

5,000 Years Ago, Once Again Tonight

Written by Alex Baer

Monday, 22 October 2012 17:10 - Last Updated Monday, 22 October 2012 17:10

Ancient history is alive and well today -- and is, in short, old hat.

Submitted for your consideration, a tale of two worlds:

In the UK, a man is trying to decipher the intricate subtleties of symbols on a clay tablet from 3200 BCE that speaks to the current status of the home group, using the language of the time.

Across an ocean, in the US, two men will meet tonight, in 2012 CE, and use modern speech, attempting to speak to their own audience about current affairs within the home group -- providing observers can decode the oblique, nuanced language used.

The man in the UK is an Oxford University academic investigating arcane symbols, figures, and ancient language not used in more than 5,000 years. He says he could use some suggestions in cracking open the meaning of this true prize, if we'd care to join in.

The men in the U.S. are politicians, and have been running for their prize for what seems like more than 5,000 years. It's a cinch they will be using arcane language, too -- ancient symbols of what they really mean, and lots of figures, to boot. It will be up to us to crack open their true meaning, if we'd care to join in.

Oh, sure -- It's a given we'll all be making lots of "suggestions" in the US, all throughout the current event. Some of those suggestions will even be fit for family audience consumption, even though we are addressing our screens, using an assortment of hand signals and gestures. In the UK, though, people are being invited to share their suggestions regarding the clay tablet.

We are all of us code-breakers, suddenly united in a struggle to make some small sense of life, using the communication method of our times.

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Even more parallels of these two worlds await:

In the UK, the clay tablet addresses property ownership and accounts. It speaks of a ruling household or class, and below them a powerful middle rank, and below them, the majority -- workers who, experts say, were little more than "cattle with names," according to an article in the BBC.

The rulers have names and titles that reflect their power and status -- names like "Mr. One Hundred," to show the number of people below him. We have similar classes, of course, but resort to more general names, like "millionaire" and "billionaire."

For the lowest ranks, subsistence hovered around starvation levels, while those higher up ate very well indeed. In terms of life expectancy, some at the top might have lived as long as the rich do now. For those at the bottom, the life span was about what it is today in the poorest countries.

In trying to crack the code of the clay tablet's written communication, interpreters have run into a number of problems. One key challenge is the lack of education and scholarship -- little attention was paid to maintaining the integrity and accuracy of the writing.

There were no symbol lists or exercises for scribes to use to ensure or preserve any sense of accuracy. This likely led to questions about whether the tablet's facts and figures could be believed, and *which* communication meant *what*.

Among key challenges for audiences tonight? Whether viewers and listeners have sufficient education, ability, and awareness to determine the accuracy of the communication, and whether any of it can be believed -- at *any* level.

(So far, these staged diatribes -- *what insane marketing person thought to call these farces debates?* -- are about as instructive as watching the undifferentiated flow after opening a long-closed sluice gate.)

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The lack of education 5,000 years ago led to a system of communication that may have proven useless. It became so corrupted it lasted only a couple of hundred years.

So far, our system is hanging in there, after a couple hundred years. Lack of education, and system corruption, though, continue to be constant challenges even today.

The tablet language, as communication, fell out of use, garbled, confused, and no longer trusted to accurately reflect the current status and affairs of life in their community.

So far, we have not yet given up in our communities, and still use our modern-day communication system of speech to interact, present our ideas of current affairs, and try to win others to our side.

Although, you have to admit, this method is getting less and less trustworthy all the time, and more and more heated, side-tracked, and, at times, more than a little deranged.

But then, 5,000 years ago, perhaps the scribes with their clay tablets had no quick or easy way to indicate the raised voices, finger-pointing, over-talking, and aggressive body language they may have seen from their masters -- and no way to note the very firm suspicion they were hearing lies.

If so, the community's scribes were likely told by their masters -- in no uncertain terms -- to record the lies as they were given, keep quiet, and just pass them on.

Any similarities with current-day, mainstream scribes and/or masters is purely intentional. □ Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is likely very uncomfortable. □ Note to masters and scribes: □ If you don't enjoy your current reputation with the American people, feel free to improve.

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Clay tablet: Care to help decode it? <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-19964786>