

Crossed by name

1

VIII

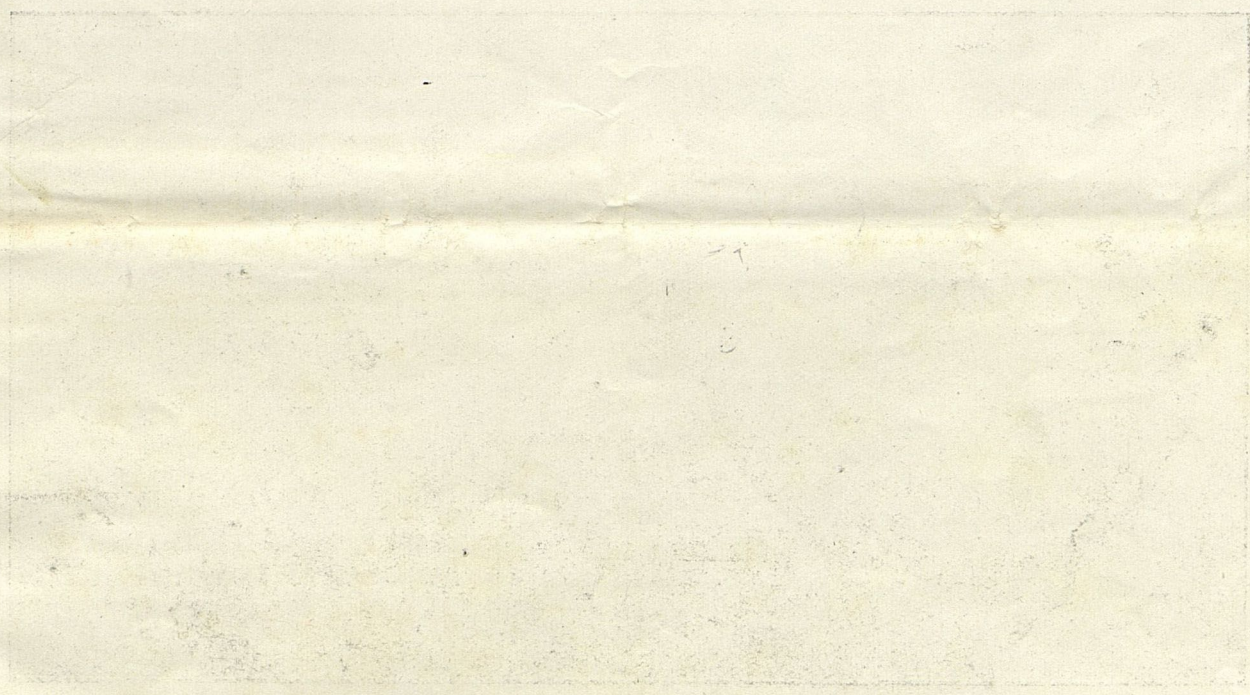
Indian antiquary July 1931.

Voir aussi Illustration du 14 Sept 1929.

juin 1930

1929 - Communication à P. T. F. A.

