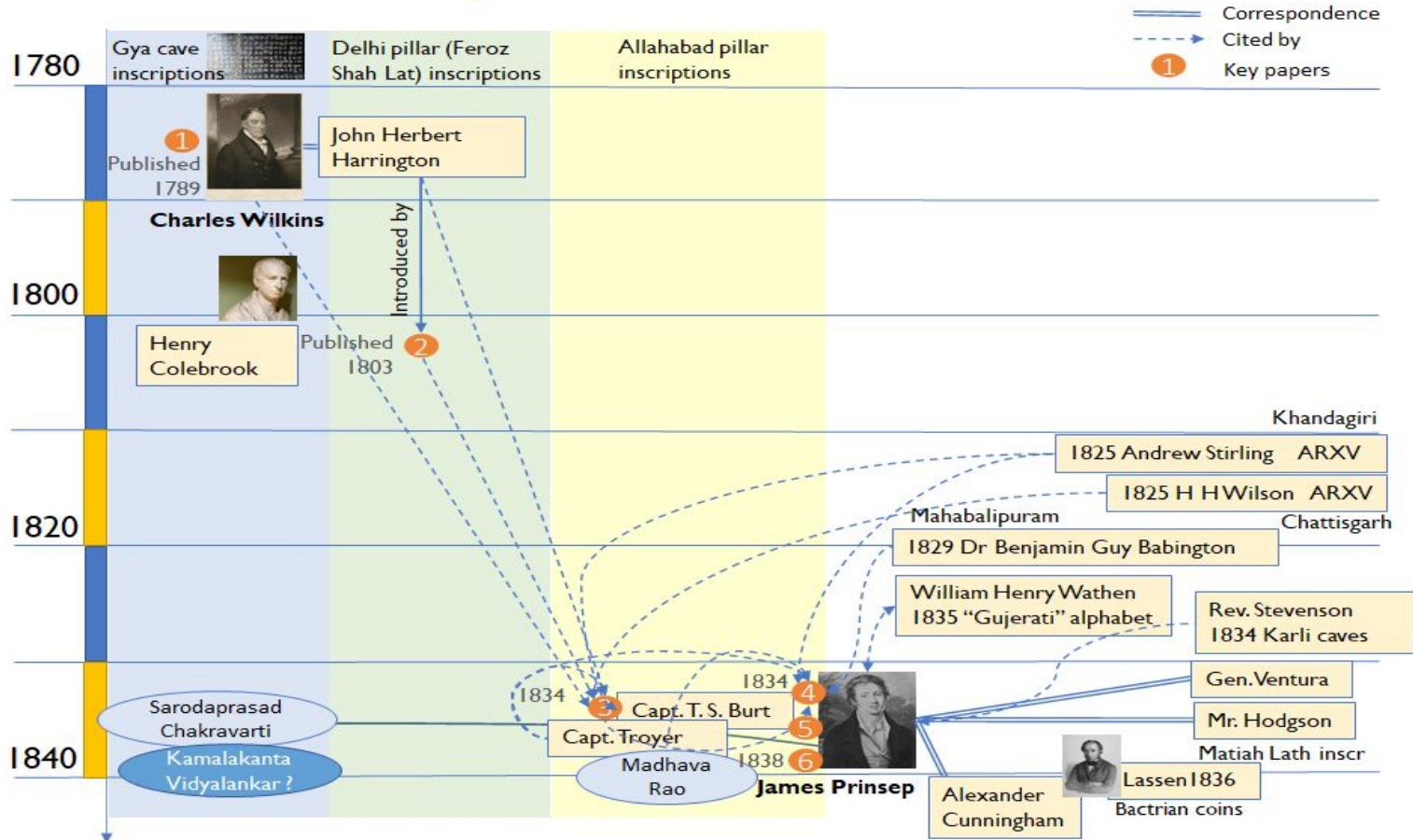
- *A Description with Drawings ,of the Ancient Stone Pillar at Allahabad called Bhim Sen's Gada or Club, with accompanying copies of four inscriptions engraven in different characters upon its surface.* T.S. Burt
- *Remarks Upon the Second Inscription of the Allahabad Pillar.* A. Troyer
- *Restoration of the Inscription, No. 2 on the Allahabad Column.* Rev. W.H. Mill
- *Supplement to the Historical Remarks on the Allahabad Inscription.* Rev. W.H. Mill
- *Notice of some Ancient Inscriptions Characters of Allahabad Column.* B.H. Hodgson

