The Indus Script as Astronomical Notation System: Extending Parpola's Fish Sign Hypothesis Towards a Nakshatra-Based Calendrical Interpretation

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Abstract

Asko Parpola's identification of the Indus fish sign as a representation of the Proto-Dravidian homophone *mīn* (fish/star) constitutes the most academically robust partial decipherment of the Indus script to date. This paper accepts Parpola's foundational insight and proposes a systematic extension: the Indus script is not merely linguistically Dravidian but functionally astronomical — specifically, a compact notational system for recording celestial configurations within the framework of the 27-station Nakshatra calendar. We demonstrate that this hypothesis accounts for four structural features of the corpus that no existing decipherment model adequately explains: (1) the extreme brevity of texts (mean length 4–5 signs); (2) the dominance of a small core vocabulary of fewer than 100 high-frequency signs against a long tail of rare signs; (3) the systematic positional behaviour of signs (fixed initial and terminal markers); and (4) the prevalence of numerical prefixes attached to the fish sign. We further situate this astronomical function within the broader cultural context established in a companion paper (Konstapel, 2025a), which identifies the Indus Civilisation as the urban institutionalisation of a pre-Jain consciousness culture continuous with San and Aboriginal knowledge systems. The astronomical notation hypothesis is falsifiable and generates specific predictions testable against the existing corpus. We conclude that the Indus script recorded the celestial time-clock of a civilisation organised around cosmic cyclicity, ritual timing, and the Nakshatra calendar — and that the Jain *Jyotiṣa* tradition preserves the philosophical codification of this astronomical heritage.

Keywords: Indus script, Indus Valley Civilisation, Nakshatra, *mīn* sign, Parpola, Proto-Dravidian astronomy, Jain *Jyotiṣa*, archaeoastronomy, undeciphered scripts, calendrical notation

1. Introduction: The State of the Problem

The Indus script remains one of the most significant unsolved problems in the history of ancient writing. Discovered during excavations at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa in the 1920s, the script has resisted decipherment for over a century despite sustained scholarly effort. Three structural obstacles have frustrated all attempts: the absence of a bilingual text comparable to the Rosetta Stone; the extreme brevity of inscriptions (mean text length 4–5 signs, with only eight texts exceeding fifteen signs); and uncertainty about the underlying language family (Mahadevan, 1977; Parpola, 1994; Wells, 2015).

These obstacles have not prevented the accumulation of important partial results. The statistical properties of the script — its Zipf-Mandelbrot frequency distribution, its syntactic structure as evidenced by bigram and trigram analysis, and its positional regularities — establish beyond

reasonable doubt that it encodes a natural language rather than a proto-writing or accounting system (Rao et al., 2009; Yadav et al., 2010). The direction of writing (predominantly right to left) is well established. The approximate size of the core vocabulary (fewer than 100 high-frequency signs from a total inventory of 400–700, depending on the sign list used) is agreed upon (Fuls, 2023; Wells, 2015).

Within this field of partial results, one contribution stands out for its linguistic precision and its degree of independent corroboration: Asko Parpola's identification of the fish sign as a rebus representation of the Proto-Dravidian word *mīn*, exploiting the homophony between *mīn* (fish) and *mīn* (star/to shine) to encode astronomical referents. First suggested by Father Henry Heras in 1932 and developed with systematic rigour by Parpola over four decades of research culminating in his 1994 monograph *Deciphering the Indus Script*, this hypothesis has achieved a degree of acceptance among specialists that no other proposed Indus decipherment has approached (Harappa.com, 2014).

The present paper takes Parpola's fish sign hypothesis as its foundation and proposes a systematic extension. Our central argument is that the fish sign and its variants are not isolated lexical items within a more general-purpose script, but the visible surface of a coherent astronomical notation system — specifically, a compact system for recording celestial configurations in terms of the 27-station Nakshatra (lunar mansion) calendar that underlies all classical Indian astronomy and the Jain *Jyotiṣa* tradition.

This extension has two consequences. First, it provides a functional account of the script's structural properties — its brevity, its positional regularities, its core-versus-periphery vocabulary structure — that no existing model has supplied. Second, it situates the Indus script within a broader cultural and historical argument about the antiquity of the astronomical knowledge tradition that eventually found philosophical expression in Jainism.

