

THE PHAISTOS DISK: A BILINGUAL IBERIAN DOCUMENT?

by

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Summary

It is the author's thesis that the two texts on the sides of the as yet undeciphered Phaistos disk are written in two different but somehow related languages, by means of two different but related, probably syllabic "alphabets". Only a little more than half of the characters occur on both sides. The frequency, with which characters occur, is highly dissimilar for both sides. The distribution of word lengths is also dissimilar. Only one word occurs on both sides. After rejecting, as highly improbable, an origin of the Phaistos disk from Mediterranean or Near Eastern countries to the east of Sardinia, the thesis is proposed that our object might possibly hail from the greater Iberian West, and that only there can we hope to unearth similarly inscribed artefacts.

TO LIST THE characters, or probably syllabic "letters", of both sides of the famous disk-shaped Cretan artefact together in a single listing, as done e.g. by Doblhofer(1) (see figure 1), is misleading. It takes tacitly for granted, or presupposes, that which should have been conclusively established beforehand: namely that the inscriptions on both sides have been written in the same language.

I am not at all convinced that this assumption can be regarded as valid, i.e. based on sound reasoning. Because, as a simple listing of the characters shows, the frequency with which they occur is highly dissimilar for both sides. I will abstain from troubling my readers with a rather long, and possibly boring, comparative list. A simple, short visual inspection of both sides of the disk will suffice to see the difference.

Only 24 characters of 45, i.e. only a little more than half of the total, occur on both sides. That would be extremely strange if the inscriptions on both sides were in the same language, independently of the question if we have here an alphabetic or, more probably, a syllabic script.

WE FIND A similar discrepancy, or dissimilarity, between the sides of the disk when we consider recurring groups of two or more characters, or of what I will provisionally call words(2), which are clearly separated by stokes.

The accompanying word ending is an extreme example: on one side it occurs 12 times, on the other only once. Only one word occurs on both sides. (see figure 2)

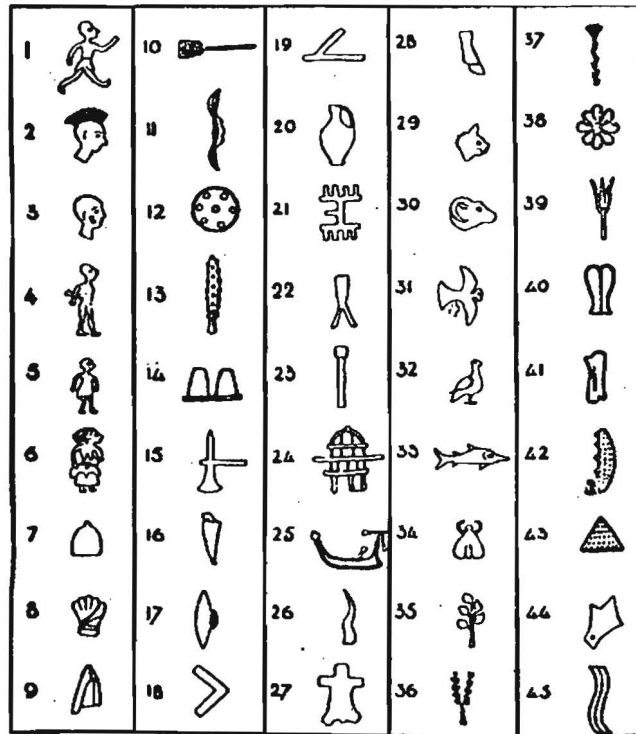


Figure 1

List of characters on the Phaistos disk, of both sides together, given by Doblhofer (in: ZEICHEN UND WUNDER 1964, p.259).