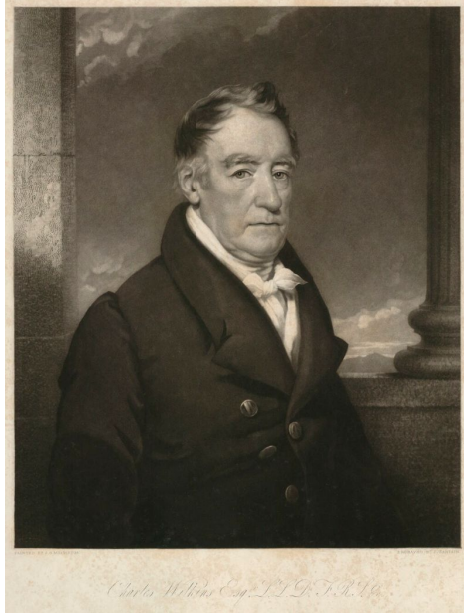
Drawing of Bhim Sen's Lat by T. S. Burt



Journal of Asiatic Society Bengal Vol- III Plate- III, 1834

Decipherment of Brahmi





ক খ গ ঘ ঙ চ ছ জ ঝ
ঞ ট ঠ ড ঢ ন ত থ
দ ধ ন প ফ ব ভ য
য ব ল ব শ ষ স হ ঙ্গ

With the assistance of Panchanan Karmakar, Bengali
Typeset was created by Charles Wilkins, 1778.

Publications by Wilkins

- The first publication on the early Indian Inscriptions began with Charles Wilkins.
- *Asiatick Researches Vol-I*
 - ❖ A Royal Grant of Land, engraved on a Copper Plate, bearing date Twenty-three Years before Christ; and discovered among the Ruins at Mongueer. (Translated from the Original Sanscrit in the year 1781 [Grant of Devapala])
 - ❖ An Inscription on a Pillar near Buddal. Translated from the Sanscrit, 1785 [Badal inscription of Narayanapala].
 - ❖ Translation of a Sanscrit Inscription, copied from a Stone at Boddh&-Gaya, by Mr. Wilmot, 1785.
- *Asiatick Researches Vol-II*
 - ❖ Two Inscriptions from the Vindhya Mountains, translated from the Sanscrit. First Inscription, in a Cavern, called the Grot of the Seven Rishi's, near Gaya. Second Inscription, in a cave behind Nagarjeni [Inscriptions of Anantavarman in the Barabar hills]

15 languages

Article Title

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Christian Lassen (22 October 1800 – 8 May 1876) was a Norwegian-born, German orientalist and Indologist. He was a professor of Old Indian language and literature at the University of Bonn.^{[1][2]}

Biography [\[edit \]](#)

He was born at [Bergen, Norway](#) where he attended [Bergen Cathedral School](#). Having received an education at the [University of Oslo](#), he moved to Germany and continued his studies at the [University of Heidelberg](#) and the [University of Bonn](#) where he Lassen acquired a sound knowledge of [Sanskrit](#). He spent three years in [Paris](#) and [London](#), engaged in copying and collating manuscripts, and collecting materials for future research, especially with reference to [Hindu drama](#) and [philosophy](#). During this period he published, jointly with [Eugène Burnout](#), his first work, *Essai sur le Pāṇi* (Paris, 1820).

On his return to Bonn he studied Arabic, and took the degree of Ph.D., his dissertation discussing the Arabic notices of the geography of the *Purjab* (*Commentario geographico Historico de Pentapotamia India*, Bonn, 1827). Soon after he was admitted *Privatdozent*, and in 1830 was appointed extraordinary and in 1840 ordinary professor of Old Indian language and literature. Lassen remained at the University of Bonn to the end of his life. Having been affected with almost total blindness for many years, by 1864 he was allowed to give up lecturing. He died at Bonn and was buried at *Alter Friedhof*.^[2]



Christian Lassen
drawing by Adolf Holtzack, 1859

Work [edit]

In 1829–1831 he brought out, in conjunction with *August Wilhelm von Schlegel*, a critical annotated edition of the *Higwadita*. The appearance of this edition marks the starting-point of the critical study of Sanskrit literature. Lassen assisted von Schlegel in editing and translating the first two cantos of the epic *Māhātmya* (1829–1833). In 1832 he brought out the text of the first act of *Bhābhūti's* drama, *Mādhavādī*, and a complete edition, with a *Latin* translation, of the *Sāhitya-kārikā*. In 1837 followed his edition and translation of *Jayadeva's* charming lyric drama, *Gitagovinda* and his *Institutiones Linguae Practicae*. His *Anthologia Sanscritica*, which came out the following year, contained several hitherto unpublished texts, and did much to stimulate the study of Sanskrit in German universities. In 1846 Lassen brought out an improved edition of Schlegel's text and translation of the "Bhagavad Gītā".^[2]