2. Parpola's Contribution: The Fish Sign and Its Variants

2.1 The Linguistic Foundation

The key to Parpola's fish sign hypothesis is the Proto-Dravidian homophonic pair *mīn*/*mīn*. In virtually all Dravidian languages — Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Tulu, and others — the word for fish (*mīn*) is phonologically identical to the word for star or to shine (*mīn*, from the root *mī*, to glitter). Parpola (1994) argues, following earlier work by Heras (1932) and Soviet scholars including Knorozov, that this homophony was present in Proto-Dravidian and was exploited by Indus scribes through the rebus principle: the picture of a fish (*mīn*) encodes the sound *mīn*, which is then interpreted as "star" or "heavenly body."

The rebus principle — using a pictogram of one object to encode the sound of a different object sharing the same phonological form — is well attested in early writing systems. It is central to the earliest Sumerian and Egyptian scripts. Its use in the Indus system would place Indus writing within the normal developmental trajectory of early literacy.

2.2 Planetary Variants

Parpola's most significant contribution beyond the basic fish/*mīn*/star identification is his systematic analysis of the fish sign variants — fish signs modified by diacritic-like additions — as encodings of specific planets. The evidence is as follows:

Mercury. A horizontal or oblique line drawn across the body of the fish sign is interpreted by Parpola as expressing the concept "dividing" or "halving," corresponding to the Proto-Dravidian root *pacu* ("to halve, divide"). The homophone *pacu* means "greenish-yellow" in Proto-Dravidian. Mercury, which appears greenish-yellow in ancient Indian astronomical tradition, is called *paccai* ("green [planet]") in Old Tamil star lists. The sign *pacu mīn* therefore reads "greenish-yellow star" = Mercury.

Venus. Two long vertical strokes flanking the fish sign are interpreted as expressing "enclosed space" or "intermediate space," corresponding to Dravidian *veli*. The homophone *velli* means "white" or "bright." Venus, as the brightest object in the night sky after the moon, is still called *velli* in Tamil. The sign combination reads *velli mīn* = "bright/white star" = Venus.

Saturn. An inverted V-like element above the fish sign, interpreted as a "roof," leads through a chain of Dravidian homophones to a planetary identification that Parpola discusses in detail in his 1994 monograph.

Asterisms. Critically for our argument, sequences of the form *numeral + fish sign* appear repeatedly in the corpus. Parpola identifies these as asterisms, exploiting the same *mīn*/star reading:

- *3 + fish* = three-star asterism = **Orion's Belt** (*Mrigashira* or the three stars of Orion, a prominent Nakshatra)
- *6 + fish* = six-star asterism = **Pleiades** (*Kṛttikā*, Nakshatra 3 in the standard list)
- *7 + fish* = seven-star asterism = **Ursa Major / Saptarishi** (the seven sages, a fundamental reference point in Indian astronomy)

The numerical names for all three asterisms are attested in Old Tamil astronomical literature, providing independent linguistic corroboration for the identification (Parpola, 1994, pp. 179–201).

2.3 The Limits of Parpola's Interpretation

Parpola himself acknowledges the limits of his decipherment. As he stated in a recorded interview preserved on the Harappa.com website: "I readily admit that it has not been proved. That could only come if the word *meen* was written elsewhere syllabically or if you have a bilingual inscription." His planetary identifications, while internally consistent, depend on chains of Dravidian homophones that not all specialists find fully convincing.

What is not in dispute is the following: the fish sign is among the most frequent signs in the corpus; its variants are systematically distributed; the numerals preceding it correspond to known asterisms in the Indian astronomical tradition; and the linguistic basis (Proto-Dravidian *mīn* homophony) is independently supported by comparative Dravidian linguistics. This is substantially more than can be said for any competing hypothesis.

Our extension builds directly on this foundation.

3. The Astronomical Notation Hypothesis

3.1 Core Claim

We propose that the Indus script functioned primarily as a **compact astronomical notation system** for recording celestial configurations — specifically, the positions of the moon, sun, and visible planets relative to the 27 Nakshatra stations — for the purpose of ritual calendrical calculation.

This is an extension of Parpola, not a replacement. Where Parpola identified specific signs as encoding specific celestial objects, we propose a systematic functional grammar: the script as a whole is organised around the task of astronomical recording, and its structural properties follow from this function.

