

## ***LAYISH NEWSLETTER 2013***

As I explain on my home page, the hypothesis behind the research posted on this website is that certain recurring images in Ancient Near Eastern Art are calendrical in nature, referring at least to the Equinoxes and Solstices, if not also the Quarter Festivals as still celebrated today by the Celtic peoples. Placing them all into a circular zodiac (which could be as small as an eight-fold zodiac, but in certain periods stretching to 10 and 12-fold (or even 9-, 11- and 13-fold when accounting for the shortfall between lunar and solar calendars) should provide a master key to understanding the content of this art (it is surprising what clichés come out of the mouths of archaeologists and historians on this iconography - without any proof whatsoever)! The images of the Canon endure throughout the last four millennia BC, are picked up into Roman art and the art of the 'Dark Ages' in Europe, and are even at times to be spotted incorporated into Christian and Islamic art - because astronomy and astrology are the perennial background to Mankind's material and spiritual life.

***THE HANDFUL OF VALUED READERS WHO FOLLOW THIS SITE MUST WONDER WHY IT IS TAKING SO LONG TO DO EACH CHAPTER. LET ME EXPLAIN WHY, PUTTING THE MOST SUPERFICIAL REASONS FIRST AND DEALING WITH THE MORE COMPELLING, HEAVY-DUTY ONES - IN ASCENDING ORDER.***

- A. Most male scholars can set up home with a wife who will take care of the housework and cooking so that they can devote themselves full-time to their scholarly pursuits. When it's the other way round there is no such luxury, and I can't work unless my surroundings are clean and I eat regularly, meaning domestic work eats into writing time.
- B. When my marriage broke up it took me ten years to start all over again at the material level after changing home and lifestyle, so I did no work on this project at all, compounding the delay and making it hard to pick up the threads again once back onto the research. In order to survive I needed to have a day-job to earn money, which of course is a further drain on time given to this central pursuit, meaning I could only work on it at weekends, still exhausted from a 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. day at the office, plus 5 hours travelling to get there and back. Happily, now I am recently retired I can write every day, and can choose the time of day to write when the brain is at its sharpest.
- C. From the work I have managed to achieve in recent years, one of the ways of testing my ideas on others has been to present papers at conferences (posted on this website as well as stand-alone pieces) but it takes some weeks to get a short paper into presentable, then publishable, order and now having presented three papers drawing on ***Chapter 19*** and ***Catalogues B*** and ***C***, I have decided that the priority now (I am not getting any younger) is to forge ahead on the main body of the work, so I will give no further papers at Oxford's Oriental Institute. It is now down to my website participators to question and test me!
- D. The fact that my evidence is as much visual as documentary means that gathering relevant illustrations is an added, time-consuming complication in presenting credible evidence. I do

not like to discuss an artefact unless I can illustrate it, otherwise I would be putting the burden on the reader to follow up illustrations in hundreds of specialist publications in academic libraries for themselves which few have the time, or access, to do. Without illustrations it is just not possible to understand what I am talking about, but I find over and over again the added difficulty that text-based scholars tend not to see images as a different kind of document, also providing information when skilfully elicited.

E. Now we are getting closer to the real nub of why progress is slow: I am still sifting the evidence, still checking and making up my mind as I process all the images I have collected, from which unexpected surprises and connotations emerge! Each catalogue I bring together (I hope to post *Catalogue D* in the new year of 2014) has raised different foci of information that cumulatively add not only to the ratification of the main thrust of my enquiry, but also take in expansions and adjustments. Bear in mind I look primarily into

a) *the specific meaning of the lion attacking its prey* in ancient near-eastern art, then (depending on the other images to which it is often juxtaposed)

b) *the unspoken existence of what I call The Canon of Ancient Near Eastern Art (CANEA)* - that assemblage of calendrical images, like beads on a necklace covering stages in the passing of the Year, rarely shown all together in sequence, but more commonly as combinations of some images chosen from the full repertoire, depending on their relevance to the artefact or monument concerned in the country and period it is made.

***AGAIN, PEOPLE MUST BE PUZZLED THAT I HAVE NOT YET ALLOCATED THE CANEA IMAGES TO THEIR PLACES IN THE CYCLE - EVEN THOUGH I CONTINUE TO TALK ABOUT THE CONCEPT THEORETICALLY -- SURELY IT SHOULD BE SIMPLE TO STRING THE BEADS TOGETHER BY NOW!***

F. This is because I am still weighing up which motifs belong to it and, even more crucially, how to allocate them to the different seasons within the calendar/zodiac. In *Catalogue D*, in relation to Minoan art I have for the first time introduced the idea that a new 'modernising' culture (Minoan) could *adopt* the *CANEA* imagery from the Levant at one particular period in time - using it for their own purposes, but also in the process *adapting* it by adding their own images relevant to local conditions. So I point out their adoption of

- a) the Master/Mistress of the Beasts group;
- b) the goat or cow suckling its young;
- c) the heraldic arrangement of creatures either side of a column, mountain or tree;
- d) and the lion-prey group itself.