As well as the study of Indian languages, he was a scientific pioneer in other fields of philological inquiry. In his *Beiträge zur Deutung der Eugubinschen Tafeln* (1833) he prepared the way for the correct interpretation of the *Umbrian* inscriptions; and the *Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* (7 vols., 1837–1850), started and largely conducted by him, contains, among other valuable papers from his pen, grammatical sketches of the *Beluchi* and *Brahui* languages, and an essay on the *Lybian* inscriptions.^[2]

Old Persian cuneiform [[edit](#)]

Soon after the appearance of Burnouf's *Commentaire sur le Yacna* (1833), Lassen also directed his attention to the *Zend language*, and to *Iranian studies* generally, and in *Die ältesten Keilschriftens von Persepolis* (1836) he greatly improved the knowledge of the *Old Persian cuneiform inscriptions*, following the early efforts of *Grottefeldt* (1802) and *Saint-Martin* (1823),^[6] thereby anticipating, by one month, Burnouf's *Mémoire* on the same subject, while *Sir Henry Rawlinson's* famous memoir on the *Behistun Inscription*, though drawn up in Persia, at about the same time, did not reach the Royal Asiatic Society until three years later, 1839.^[7]

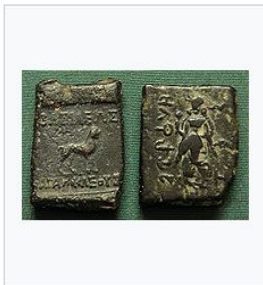
Subsequently, Lassen published, in the sixth volume of his journal (1845), a collection of all the Old Persian

(Lassen's)...contributions to the decipherment of the inscriptions were numerous and important. He succeeded in fixing the true values of nearly all the letters in the Persian alphabet, in translating the texts, and in proving that the language of them was not *Zend*, but stood to both *Zend* and *Sanskrit* in the relation of a sister.

—Source: ³⁹ 15

Brahmi script [\[edit \]](#)

The first successful attempts at deciphering the *Brahmi script* were made in 1836 by Christian Lassen, who used a bilingual Greek-Brahmi coin of Indo-Greek king *Agathocles* to correctly identify several Brahmi letters.^[7] The task was then completed by *James Prinsep*, who was able to identify the rest of the Brahmi characters, with the help of *Major Cunningham*.^[7]



Postscript. I cannot deny one moment possessing a very successful reading by Professor LAMSON of Bonn, of the entire legend on the coin of ANASTASIUS depicted in Vol. III, Pl. 16, fig. 17, by MAYER, and again engraved last month as fig. 9 of Pl. XXXV. The following is an extract from the Professor's letter this moment received:—"The legend on the coin of ANASTASIUS, is in my opinion, in another character, and I think we may recognize in $\text{H}\alpha\phi\alpha\tau\epsilon$ the letters $\text{H}\alpha\phi\alpha\tau\epsilon$, *Apollinias* etc., reading from the left to the right. The first two letters are self-evident—the third is inadequate to the Thibetan and Nili forms of α with a below; the fourth letter expresses $\text{H}\alpha$ in the Indian manner. If I am right in this, it will be necessary to give to ANASTASIUS a very different position from that assigned to him by Mr. ROBERT ROBERTS."



Lassen used the bilingual Greek-Brahmi coinage of Indo-Greek kings Agathocles and Pantaleon to correctly decipher the Brahmi script.^[7]

Announcement by James Prinsep of the secure decipherment of the first Brahmi letters by Lassen in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, in 1836.^[8]

Identical regnal names *Agathuklayesa*
(Brahmi: 𑀅𑀲𑁆𑀭𑀺𑀓𑀢𑀺𑀬𑀸) and *Agathokles*
(Greek: ΑΓΑΘΟΚΛΕΟΥΣ) on a
bilingual coin of Agathocles, used by
Christian Lassen to decipher securely
the first Brahmi letters.^[7]



Lassen used the bilingual Greek-Brahmi coinage of Indo-Greek kings Agathokles and Pantaleon to correct and decipher the Brahmi script.^[7]

announcement by James Prinsep of the secure decipherment of the first Brahmi letters by Lassen in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1836.