3.2 The Nakshatra Calendar as Functional Context

The Nakshatra system — 27 (or 28) lunar mansions dividing the ecliptic into equal segments of approximately 13.2 degrees each — is the oldest stratum of Indian astronomical knowledge. Its presence in Vedic literature (the *Atharvaveda* contains a complete Nakshatra list) indicates that it predates the Vedic period. The precision of the system — tracking the moon's nightly position through a fixed set of reference star clusters — requires decades if not centuries of systematic observation before the list can be established and validated.

The chronological implications are significant. The Pleiades (*Kṛttikā*), Nakshatra 3 in the standard list, coincided with the vernal equinox at approximately **2300 BCE** — the height of the Indus Civilisation's urban phase. In early Vedic literature, the Pleiades are treated as the "first" or "leading" Nakshatra, consistent with their equinoctial position at that date. If Indus scribes were recording celestial positions using a Nakshatra-based system, the Pleiades — encoded as *6 + fish* — would have been the calendrical anchor point of their astronomical year.

This is precisely what Parpola's corpus analysis shows: the *6 + fish* (Pleiades) combination is one of the most frequent numerical-fish sequences in the corpus.

3.3 Structural Predictions of the Astronomical Notation Hypothesis

A well-formed scientific hypothesis generates predictions. The astronomical notation hypothesis predicts the following structural features in the corpus, all of which can be checked against the available data:

Prediction 1: Short text length. Astronomical notations are compact by design. A record of the moon's position on a given night requires: (a) identification of the relevant Nakshatra, (b) identification of any planets present, (c) a temporal marker, and (d) a qualitative assessment (auspicious/inauspicious for specific activities). This is achievable in 4–6 signs. The observed mean text length of 4–5 signs is exactly consistent with this functional requirement.

Observed: Mean text length 4–5 signs. Only 8 texts exceed 15 signs. **Prediction confirmed.**

Prediction 2: Small core vocabulary with long tail. A Nakshatra-based calendrical system requires a fixed set of signs for: 27 Nakshatra stations, 7 planets (sun, moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn), temporal markers (day, month, year, season), and qualitative markers (auspicious/inauspicious, rising/setting, waxing/waning). This gives a core vocabulary in the range of 50–80 signs. Additional signs for specific ritual contexts, personal names, and extended descriptions would form a less frequent periphery.

Observed: Fewer than 100 signs constitute the high-frequency core; the remaining 300–600 signs each appear rarely (219 signs appear fewer than five times; 113 appear only once). **Prediction confirmed.**

Prediction 3: Positional regularities. In a grammatically structured astronomical notation, celestial object signs (the subject of the notation) would appear at the beginning of a text; qualitative or temporal assessments would appear at the end. Fixed positional behaviour is therefore expected.

Observed: Statistical analysis (Fuls, 2013; Rao et al., 2009) confirms strong positional regularities: specific signs function as text initiators, others as text terminators. The distribution is non-random and syntactically structured. **Prediction confirmed.**

Prediction 4: Numerical prefixes attached to the fish sign. If the fish sign encodes *mīn* (star/heavenly body), numerical prefixes are the natural way to specify which star cluster (asterism) is meant — three stars = Orion's Belt, six stars = Pleiades, seven stars = Ursa Major. These are the most prominent asterisms in the Nakshatra tradition, and they should therefore be among the most frequent sign combinations.

Observed: Parpola's corpus analysis confirms that *numeral + fish* sequences are among the most frequent and most consistently distributed sign combinations. **Prediction confirmed.**

Prediction 5: The fish sign and its variants constitute a coherent subsystem. If the fish sign encodes the generic concept "heavenly body" (*mīn*), its variants should encode specific heavenly bodies — planets identifiable through Dravidian colour/property homophones. The distribution of variants should be consistent across sites and artefact types.

Observed: Parpola (1994) documents exactly this: the fish sign variants (Mercury, Venus, Saturn identifications) are distributed consistently across the corpus. **Prediction confirmed.**

All five structural predictions of the astronomical notation hypothesis are consistent with the observed corpus data. No alternative hypothesis — administrative records, personal names, religious titles, trade notations — accounts for all five simultaneously.

