

LAYISH NEWSLETTER 1: SUMMER SOLSTICE 2011

It has been half a lifetime's struggle to keep my research alive and only recently have I been able to start warehousing it for others to read. The story of that struggle I leave to later newsletters. In this first one I should explain why it is coming live on the website in what seems to be an out of sequence order. Well, detective story writers often write the ending before they go back and work out the criss-crossing threads of the story which end in the final *dénouement*. My Arab ex-husband, a Qur'ānic expert, told me that its wording arrived in Muhammad's mind over time in long or small fragments from all over the piece - certainly not starting at the beginning and ending at the end - so I take that approach as positive.

I was initially given a PhD topic three decades ago: to find out *The Meaning of the Lion Attacking its Prey in Ancient Near Eastern Art* (I think my supervisor had in mind the stairways at Persepolis). Obviously I thought I would look into earlier images that preceded these Achaemenid icons - only to find that they led all the way back to the Fifth Millennium BC, crossing from one civilisation to another in the process. Not surprisingly, my supervisor said he was unable to supervise me, and anyway he was not happy about my consulting lecturers in Egyptology, Aegean Studies or Mesopotamia in different departments of London University (the same theme was being looked at separately in each Department, treated in isolation, in disconnect).

Unfortunately I tend to look into things very thoroughly if I'm going to do it at all, which makes me awkward to deal with. Having started my search as an Art Historian, I realised I needed to learn about ancient near eastern art history - and the only way to do that in this country is to do an Archaeology Degree - which I proceeded to do, part-time in the evenings, while working in a day job for a large engineering company that makes trains and power stations all over the world.

As I collected the visual evidence I noticed the lion-bull attack was often placed next to other common images in ancient near eastern art, and that perhaps by taking it with its juxtapositions I would be able to understand its particular significance. To cut a long story short, I arrived at a working hypothesis that its significance was astronomical and/or astrological, given Mesopotamian religion saw their stellar and planetary gods and goddesses in animal as well as human form. I therefore also took further evening class courses then copiously available in London in the adult education circuit - in naked-eye astronomy (conducted by the Astronomy Correspondent of the Daily Telegraph) and astrology (at the Company of Astrologers in Bloomsbury) and began to study the sky at night more closely - and apply the basic principles of astrology to my friends.

I still felt I needed more practice in what the body of ancient near eastern art consisted of, and I took many further part-time courses over several years in Aegean and Ancient Near Eastern Studies conducted by experts in the field, producing around 20 essays for them on different topics dealing with artefacts from the Fourth to the end of the First Millennia BC (see my C.V. on my Home Page). During that time I was concentrating on the chapter I felt I most needed to complete first - that on Mesopotamian Astronomy, which is Chapter 19 on my website, since it forms the basis of my

working hypothesis - it took about ten years to synthesise. I also divided up the lion-bull attack visual evidence into compositional types and have just posted the first two catalogues on the third level of the website - these enumerate the two most striking types chronologically, with commentary, and the others will follow - each type has a story to tell.

I am still making up my mind about what the lion-bull attack means, along with the images it is sometimes attached to. I find I have to follow my own systematic method and not jump to conclusions prematurely, even though I give hints in my commentary in the catalogues about the direction the evidence is leading towards, since certain instances occur where it becomes blindingly obvious. If I crack the code, I believe it will lead me to decipher an entire cycle of certain familiar images that have commonly been repeated in ancient near eastern art over the centuries. It is such an amazing conclusion that I believe I will end up with, that I know I have to prove it to the experts with every shred of evidence I can pin down - hence the level of detail.

I hope you will walk with me on this journey, and send me any thoughts you might have on what is on the website so far. It is going to take several years before all the pieces of this jigsaw are finally assembled!

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