

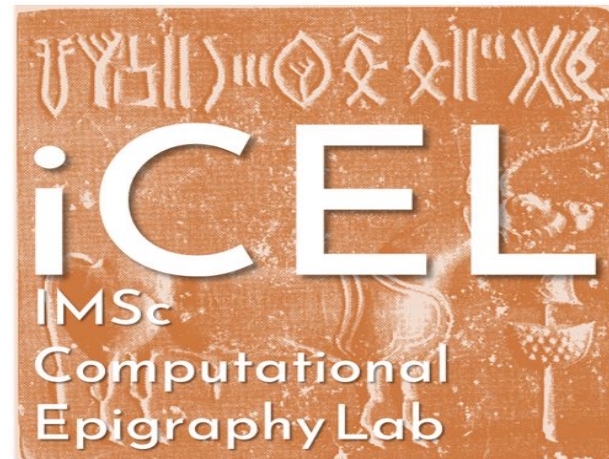
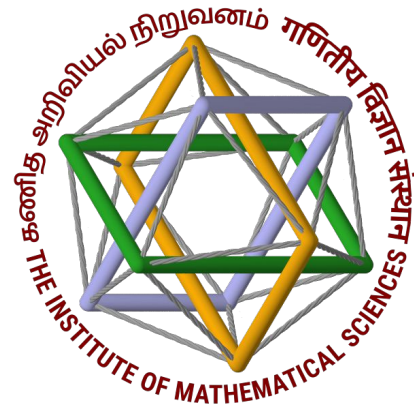
# Bits & Scripts

iCEL, IMSc, Chennai

March 25-30, 2024

Deciphering Brahmi  
(Part-I)

Nandini Mitra



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Devanagari	अ आ इ ई उ ऊ ऋ ॠ एँ ऐ ए ऐ औ ओ औ क ख ग घ ङ च छ ज झ
Bengali	অ আ ই ঐ উ ঊ ঞ ণ এ ঐ ও ঔ ক খ গ ঘ ঙ চ ছ জ ঝ ঞ ট ঠ ড
Gurmukhi	ਅ ਆ ਇ ਈ ਉ ਊ ਏ ਐ ਓ ਔ ਕ ਖ ਗ ਘ ਙ ਚ ਛ ਜ ਝ ਟ ਠ ਡ ਢ ਤ ਥ
Gujarati	અ આ ઇ ઈ ઉ ઊ ળ એ એ ઐ ઔ ઑ ઒ ઃ ઄ અ ઇ ઈ ઉ ઊ ઋ ઌ
Oriya	ଅ ଆ ଇ ଈ ଉ ଊ ଋ ୠ ଏ ଐ ଓ ଔ କ ଖ ଗ ଘ ଙ ଚ ଛ ଜ ଝ ଟ ଠ ଡ ଢ ଣ ତ ଥ
Tamil	அ ஆ இ ஈ உ ஊ எ ஏ ஐ ஒ ஓ ஔ கங ச ஜ ஞ ட ண த ந
Telugu	అ ఆ ఇ ఈ ఉ ఊ య వ వి ష ఒ ఓ ట క ఖ గ ఘ జ చ ఛ జ రు
Kannada	ಅ ಆ ಇ ಈ ಉ ಊ ಯ ವ ವಿ ಷ ಒ ಓ ಟ ಕ ಖ ಗ ಘ ಜ ಚ ಛ ಜ ರು ಣ
Malayalam	അ ആ ഇ ഊ ഉ ഊ ള ണ എ ഏ ഒ ഓ ഔ ക വ ഗ ഹ