4. The Seal as Astronomical Identity Document

4.1 The Functional Problem of Indus Seals

The standard interpretation of Indus seals — as merchant identity markers or trade administrative devices, analogous to cylinder seals in Mesopotamia — faces a significant objection: the content does not resemble administrative or commercial notation. Mesopotamian seals encode names, titles, and transactional data. Indus seals encode short, positionally structured sequences dominated by astronomical sign clusters.

The astronomical notation hypothesis offers a more coherent functional account: Indus seals are **astronomical identity documents** — personal records of the celestial configuration at birth or initiation, functioning as identity markers in a culture where one's astrological configuration was socially and ritually significant.

4.2 The Jain Parallel

This interpretation finds direct support in the Jain tradition. The Jain *Jyotiṣa* — the astronomical-astrological component of the Jain canonical literature — treats the celestial configuration at birth as a direct indicator of the individual soul's (*jīva*'s) karmic state and its trajectory through the cycle of rebirths. Planetary positions, Nakshatra stations, and lunar phases at birth are not incidental biographical data; they are ontologically significant markers of the soul's position within the cosmic order.

If the Jain *Jyotiṣa* preserves the philosophical codification of Indus astronomical practice — as the broader cultural argument of this paper's companion article (Konstapel, 2025a) implies — then an Indus seal encoding a celestial configuration would be the functional precursor of a Jain birth horoscope: a compact record of the heavens at the moment of a person's entry into the world, serving as their cosmic identity.

4.3 The Unicorn Seal

The most famous Indus seal — the unicorn seal from Mohenjo-daro — depicts a single-horned animal facing a "filter" or "standard" device, with a short inscription above. The unicorn has been identified by Parpola as a representation of the mythological one-horned rhinoceros, associated in later Indian tradition with the lunar Nakshatra *Rohiṇī* (the most auspicious of the 27 stations, associated with the moon's exaltation). The inscription above the unicorn would then constitute the astronomical specification of the celestial moment encoded in the seal.

This interpretation — seal iconography as astronomical symbol, inscription as celestial notation — is consistent with known practices in adjacent ancient cultures. Babylonian cylinder seals frequently combined iconic imagery (associated with specific planets or deities) with cuneiform astronomical notation.

5. The Broader Cultural Context: Astronomy as the Oldest Human Science

5.1 San Astronomical Knowledge

The San peoples of southern Africa, as established in the companion paper (Konstapel, 2025a), represent the oldest continuous cultural tradition on Earth. Their astronomical knowledge has been documented in systematic ethnographic studies (Hollmann, 2004; Barnard, 1992). The Milky Way, the Pleiades, Orion, and the Southern Cross serve as calendrical markers in San cosmology, calibrating seasonal activities and ritual timing. The *!kia* trance dance is timed to specific stellar positions. This is not casual star-gazing; it is the systematic use of celestial observation as the primary temporal framework for communal life.

The Pleiades in particular hold a position of extraordinary importance across African astronomical traditions. Their heliacal rising marks the beginning of the agricultural year in many sub-Saharan cultures. Given the genetic and temporal priority of San culture, this Pleiadean calendrical emphasis is the most parsimonious candidate for the original Pan-human astronomical reference point — the first and most persistent celestial calendar marker in the human record.

Its appearance as *6 + fish* (Pleiades) among the most frequent Indus sign combinations is, in this light, not surprising. It is the persistence of the most ancient human calendar anchor into the Indus script.

5.2 Aboriginal Astronomical Knowledge

The Aboriginal Australians developed what has been described by modern astronomers as the most sophisticated pre-literate astronomical tradition on Earth (Hamacher & Norris, 2011; Norris & Hamacher, 2011). Aboriginal astronomical knowledge encompasses: precise tracking of planetary cycles; identification of dark constellations (constellations defined by dark patches in the Milky Way rather than by stars); use of stellar positions for navigation across continental distances; and a complex system of astronomical calibration for ecological and ceremonial timing.

The songlines — the navigational-ceremonial paths that cross the Australian continent — are in part stellar maps: the sky and the land are superimposed in a single integrated spatial-temporal framework. This is precisely the kind of astronomical-geographical synthesis that a Nakshatra-based calendrical system represents: the sky as the master map onto which terrestrial time and space are referenced.

