



Course

SPRING 2009

HUM 597 (1 credit)



Deciphering the 4500-year-old Indus Script: Past Efforts and Recent Approaches

Instructor: Rajesh Rao (Computer Science & Engineering)

Meeting Days: April 21, 22, 23, & 24

2:30 to 3:20 pm

Computer Science & Engineering (CSE) 403

The Indus civilization flourished c. 2550-1900 BC in what is now Pakistan and northwestern India. Although little historical information exists about this civilization, archaeologists have uncovered about 4,000 samples of their writing system on stamp seals, amulets, and small tablets. The script on these objects remains undeciphered.

Leading the seminar with **Rajesh Rao** are these collaborators—**Mayank Vahia** and **Nisha Yadav** (Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, India), **Ronojoy Adhikari** (Institute of Mathematical Sciences, India), **Hrishikesh Joglekar** (Oracle, India), and **Irvatham Mahadevan** (Indus Research Center, India)—who will be in residence at UW. Together, they have begun a systematic analysis of the Indus script using quantitative and statistical techniques from computer science, particularly machine learning and data mining. This short course will focus on the script decipherment problem, analyzing the Indus texts using new techniques for grammar discovery from data, exposing students to a new area of research that straddles the boundaries between the humanities and the sciences.

**This cross-disciplinary micro-seminar addresses issues and methods pertinent to the digital humanities, archaeology, Asian languages and literature, linguistics, mathematics, and computer science. Graduate students from all programs and colleges are encouraged to register.*

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