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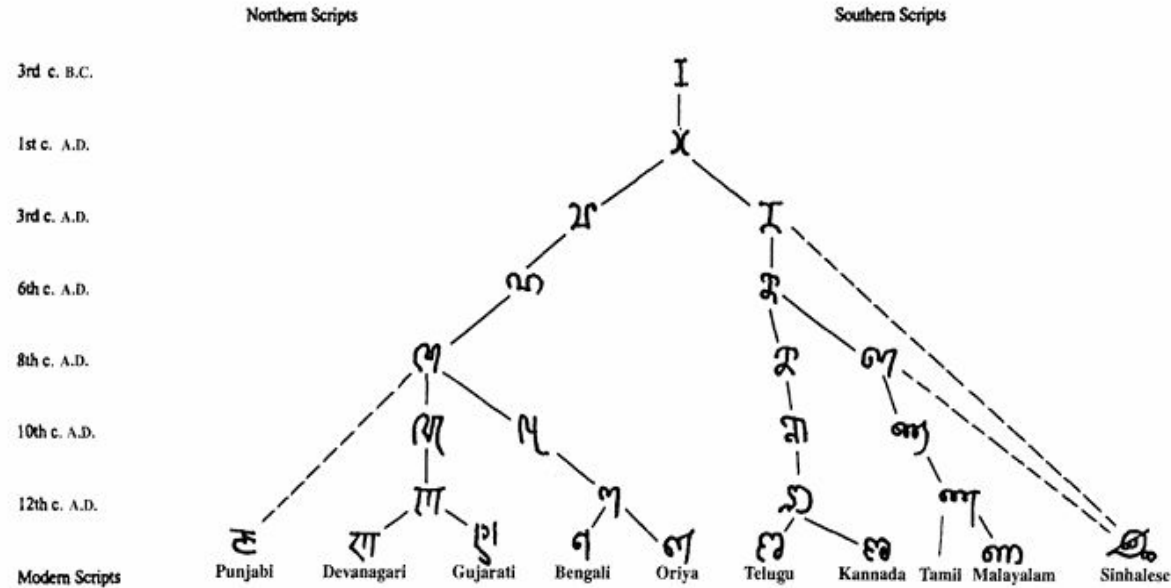
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Why Brahmi?

# Regional Variation of Brahmi

TABLE 2.4. The Development of *ṆA* in Brāhmī and Its Derivative Scripts



Note: This table presents in broad outline the development of a representative character, *ṆA*, from early Brāhmī to the major modern Indian scripts. Detailed charts for the development of each *akṣara* are provided in Sivaramamurti, IESIS 57-153

Source: Salomon p.33

# Introduction



Girnar Rock Inscription  
(Girnar Hill, Gujarat)

- *Lalitavistara Sūtra* a 3rd Century CE text refers to Brahmi Script.
- After the decline of the Indus Valley culture, the graphic record of India is virtually a total blank for well over a thousand years until the time of the Asokan inscriptions.
- The earliest definitely datable written records of the historical period, around the middle of the third century B.C.

# Naming the Script

- Until the late nineteenth century, the script of the Asokan (non-Kharosthi) inscriptions and its immediate derivatives was referred to by various names such as "lath" or "Lat," "Southern Asokan," "Indian Pali," "Mauryan" .
- The application to it of the name Brahmi, which stands at the head of the Buddhist and Jaina script lists was first suggested by Albert Lacouperie.
- He noted that in the Chinese Buddhist encyclopedia Fa yuan chu lin the scripts whose names corresponded to the Brahmi and Kharosthi of the Lalitavistara.



# Writing in Early India

- Megasthenes pointed out that Indians were not aware of written characters.
- The Pali Buddhist canon, especially the Jatakas and the Vinaya-pitaka, contains numerous explicit references to writing and written documents, particularly to "private and official correspondence by means of letters" .
- But it is uncertain whether any of these references can really be taken to represent the state of things in pre-Mauryan India, as Buhler and others have claimed, since all or most of them seem to belong to the later strata of the canon .
- In Panini's Astadhyayi we seem to have a clear reference to early writing in the term lipi/libi 'script'.