The independent development of such sophisticated astronomical practice by Aboriginal Australians — a population genetically continuous with the earliest human migrants from Africa, developing in relative isolation for 65,000 years — constitutes strong evidence that systematic celestial observation is not a product of the Bronze Age agricultural revolution but a fundamental feature of human cognitive and cultural organisation.

5.3 The Jain *Jyotiṣa* as Philosophical Codification

The Jain canonical literature includes a substantial astronomical-astrological corpus under the heading *Jyotiṣa* (literally "pertaining to luminaries"). The Jain *Jyotiṣa* tradition treats astronomy not as a technical auxiliary to religion but as a fundamental component of cosmological understanding. The *Sūryaprajñapti* and *Candraprajñapti* — canonical texts dealing with the sun and moon respectively — describe planetary orbits, eclipse cycles, and the Nakshatra calendar with a precision that implies extensive prior observational tradition.

Several features of the Jain astronomical tradition are distinctive and relevant to the present argument:

The primacy of the Nakshatra system. Jain astronomy organises the celestial sphere primarily through the 27 Nakshatra stations rather than the 12 zodiacal signs that dominate later Hindu and Western astronomy. This is consistent with a tradition older than the zodiacal system, which entered Indian astronomy through Babylonian influence in the first millennium BCE — after the Indus period.

Cosmic time scales. Jain cosmology operates with time cycles (*kālacakra*) of immense duration — billions of years — calibrated against astronomical periodicities. The smallest Jain time unit (*samay*, an instant) and the largest (*pudgala parāvarta*, an inconceivably long cycle) are both defined in terms of cosmic processes. This is not metaphorical; it is the philosophical expression of a tradition that takes celestial cyclicity as the fundamental structure of reality.

The individual soul and celestial configuration. As noted above, the Jain *Jyotiṣa* treats the celestial configuration at birth as cosmologically significant. The *jīva*'s karmic burden is partly indexed to the planetary conditions at entry into a given life. This is not fate in the Greek sense — it is a description of the field conditions within which the soul's freedom operates. The practical implication is that astronomical notation at birth has direct soteriological relevance: it records the conditions of the soul's current embodiment.

6. A Revised Account of Indus Script Function

6.1 What the Script Was For

Integrating the corpus-statistical evidence, Parpola's linguistic analysis, and the cultural-historical context established above, we propose the following account of Indus script function:

The Indus script served primarily as a **ritual astronomical notation system**, used to record:

1. **Birth configurations** — the Nakshatra position of the moon, the positions of visible planets, and the relevant asterisms at the time of a person's birth or initiation. These were recorded on personal seals, functioning as portable cosmic identity documents.

2. **Calendrical records** — the timing of ritually significant celestial events (heliacal risings and settings, conjunctions, eclipses, equinoxes) relative to the Nakshatra calendar, used to schedule ceremonies, agricultural activities, and long-distance trade.

3. **Auspicious moment notation** — compact records of celestial configurations deemed favourable or unfavourable for specific activities, analogous to the *muhūrta* calculations that remain central to Hindu and Jain ritual practice today.

The short text length (4–5 signs) follows from the compact, standardised nature of astronomical notation. The core vocabulary (fewer than 100 signs) follows from the finite number of celestial objects, Nakshatra stations, and qualitative categories required by the system. The positional regularities follow from the fixed grammatical structure of astronomical notation (subject — position — quality). The dominance of the fish sign and its variants follows from the centrality of planetary and asterismal identification to the system's function.

6.2 The Seals as Cosmic Identity

The fact that Indus inscriptions appear predominantly on small, portable stone seals — not on monumental architecture, temple walls, or administrative tablets — is fully consistent with the personal astronomical identity document interpretation. In a culture where one's cosmic configuration at birth is socially and ritually significant, a personal seal bearing one's astronomical identity serves simultaneously as identification, as ritual credential, and as a portable statement of one's position within the cosmic order.

This interpretation also explains the animal iconography that accompanies most Indus inscriptions. Each major animal depicted on Indus seals — the unicorn, the bull, the elephant, the rhinoceros, the tiger — may correspond to a specific Nakshatra or planetary association, functioning as a

pictographic astronomical index complementary to the written notation. The unicorn's association with *Rohiṇī* (Parpola, 1994) is the most developed example of this pattern.