Identical regnal names Agathaklyses
(Brahmi: 𑀅𑀲𑁆𑀭𑀺𑀓𑀢𑀺𑀣) and Agathokles
(Greek: ΑΓΑΘΟΚΛΕΟΥΣ) on a
lingual coin of Agathokles, used by
Christian Lassen to decipher securely
the first Brahmi letters.^[7]

Kharoshthi [[edit](#)]

He also was one of the first scholars in Europe who took up, with signal success, the decipherment of the newly discovered Bactrian, *Indo-Greek* and *Indo-Scythian* coins with Kharosthi legends, which furnished him the materials for *Zur Geschichte der griechischen und indoskythischen Könige in Bakterien, Kabul, und Indien* (1838).²⁰ In this, he closely followed the pioneering work of James Prinsep (1833), and Carl Ludwig Grottelend (1836).¹²²

Christian Lassen

New types of Bactrian Coins, engraved as Plates, JASB VoL-V Plate XVI 1836

Postscript. I cannot delay one moment announcing a very successful reading by Professor LASSEN of Bonn, of the native legend on the coin of AGATHOCLES depicted in Vol. III. Pl. ix. fig. 17, by MASSON, and again engraved last month as fig. 9 of Pl. XXXV. The following is an extract from the Professor's letter this moment received. "The legend on the coin of AGATHOCLES, is in my opinion, in another character, and I think we may recognize in $\text{H} \wedge \odot \text{J} . \text{L} \text{E}$

the letters अगथुक्लराज, *Agathukla rāja*, reading from the left to the right. The first two letters are self-evident—the third is similar enough to the Tibetan and Pāli forms of *th* with *u* below : the fourth letter expresses *kl* quite in the Indian manner. If I am right in this, it will be necessary to give to AGATHOCLES a very different position from that assigned to him by Mr. RAOUL ROCHETTE."

. Lassen read the legend A Ga Tha Ku la from left to right

Prinsep's Publications 1837

Facsimiles of Ancient Inscription April

Specimens of Hindu Coins descended from Parthian type, and of the Ancient Coins of Ceylon April

Note on Facsimile of Inscriptions from Sanchi near Bhilsa , taken for the society by Capt. Ed. Smith, Engineer and on the drawings of the Buddhist monument, presented by Captain Murray at the meeting of the 7th June, June

Interpretation of the most ancient of the inscriptions on the pillar called lat of Firoz Shah, near Delhi, and of the Allahabad, Radhia, and Matiah Pillar, or lat inscriptions which agree therewith. July