# Origin of Brahmi

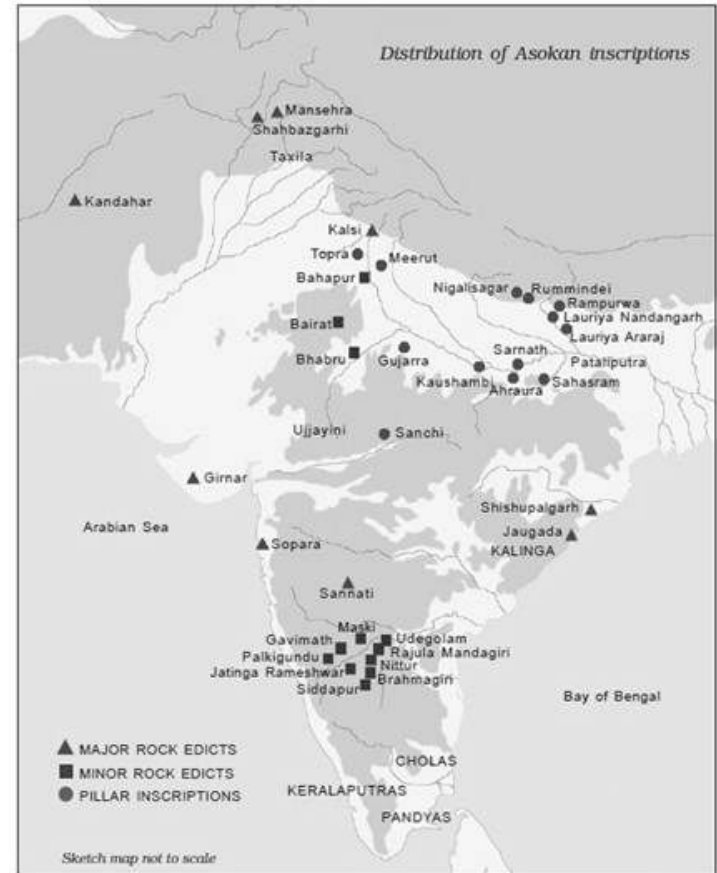
- R. Salomon (1988), Brahmi script is derived from a semitic proto-type which mainly on historical grounds is most likely to have been Aramaic.
- A. Cruttendan(2021), its origin maybe traced back to Aramaic and if it is truly Aramaic then it should show a common origin for most writing systems of Europe and Asia.

## Inscription of Aśoka

- The inscriptions are presented to us in exactly same form in which they were written.
- His messages were modulated to fit different regions and localities.
- The widespread of writing across the subcontinent is a symbolic assertion of imperial presence.
- The standardization of language and script across most of the empire was clearly a central part of the broader imperial ideology.

# The Distribution of Aśoka's Inscription

- The Major Rock Edicts
- The Minor Rock Edicts
- The Pillar Edicts
- The Minor Pillar Edicts



# List of Sites (Major Rock Edicts)

1. Kandahar (in Kandahar district, south Afghanistan) (only portions of rock edicts 12 and 13)

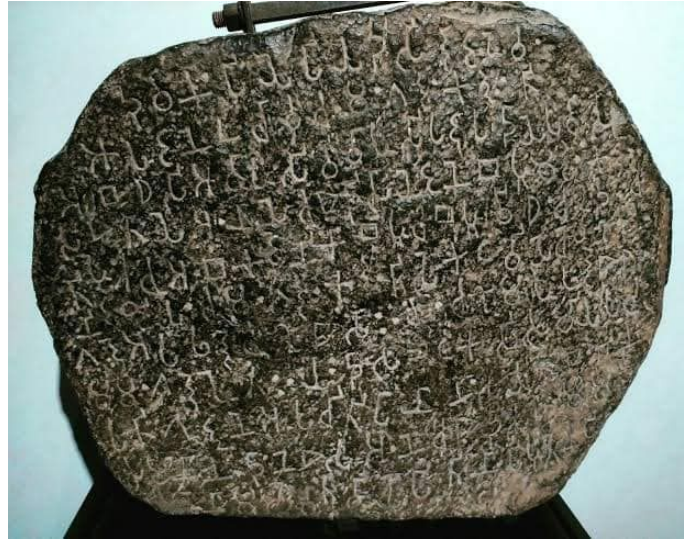
2. Shahbazgarhi (Peshawar district, North-West Frontier Province [NWFP], Pakistan)

3. Mansehra (Hazara district, NWFP, Pakistan)

4. Kalsi (Dehradun district, Uttarakhand)

5. Girnar (Junagadh district, Gujarat)

6. Bombay–Sopara (originally at Sopara in Thana district, Maharashtra; now in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai only fragments



Bombay–Sopara

7. Dhauli (Puri district, Orissa; separate rock edicts 1 and 2 replace major rock edicts 11–13)

8. Jaugada (Ganjam district, Orissa; separate rock edicts 1 and 2 replace major rock edicts 11–13)

9. Erragudi (Kurnool district, AP)

10. Sannati (Gulbarga district, Karnataka; portions of rock edicts 12 and 14 and separate rock edicts 1 and 2 were found on a granite slab in a medieval goddess temple.)