6.3 The Administrative Minority

This interpretation does not require that all Indus inscriptions are astronomical. A small fraction of longer inscriptions — particularly those found on tablets rather than seals — may encode administrative, personal name, or title information. The existence of an administrative minority is consistent with the long tail of rare signs (signs appearing fewer than five times) that represent personalised or context-specific notations outside the standard astronomical core vocabulary.

7. Falsifiability and Future Research

7.1 How the Hypothesis Could Be Refuted

A scientific hypothesis must be falsifiable. The astronomical notation hypothesis generates the following refutation conditions:

If the frequency distribution of high-frequency signs does **not** correspond to a structure consistent with 27 Nakshatra stations plus 7 planets plus a set of temporal and qualitative markers, the hypothesis is weakened.

If the positional behaviour of signs is **not** consistent with a subject-position-quality grammatical structure, the hypothesis is weakened.

If future archaeological discoveries reveal Indus inscriptions on commercial transaction records, inventory lists, or royal proclamations — contexts incompatible with astronomical notation — the hypothesis requires revision.

If the underlying language is demonstrated to be non-Dravidian, Parpola's fish/*mīn* identification — the foundation of our extension — is undermined.

7.2 Research Programme

The hypothesis suggests a concrete research programme:

Step 1: Sign clustering analysis. Apply unsupervised clustering algorithms to the high-frequency core of the Indus sign list, using co-occurrence data from the corpus, and test whether the resulting clusters correspond to the expected astronomical categories (Nakshatra signs, planetary signs, temporal signs, qualitative signs). The Interactive Corpus of Indus Texts (Wells & Fuls, 2017) provides the necessary data.

Step 2: Frequency matching. Test whether the frequency distribution of high-frequency signs matches the expected distribution in a Nakshatra-based notation system. The 27 Nakshatra stations would be expected to contribute roughly equally to frequency; the 7 planets would have higher individual frequencies; temporal and qualitative markers would have the highest frequencies as they appear in every notation.

Step 3: Iconographic correlation. Systematically test the correlation between the animal iconography of Indus seals and proposed Nakshatra/planetary associations, extending Parpola's unicorn/*Rohiṇī* identification to the full range of depicted animals.

Step 4: Comparative *Jyotiṣa* analysis. Identify the earliest stratum of Jain *Jyotiṣa* terminology — pre-Sanskritic, Proto-Dravidian vocabulary for celestial objects and processes — and test its correspondence with proposed Indus sign readings.

Step 5: Site distribution analysis. Test whether the distribution of specific sign combinations across Indus sites correlates with astronomical visibility patterns — i.e., whether sites at different latitudes show systematic differences in the frequency of signs associated with celestial objects whose visibility varies with latitude.

8. Conclusion

Asko Parpola devoted four decades of meticulous scholarship to the Indus script. His identification of the fish sign as *mīn*/star, his systematic analysis of the planetary variants, and his proposal that numerical prefixes encode asterisms represent the most significant advance in Indus decipherment since the script's discovery. This paper acknowledges that debt explicitly.

What we have proposed is an extension, not a revision, of Parpola's work. By placing his fish sign analysis within a systematic functional framework — the Nakshatra-based astronomical notation hypothesis — we have shown that the structural properties of the Indus corpus are not obstacles to interpretation but confirmations of a specific functional identity: the Indus script is the world's oldest known astronomical notation system.

This conclusion has implications beyond epigraphy. If the Indus script encoded a Nakshatra-based astronomical calendar, then the astronomical knowledge tradition that underlies classical Indian astronomy — the tradition preserved in the Jain *Jyotiṣa*, the Vedic *Jyotiṣavedāṅga*, and the later *Siddhānta* astronomical literature — is not a product of the first millennium BCE but of the third millennium BCE or earlier. Combined with the evidence for San and Aboriginal astronomical traditions of comparable or greater antiquity, this suggests that systematic celestial observation is not a civilisational achievement of the Bronze Age but a fundamental feature of human cognitive organisation — as old as the species itself.

The Indus Civilisation did not write about commerce, conquest, or kings. It wrote about the sky. And in that writing, it preserved the oldest human understanding: that we are creatures of cosmic time, embedded in celestial cycles that precede and will outlast us, and that the right relationship to those cycles is not domination but attentiveness.

The Jain tradition calls this understanding *jñāna* — knowledge. The San call it *n/um* — living energy. The Aboriginal Australians call it Dreaming.

They are the same thing.

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