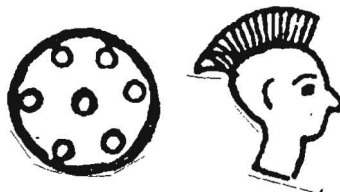


Figure 2

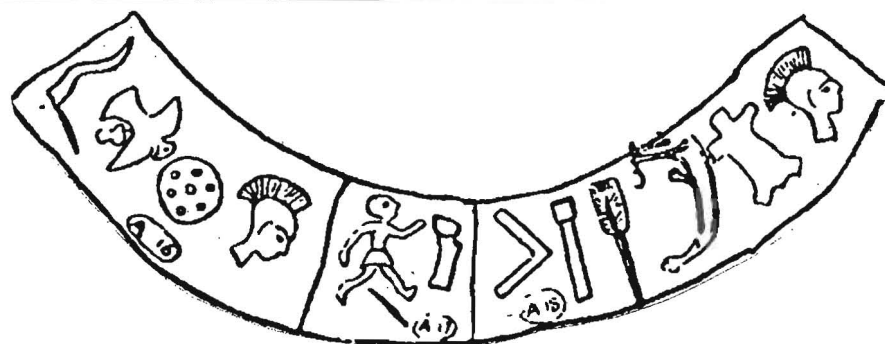


Figure 3



Both sides of the Phaistos disk



ON THE OTHER hand there are the obvious affinities, or similarities, between the texts on both sides. As already mentioned, 24 characters of 45 occur on both sides. Frequencies of word lengths (number of characters per word) are roughly similar. The exceptions will be commented upon in a

moment. The number of words per each side (31 against 30) is nearly the same.

The exceptions, i.e. dissimilarities with respect to frequency of word lengths, are the words of 6 and 7 characters. These (a total of 5) occur only on the so-called front side, i.e. where the eight-petalled flower is the first character in the middle of the disk. Generally one can say that for this side we find a more evenly distributed spectrum of word length, whereas on the so-called reverse side there occur (with only one exception) only words of 3, 4 and 5 characters.

There must be a plausible explanation for this unusual coincidence of similarities and dissimilarities. How to account for them?

When we compare two pages of any book, written in whatever language, we would never find comparable dissimilarities.

THEREFORE, as a tentative explanation for this unusual coincidence of similarities and dissimilarities, the author proposes the thesis that we have here, with the inscriptions on both sides of the Phaistos disk, two texts in two different, albeit related languages, written in two different but related, probably syllabic "alphabets".

On closer inspection, however, we can easily see that the texts on both sides of the disk cannot possibly constitute only two, more or less identical versions in two different languages. This can be inferred e.g. from the fact that the word sequence (see figure 3) occurs two times on the so-called front side, whereas in the text on the so-called reverse side we do not find such a configuration. Other considerations with respect to frequency (reappearance) and place, in the texts, of certain words confirm this conclusion.

In other words: the Phaistos disk could not, then, be a true bilingual document in the sense of the famous Rosetta stone.

OUR UNIQUE, disk-shaped burnt clay tablet, which had been found 1908 in the ruined Minoan fortress of Phaistos, on the south coast of Crete, has so far remained a solitary find. But quite obviously it cannot be without companions. The characters have been imprinted, into the then still soft clay, by means of a set of stamps. Nobody takes the trouble to make 45 (or perhaps 46, since one additional character is illegible) "letter" stamps, when he wants only to inscribe two little texts on a solitary clay tablet. We have to take it for granted that many more similarly inscribed objects have been produced by the civilisation which left for us this enigmatic disk.

BUT WHERE are these many more, as yet unlocated companions or counterparts of the Phaistos disk?

According to experts(3) the fine-grained clay, from which our disk-shaped tablet was made, cannot possibly be of Cretan origin. Neither can our object hail from somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean or Near East, or from southern Italy, Sicily, Sardinia or Corsica, because the many excavations in these regions would have long ago unearthed at least some more artefacts with similar inscriptions.

THE ONLY remaining, viable proposition seems, then, to be the thesis that we will have to look for the country of origin of the Phaistos disk farther to the West, beyond the Italian peninsula and Sardinia. First candidate there would be the Iberian Peninsula.