# List of Sites (Minor Rock Edicts)

1. New Delhi (also referred to as Amar Colony or Panchsala, Delhi Union Territory)
2. Bairat (Jaipur Dist, Rajasthan)
3. Gujjara (Datia Dist., MP)
4. Sahasram  
(Rohtas [formerly Shahabad] Dist., Bihar)
5. Ahraura (Mirzapur Dist., UP)
6. Rupnath (Jabalpur Dist., MP)
7. Pariguraria (Sehore Dist., MP)
8. Maski (Raichur Dist., Karnataka)



Maski Inscription of Aśoka



9. Gavlmath (Raichur Dist., Karnataka)
10. Palkigundu (Raichur Dist., Karnataka)
11. Nittur (Bellary Dist., Karnataka)
12. Udegolam (Bellary Dist., Karnataka)
13. Rajula-Mandagiri (Kurnool Dist., AP)
14. Erragudi (Kurnool Dist., AP)
15. Brahmagiri (Chitradurga Dist., Karnataka)
16. Siddapura (Chitradurga Dist., Karnataka)
17. Jatiriga-Ramesvara (Chitradurga Dist., Karnataka)



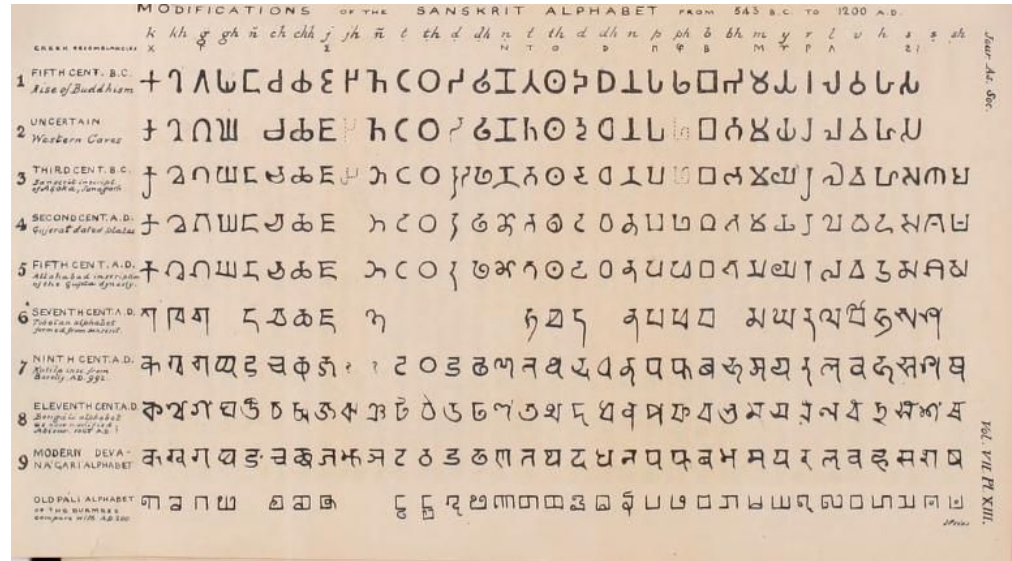
James Prinsep

- 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.

JASB Vol-VI Pt-1 Plate No. XIII

[illegible]





# MODIFICATIONS OF THE SANSKRIT ALPHABET. VOWELS.

	INITIALS										MEDIALS										VOWELS						
	a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛ	ṛī	ṝ	ai	o	au	āu	ah	ka	kā	gi	ghā	chā	chāu	hr̄	da	dhai	ma	mau	aya	ghā
1 FIFTH CENT. B.C.	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ
2 CENT. B.C.?	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ
3 THIRD CENT. B.C.	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ
4 SECOND CENT. A.D.	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ
also	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ
5 FIFTH CENT. A.D.	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ
6 SEVENTH CENT. A.D.	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ
7 NINTH CENT. A.D.	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ
8 TENTH CENT. A.D.	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ
9 MODERN	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ
SQUARE PALI	ਖ	ਖ਼	ਲ	ਲ਼	ੳ	ੳ਼	ੲ	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ਼	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ	ੲ

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