1930 - Communication à la Société Asiatique



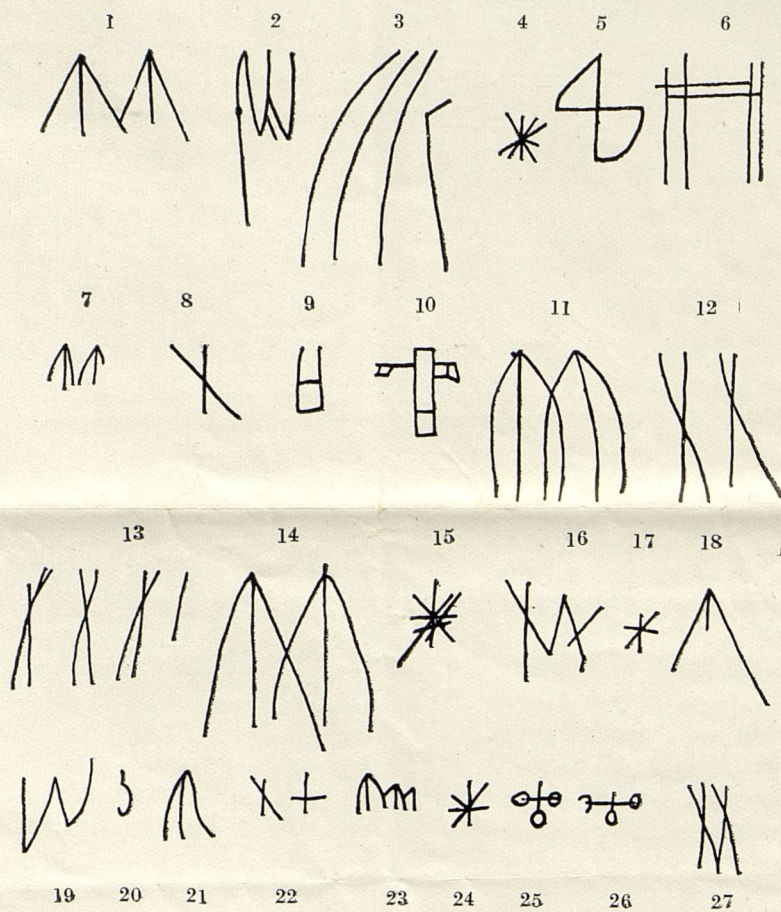
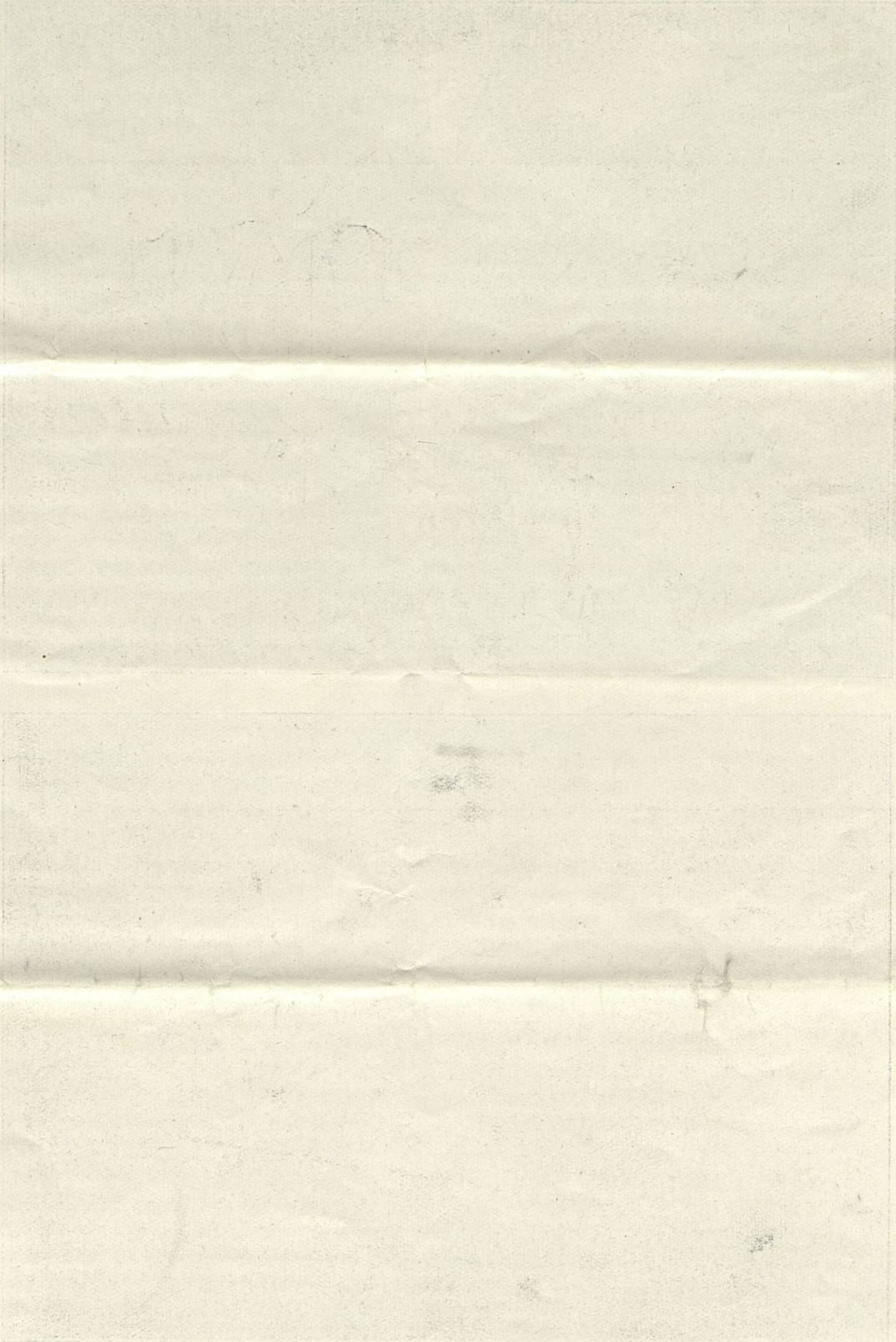


Plate IV.