The pictorial inventory, which we find on the Phaistos disk, seems to be compatible with such a thesis for its geographical origin. It goes without saying that there was no problem, during Mycenaean-Minoan times, for ships from the Iberian Peninsula to reach Crete. The geographical distribution of a certain type of very ancient stepped pyramids, from the Canary Islands through the Mediterranean to the Peloponnese, which

has recently come to our knowledge(4), is proof that the nautical and shipbuilding abilities of the ancient Mediterranean peoples have been grossly underestimated.

BESIDES THERE has been presented by Dayton(5) and Touchet(6) good evidence for a scenario, in which a more or less continuous West-East spread or dispersion of peoples, languages (especially of Hamito-Semitic character), and technologies in the ancient Mediterranean has been the norm rather than the exception. This scenario has not received the favourable reception it deserves, because it contradicts that version of the ex-oriente-lux paradigm which is still the credo of the mainstream. It is, however, corroborated by the view of the well-known Munich linguist Vennemann who states explicitly that, from linguistic considerations, he sees no other choice than to place the original homeland of the Semites, and their center of diffusion, in the Iberian West(7). In his view they had a rather advanced, seafaring civilization there.

IN SUCH A scenario it would, then, be no great miracle how the Phaistos disk, if indeed of Iberian origin, could have arrived at that Cretan fortress-cum-harbour town. A skeptic might of course, and understandably, ask: But why the Iberian Peninsula, where there have not been found similarly inscribed artefacts either? Isn't that highly speculative?

To this could be answered: Speculative, in a sense, yes. But not highly. The situation in the central or eastern Mediterranean or Near Eastern regions is quite another than that for the Iberian Peninsula. In the former case innumerable archaeological excavations would have unearthed at least some companions or counterparts of the Phaistos disk, if there had been any. On the European and African mainlands to the north and south of Crete we know of no culture which could have produced the disk, with its typical pictorial inventory. The only remaining

possibility seems to be the greater Iberian West.

But why should then similarly objects not have found there either?

THE ANSWER could be: We would perhaps have to look for them not on land, but on the bottom of the surrounding seas. Because we have a serious problem with the Iberian Peninsula and the region of the Strait of Gibraltar. The regions may have suffered from great geological upheavals of a tectonic nature as late as Minoan times. This is at least postulated, with impressive evidence, by Topper(8) and de Sarre(9). It would constitute a parallel case to the destruction of the original Indus civilization, by similar geological upheavals, conventionally dated to circa 1900 B.C., after which the center of Indic civilization shifted from Indus and Saraswati rivers to its new relocation area in the Ganges plain(10). Similarly, de Sarre speaks of intermittent tectonic disturbances, around this time, of the region of the Strait of Gibraltar, which even became a broad landbridge for a limited period, and Topper describes traces of highly unusual destructions which characterize many remains of the late prehistoric, rather advanced Iberian civilizations.

Both non-Establishments scholars show themselves so impressed by the relevant evidence that they even seriously, though of course tentatively, consider the possibility of a local impact into the Atlantic somewhere to the west of the Iberian Peninsula, as a trigger for geological changes and destruction of such magnitude.

IF THIS should be so, we would have to reckon with the possibility that lands in the greater Iberian West, were thrived local advanced civilizations, ie now on the bottom of the surrounding seas, or may have been swept away or buried by gravel and sand, e.g. under today's alluvial plain around the mouth of the Guadalquivir (between Sevilla, Cadiz,

and Huelva), by the action of great impact-triggered tsunamis.

IT IS IN THIS nearly equilateral triangle between Sevilla, Cadiz, and Huelva, where (buried under debris) after Schulten and others, the ancient city of Tartessos or Tarshish, a great seafaring civilization, has to be suspected.

And it is, indeed, the author's opinion that it is absolutely legitimate to speculate, if not the Phaistos disk might be a relict from Tarshish. The pictorial inventory of our roughly disk-shaped clay tablet could fit the thesis that it was made by an Ibero-Semitic civilization of Minoan times. I feel most readers, who are knowledgeable in this fields, will agree.

In such a scenario it would be logical to suspect in the language of the two sides of the Phaistos disk members of the Hamito-Semitic language family. At least in our conventional scheme of things. Because in this view peoples speaking Indo-European languages had then not yet arrived, via central Europe, in the Iberian Peninsula.

