

Thoughts of a Disk

Here come some more people. I wonder what they will make of me? Some gaze in wonder; some are slightly curious. "I wonder what all those weird marks mean?" they say.

Some just shrug their shoulders. "Is that it? that little disk thing there?" they say. "Is that it?"

Yes, I admit, I am not very big; barely fifteen centimetres across, and a centimetre thick. Yet I am unique; I know that.

The Museum say I am one of their highlights. Certainly people buy postcards with me on it, and tourists happily buy copies of me, done in all sorts of colors. Why are they not content with my natural baked clay color? I have never really understood tourists.

That lot have moved on. I expect at least one of them will buy a copy of me. I wonder what color they will choose. What will they do with it when they get home?

Here come some more.

But, hey, I have not properly introduced myself, have I?

The first thing I remember is an Italian archaeologist, Luigi Pernier, waking me up on the 3rd July, 1908. He found me sleeping in the basement of a room, which they call room XL-101, of the ruined palace at Phaistós, near Hágia Triáda in Crete. They tell me at the Museum here that I had been sleeping for more than three and half thousand years.

Did I really sleep that long? I do not know. Some say I could have slept only for a few days before being woken up; they say I am a fake, whatever that means.

I do know the people here say the reason I am so famous is that I am very old and unique. Would I not be so famous if I was, after all, only just over a hundred years old. I would still be unique, would I not?

You may think I ought to know how long I slept. But when you are sleeping, you do not know anything, do you?

Do I not remember about the time before I fell asleep? Do I not remember when I was born?

Do you remember, dear reader, when you were born? They say being born is quite a traumatic experience for you humans, and that you do not remember things till a few years after you are born.

I was born when I was fired at a very high temperature. That is very traumatic, I am told. I do not remember it nor, indeed, any time before I fell into my deep sleep.

They tell me I can be tested to see how old I really am. It is called a thermoluminescence test; but the people in the Museum say I must not have the test. They say I am too precious even to be touched. I wonder if they do not want the test in case I am only about 100 years old.

But I would like to know how old I am. You, dear reader, know how old you are, do you not? I do not know; but I like to think I am three and half thousand years old. It makes me seem more important.

But, of course, just being three and half thousand years old would not make me unique. There are clay tablets even older than this from the land of Sumer. Being circular, I suppose, makes me a little unusual.

But what is really weird is that the writing on me, if indeed, it be writing, was *printed* onto the clay before I was fired. Yes, the marks were printed by being

stamped onto the clay. Someone, somewhere had a set of at least forty-five carved punches or stamps. If I really am as old as they say, that makes me the oldest printed document in the world. This is two and a half thousand years before printing with moveable type was developed in China, and three thousand before Gutenberg introduced such printing to Europe.

What is also a little odd is that the writing goes in a spiral on each side, from the outer edge to my center. I say it is a little odd, because that is not unique; I know other examples of spiral writing have been found in other places.

What does make me so unique, apart from being printed, is that the symbols bear no relation to any others known in ancient Crete.

In fact, some people say I do not really come from Crete, because of the writing, and that I must have been imported long ago. But I do feel as though I do belong to Crete and, in any case, no writing like the characters on my two faces has ever been found anywhere else in the world.

This is very odd, given the printed nature of my characters. Why have no other examples of these characters been found over the past century? It is all very perplexing.

What do all these characters mean? As the writing is unknown *and* the language is not known, it makes it rather difficult for anyone to tell me. Also, over my two sides I bear only 242 characters, consisting, as I have said, of forty five different signs. The clever statisticians say that the low ratio of characters to the number of signs means there simply is not enough text to allow anyone to decipher me. But that has not stopped people. Quite the reverse in fact!

Some so-called “decipherers” have claimed that the language is Greek, others that it is Luwian, Egyptian, a Semitic language, or Basque, to name but a few. I am supposed to be a hymn of victory, a curse, a call to arms, a document of land ownership, a mathematical proof, a text for school children and, I am sure, many other things besides.

Inevitably, of course, the believers in the Atlantis myth have claimed me. But even they do not all agree what the Atlantean language was and whether I tell of the fall of that realm, or some deep mystery or profound philosophy of the Atlanteans.

Some claim I contain messages from extra-terrestrial beings who visited the earth thousands of years ago.

But this is all barmy. I cannot be deciphered and some of those who have claimed to have done so, really should know better. I am told that the late John Chadwick of Cambridge in England, who helped Michael Ventris with the decipherment of Linear B, used to keep the very many letters he received about me in a box marked with the Greek letter π for “potty.”

But are these mysterious printed characters writing at all? Some claim that I am a calendar, but they do agree how I work. Some claim I am an astronomical calendarium in harmony with the mechanism of the whole cosmos and that from me one can calculate the passage of planets, stars and constellations. But this seems rather far fetched to me. How can these few static symbols do so much?

It seems I am both an enigma to the sane and an irresistible magnet to crackpots. I suppose that is what makes me so famous or, some would say, notorious. At any rate, I am not ignored.

But those I like best are the ones who think I am a board game. I like that idea. Let the crackpots find that I am written in the most unlikely of languages, giving ever more bizarre messages. Let them read esoteric meanings in me, if it pleases them. I

suppose I give them some sort of pleasure. though I am well aware that these crackpots often make themselves a nuisance to reputable scholars. It must be admitted, however, that even some otherwise reputable scholars have made fools of *themselves* with their own self-styled decipherments.

But I like to think that once I gave innocent pleasure as a game board and that ordinary people can enjoy playing such a game on a copy of me they bought as a souvenir, or on a copy they have made from the illustrations of me given in so many books.

How, you are possibly asking yourself, do I know all this? The answer is simple; I learn from the staff here in the Museum, from the learned scholars that have visit it over the years to see me, and from the thousands of other visitors who see me year after year. I listen to their thoughts. Does that surprise you?

But considerer: I have no mouth and no ears, nor indeed eyes or any other sense organs. I can neither speak nor hear nor see as you see. I sense things in a holistic way and communicate by a sort of telepathy. I cannot explain it any other way.

Before I finish, dear reader, may I ask that if you have not seen me in the flesh, so to speak, you come and visit me at the Museum here in Iráklion in Crete and let me share *your* thoughts. Finally, I wish to thank my amanuensis for patiently listening to my thoughts and transcribing them into your language. I hope you found them of some interest.