2



11 511

A NOTE ON CERTAIN SIGNS INSCRIBED ON POTTERY FOUND IN ANCIENT FUNERAL URNS IN SOUTH INDIA.

BY PHARMACIEN-COMMANDANT NUMA LAFFITE OF THE SERVICE DE SANTÉ COLONIAL.

DURING the years 1928-29 I explored round Pondicherry (French India), south of Madras, numerous beds of funeral urns, stretching from east to west for a distance of about twenty thousand yards. The results of this exploration will be published in a volume under preparation, and the finds will, I hope, be exhibited at the Colonial Exhibition being held in Paris during the current year.

What I call funeral urns are large receptacles made of ordinary half-baked earth, measuring about one yard in height and about two yards in circumference. Buried in the soil, these urns, when in good preservation, are covered by others, of equal dimensions, in reverse position (see Plate I, urn 17).

The presence of human bones and skulls in these urns is general. The bones at the bottom are accompanied by numerous red and black terracotta vessels. On the accompanying Plate II two skulls may be seen. The sizes and forms of these vessels are of great variety, and they are always of elegant shape. Stone axes and implements, and numerous kinds of iron arms and instruments are often found among the bones and vessels. Sometimes also there occur copper rings and beads of cornelian.

Among the vessels found during the course of my excavations some had signs engraved upon them, which were always conspicuous. These signs are engraved in the thickness of the coating only, but this does not prevent them from being quite distinct and visible in most cases on the photographs. I collected 27 of these signs. These are shown in Plate III, reduced to half the actual size. Plate IV reproduces a photograph of two of the vessels (scale one-fifth of actual size).

What is the signification of these signs? For a long time I thought they might be potters' marks, or might refer to the deceased himself. But a few weeks ago Dr. Jouveau-Dubreuil, who had seen my collection in Pondicherry, wrote to me from Calicut, that is to say, from the opposite coast of the peninsula, that he had there seen, in an ancient burial ground, vessels, one of which bore signs bearing an exact likeness to the 14th on my plate (see Plate IV). The problem is therefore changed. It is not possible to suppose that a sign found on a funeral vessel near Pondicherry and the same sign found on a funeral vessel near Calicut can represent a maker's mark, or the name of the deceased. It might perhaps be an auspicious sign, intended for the protection of the deceased, or a religious sign. To go into the question more deeply, it would be necessary to examine the largest possible number of these signs, with photographs of the vessels bearing them and of the funeral urns or chambers in which they were found.

NOTE 1.—The third sign from the end (*i.e.*, No. 16) in the third row on Plate III was inscribed upon a vase found in a sarcophagus. This vase, instead of having two colours, red and black, is simply of a pale chestnut colour. Though this sarcophagus was found close to urns, there is no *a priori* reason for holding that it pertained to the same race as the urns.

NOTE 2.—The object of publishing this short paper is to induce other research workers to photograph as many as possible, not only of such signs but also of vases and funeral urns, so as to afford a basis for comparison and further discussion of these interesting signs or 'marks' and their meaning. The urns should be photographed (1) *in situ*, before being opened, (2) in course of being opened, and then (3) the contents should be photographed.

EDITORIAL NOTE.—The attention of our readers is invited to the article entitled "Megalithic Remains of the Deccan—a New Feature of them" by Mr. G. Yazdani,

published at pp. 56-79 of the *Journal of the Hyderabad Archaeological Society* for 1917, and particularly to the Diagram of 'Marks' facing p. 57. Several of the marks listed by Mr. Yazdani and depicted on his diagram will be found represented on Monsieur Laffitte's Plate III. Attention is also directed to the article by Mr. H. C. Ray on "The Indian Alphabet" at pp. 233-35 of vol. LIII (1924) of this Journal. Readers may also be interested, in this connexion to refer to the recent discoveries at Ras Shamra in Syria. (See *Antiquity*, December 1930, p. 464, and references quoted in footnote.)

67