WHEN WE include, however, also the researches and decipherments of Schildmann(11) into our amalgamation of possibilities, which have to be reckoned with, it cannot be excluded that colonizing Sanskrit-speakers from India had already very early arrived, on a maritime route around Africa, in the Iberian Peninsula, where they would possibly have been instrumental (by means of their, for the natives overwhelming charisma) in giving birth to Sanskrit-related, creolized ("Indo-European") languages.

All of this is of course, speculative, but as shown above it is, so to speak, qualified speculation. The text on the so-called front side of the Phaistos disk, where the words of

6 and 7 characters respectively syllables occur, might then be written in an "Indo-European" language (though not related via any "evolutionary tree" with any "language family", the text on the so-called reverse side possibly in a Semitic or Hamito-Semitic language. Via the Iberian substratum they would, however, be related.

There is still another aspect of the matter which should be taken into consideration. Such an object like the Phaistos disk will, as far as we know these ancient peoples, probably have texts of a religious nature on it.

SINCE WE HAVE seen above that the two texts on the sides of the disk cannot simply be identical versions in two languages, the one being so to speak a translation of the other, we have to suspect that those two, different ethno-linguistic groups, which used these languages, had also different religious belief systems, with probably different pantheons.

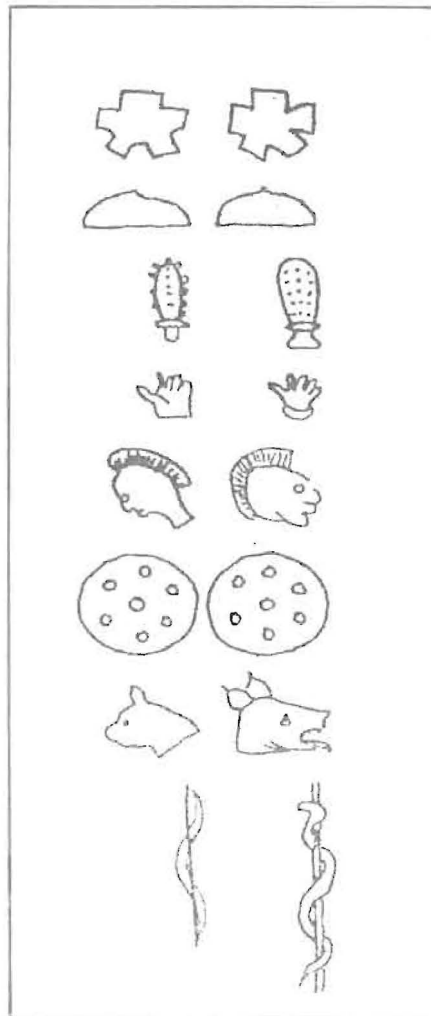
If this were so, it would fit well what we might suspect with respect to such an international, multi-ethnic center of maritime trade as Tarshish is described in the Old Testament. Surely there were not only several languages in use, but also different religious present.

Did pre-Columbian America also belong to those distant countries, with which Tarshish, or ancient Iberian civilization generally had trade contacts?

EVIDENCE for pre-Columbian cultural diffusion between the Old and the New

worlds via the Atlantic Ocean has been superabundantly described e.g. by Honore(12), in multiple detail. But here we are specifically speaking of the Phaistos disk. In the No.12/1996 issue of the journal "Ancient American" has been published a comparative listing of eight characters from the Phaistos disk and very similar Aztec ideograms(13), which has already been reproduced by Pellech(14) (see figure 4), and which is also reproduced here.

IF THIS WERE indeed so, we would then have additional evidence of cultural diffusion between pre-Columbian Mexico and Crete (as postulated by Honore), possibly via ancient Iberia, e.g. Tarshish-Tartessos. Sadly, as will be seen, that comparative drawing in the "Ancient American" is rather clumsily or carelessly done, and no reference is given, from which the Aztec ideograms were taken. This is not exactly good scholarly procedure. It is to be hoped that somebody with a good knowledge of Aztec and other, preceding Mexican writing systems will publish a more comprehensive and better documented comparison of these pre-Columbian ideograms with the characters on the Phaistos disk. Only then will we be in a position to pronounce with relative certainty on a relatedness, or not, of these writing systems.