Facsimiles of Ancient Inscriptions lithographed by James Prinsep August

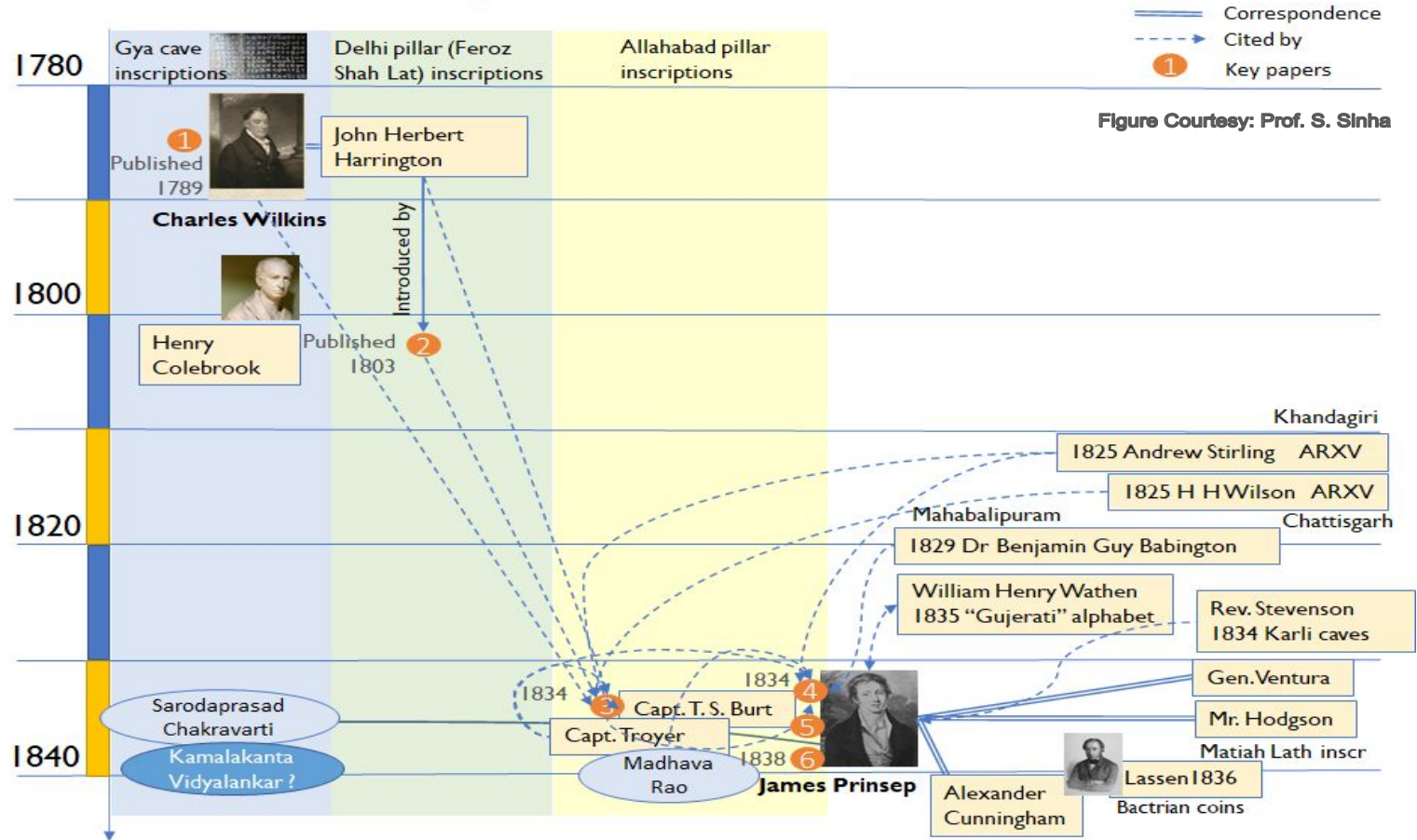
Facsimiles of Ancient Inscriptions lithographed by James Prinsep October

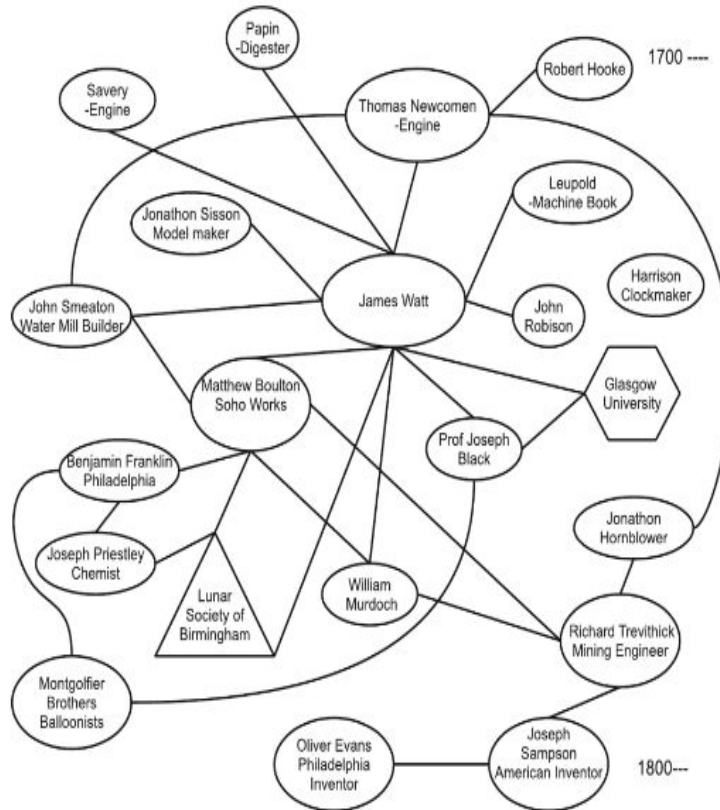
Note on Facsimiles of the various inscriptions on the ancient column at Allahabad, retaken by Captain Edward Smith, Engineers, November

Note on Inscription at Udaygiri and Khandagiri in Cuttack in the Lat character, December

The Social Network?

Decipherment of Brahmi





Steam Engine – James Watt Network 1700 – 1800

Scientific Discovery as an Emergent Process over Social Network

- Scientific research involves a social process, and social interactions have an important influence on what is classified as an objective knowledge.
- The process of scientific discovery may itself be an emergent process of interactions between individuals working on various aspects of the problem and interacting over a social network extended over physical space as well as time.

Thank You