Comparative listing of Aztec ideograms
and Minoan Cretan characters, obviously
taken from the Phaistos disk (ANCIENT
AMERICAN No.12, 1996)

Figure 4

AUTHOR'S MAIN PUBLICATIONS
Selection with respect to cultural diffusion

1981: An Alphabet of the Bronze Age Civilization of Northwestern Europe?. NEARA JOURNAL Vol.15/No.4.

1982: De la prehistoire archetypique. MEDITERRANEA No.9.

1986: Les lettres „grecques“ de Tell el-Yehudiya. MEDITERRANEA No.23.

1988: Velikovsky, Spanuth and the Sea Peoples Discussion: Arguments for a Migration of Atlanto-European, Late Bronze Age Megalithic Peoples Towards 700 B.C. to the Mediterranean (published by author).

1989: La grande mystification de Jacques Touchet et les incertitudes de la chronologie. MEDITERRANEA No.33.

1990: L'origine énigmatique des Nabatu. MEDITERRANEA No.38.

Les prétendues races humaines, ou Les dangereuses chimères de la Neo-Scholastique. MEDITERRANEA No. 40.

1992: Das Jiddische und die Herkunft der Baiern. VORZEIT-FRÜHZEIT-GEGENWART No.1-91.

The Continent of Hiva – Did Quasi-Continental Landmasses in the Mid-Pacific Survive until as Late as 1576? PURSUIT Vol.22/No.1.

Ethnien und morphische Felder – Volk, „Rasse“, Sprache, Land. VORZEIT-FRÜHZEIT-GEGENWART No.4-5/92.

1994: Eine sensationelle Entzifferung – Vorbemerkungen zu Kurt Schildmanns Entzifferung der „Indus-Kultur“-Schrift als Sanskrit. EFODON SYNESIS No.5.

Fünf Thesen zur Vorgeschichte, EFODON SYNESIS No.5.

Atlanto-Iberian Civilization and ancient America. NEARA JOURNAL Vol.29/No.1-2.

1995: Die Entstehung von Ober- und Unter-Ägypten in diffusionistischer Sicht. EFODON SYNESIS No.9.

Noch immer rätselhaft: Die Entstehung der Baiern. Wessobrunn (EFODON).

1996: Tepurerene and Pedra Pintada. EFODON SYNESIS No.13.

Hat Alt-Amerika das Buchstaben-Alphabet gekannt? EFODON SYNESIS No.16.

Sprach die westeuropäische Megalith-Kultur semitisch? (Review of publications by Theo Vennemann). EFODON SYNESIS No.17.

Was the Language of the Atlanto-European Culture an Ancient Semitic? Or: The Problem of the Atlanto-Semites. MIDWESTERN EPIGRAPHIC JOURNAL Vol.10/No.1.

1997: Wo sind Europas "Aborigines" geblieben? EFODON SYNESIS No.21.

Waren an der baierischen Stammesbildung manichäisch-buddhistische Elemente beteiligt? EFODON SYNESIS No.20.

Jahrhundert-Irrtum "Eiszeit"? Hohenpeißenberg (EFODON).

1998: Die alten Hochkulturen standen in Kontakt! EFODON SYNESIS No.26.

European Non-Establishment Research in Prehistory and Ancient Chronology. MIDWESTERN EPIGRAPHIC JOURNAL Vol.10/No.2.

1999: A diffusionist View on the Origins of Upper and Lower Egypt and on the Genesis of Civilizations Generally. MIDWESTERN EPIGRAPHIC JOURNAL: Vol.11.

REFERENCES

- 1) Ernst Doblhofer: Zeichen und Wunder. Die Entzifferung verschollener Schriften und Sprachen. Munich 1964. p. 259.
- 2) This is e.g. also the opinion of Johannes Friedrich in: Entzifferung verschollener Schriften und Sprachen. Berlin-Göttingen-Heidelberg 1954. p. 134.
- 3) According to Doblhofer: loc. cit.
- 4) Cf. Dominique Görlitz: Schilfboot Abora. Segeln gegen den Wind im Mittelmeer. Hamburg 2000. pp. 30-33.
- 5) John Dayton: Minerals Metals Glazing & Man. London 1978.
- 6) Jacques Touchet: La Grande Mystification. Published chapter-wise in MEDITERRANEA No.29 (1988) – No.47 (1992), Carcassonne. A spiral bound « version revue et corrige » of the relevant pages of that journal is available from the Societe d'Etude des Anciens Peuples Mediterraneens, 40 rue de la Liberte; F-11000 Carcassonne, France.
- 7) In e.g. Theo Vennemann: Andromeda and the Apples of the Hesperides, in: Proceedings of the 9th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference Los Angeles 1997. Washington D.C., 1998.
- 8) Uwe Topper: Das Erbe der Giganten. Olten/Freiburg 1977.
- 9) Francois de Sarre: Als das Mittelmeer trocken war. Die katastrophische Geschichte des mediterranen Gebietes. Hohenpeißenberg 1999.

- 10) Georg Feuerstein. Subhash Kak & David Frawley: In Search of the Cradle of Civilisation. Wheaton/Illinois (USA) 1995. pp. 87-97.
- 11) Kurt Schildmann: Indus/Burrows Cave (USA) Deciphering. Studia Orientalia et Indo-Atlantica, Fascicle 1, Bonn 1998. By the same author: Entzifferung der Burrows Cave texte in USA und der Glozel-Texte in Frankreich als Indus-Sanskrit-Texte. Bonn 1998.
- 12) Pierre Honore (a pseudonym): Ich fand den Weissen Gott. Frankfurt am Main. 1961.
- 13) This comparative presentation has been added, by the editor of the ANCIENT AMERICAN, to an article by James P. Grimes: They did Write it Down: Pro-Columbian Written Records of America.
- 14) Christine Pellech: Die ersten Entdecker Amerikas. Der Kulturdiffusionismus. Frankfurt am Main (etc.) 1997. p. 422.

Zusammenfassung

Die These des Autors ist es, dass die Texte auf den beiden Seiten des berühmten Diskus von Phaistos (ein bislang nicht entziffertes Unikat) in zwei unterschiedlichen aber irgendwie verwandten Sprachen abgefasst sind, und zwar unter Verwendung von zwei unterschiedlichen aber verwandten Silbenschrift-„Alphabeten“.

Nur etwas mehr als die Hälfte der Schriftzeichen kommt auf beiden Seiten vor. Die Häufigkeit, mit der die Zeichen vorkommen, ist für die beiden Seiten sehr unähnlich. Ebenfalls sehr unähnlich ist die Verteilung der Wortlängen. Nur ein einziges Wort kommt auf beiden Seiten vor. Alles dies passt nicht zu der Annahme, dass die Texte auf beiden Seiten in derselben Sprache und Schrift abgefasst seien.

Eine Herkunft des Diskus aus mediterranen oder nahöstlichen Ländern östlich von Sardinien (einschließlich Kreta) wird als höchst unwahrscheinlich verworfen, da bei den ungezählten Ausgrabungen dort dann schon längst Parallelfunde hätten gemacht werden müssen. Statt dessen wird aufgrund verschiedener Betrachtungen vermutet, dass das Herkunftsland des Diskus nur im iberischen Westen, im weiteren Sinne, liegen könne. Nur dort dürften wir in dieser Sicht der Dinge also hoffen, ähnlich beschriftete Artefakte zu finden. Als eine Möglichkeit wird auf die Alluvialebene zwischen Sevilla, Cadiz und Huelva an der Mündung des Guadalquivir hingewiesen, unter der nach einigen Gelehrten die im Alten Testament erwähnte Seehandelsmetropole Tarshish-Tartessos begraben sein soll.

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