Yet I still hesitate to assign these images to the four seasons of the year until I have gone through all the evidence, and there are still at least two more substantial catalogues to draw up, with lesser ones afterwards that will be shorter - but all may raise further angles

to be taken into account. It is especially the other, intermediate motifs that seem to be part of the **CANEA** which I still have even less of an idea of where to place them in the sequence, and it would be premature to come to conclusions too early, creating more work if I had to unravel many rows of knitting to correct a misplacement. Only after all the catalogues have been done will I be able to handle this operation with confidence -helped by the order given in the rare occurrences where the Canon is iterated in full, either on a monumental scale at a handful of architectural sites - or also on a further small group of decorated artefacts. This exercise will have its own chapter: it will be an exciting moment finally to be able to fit the pieces together into what will almost certainly be their authentic, and tested, fixed order.

***PEOPLE COMING NEW TO THIS WEBSITE – AS WELL AS THE REGULARS – MUST BE PUZZLED THAT SO MANY OF THE EARLY CHAPTERS STILL HAVE NOT BEEN WRITTEN – AND THAT ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT, CHAPTER 19 NEAR THE END OF THE WHOLE BOOK, HAS BEEN FINISHED FIRST.***

G. I convinced myself very early on that it would have to be alright to present the story of the **CANEA** piecemeal the way I have done, by bearing in mind an interesting precedent: my ex, a Qur'ānic scholar, pointed out some time ago: that the Qur'ān was revealed to Muhammad in this way over a considerable period of time - in pieces from the middle, beginning or end - and only later assembled into the Book version with the pieces placed in their intended places. The criterion for its ordering was simply to put the longest *Sūrahs* first, and end with the shortest, so the non-Muslim reader expecting a historical beginning, middle and end (as in the Bible) would be somewhat disorientated!

Thus I realize a better precedent for disassociated composition comes from novel-writing - especially crime stories - where the author will often write the last chapter first, because it brings all the threads together: from that he then works backwards to the beginning, in between weaving the separate strands of the story that make the fabric of the final conclusion credible.

***SO, TO ANYONE COMING TO THIS WEBSITE PERIODICALLY, AND PUZZLED ABOUT ITS PIECEMEAL STATE, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE. IT IS GOING TO BE SOME YEARS YET BEFORE IT IS FULLY POPULATED, SO KEEP WATCHING THIS SPACE AS THE MYSTERY UNFOLDS AND, I HOPE, IS FINALLY EXPLAINED.***

*You may already have your own ideas about the sequence of the **CANEA** images and their allocation to sections of the Year, and if you want to share your ideas I would be interested to hear from you. Any serious contribution will be properly acknowledged and, if not too long, added to the foot of this year's Newsletter or footnoted in my main work.*

**ASIA HALEEM**

[Previous newsletters follow below](#)

## *LAYISH NEWSLETTER 2012*

As regards progress of the research into the *CANEA* this past year, slowly over the years the shapes of the jigsaw pieces are emerging and as they are placed against each other the entire picture is becoming clear. Just as I was able to take the basic 'meat' out of *Chapter 19* and put it into a paper for an ARAM conference at the Oxford Oriental Institute in 2010 (the link to it is the word SIBITTI in the Chapter 19 box on my website), so from the *Uruk Stance Catalogue* (middle row of the third level of my website) I extracted the core material on my conclusions about the astronomical uses and orientation of Persepolis for a discussion/lecture given at short notice (also under ARAM's aegis) in July this year. This will be followed up by a more formal presentation of that material in 2014, after which the paper will be posted under the Uruk Stance Catalogue box on my website.

In the meantime this year I have completed the next catalogue on the *Rear Attack* whose early 2M key material I will again put into a paper featuring the *Feast of Ishtar* in Syria next year (it was very much a precursor of the New Year gathering of Nations at Persepolis), and again I have posted the catalogue in the *Rear Attack* box (top row right, level three, next to *The Uruk Stance*). What has intrigued me most is that in both, it is the Winter Solstice point that emerges as the most crucial in both Achaemenid Persia and early Second Millennium Syria, enabling the fixing of the following Spring Equinox day - so the contribution from Yehuda Rothblum on the Negev rock art mentioned below is an interesting dovetailing of emphasis on what seems to have been taken as the 'New Year season' stretching between the Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox (today in the West this is the period between Christmas and Easter). As we all know, Orion rises high in the sky in the Winter months, whilst Perseus is dominant at Spring, and these two feature as heroes in AncNME art.

Overall, then, I am beginning to feel sure that it was a good thing to organise into *compositional types* all the lion-prey visual evidence collected, since it makes paths of transmission of certain types at certain periods stand out. I have been quite surprised how so far a slightly different story emerges from each catalogue which adds to the implications of the meaning of the lion and prey group within the cycle of the other images it is so often placed alongside in the Canon of Ancient Near Eastern Art (*CANEA*). I am now working on *Catalogue D: The Back Lunge* in which - given so many lentoid seals from Crete and Mycenae use this particular grouping - I focus on its use in the Aegean which in the 2M was feeding off the Levant's example, but with local variations. In Chapter 19 I pleaded that as an art historian I am on the trail of interpreting images and insofar as Mesopotamian astronomy comes into it, I have felt bound to try and unravel relevant aspects of the subject (i.e. I am not trying to solve the whole of Mesopotamian astronomy, whose scholars I understand form a tight clique difficult to break into). I thought on moving to the Aegean world I would now have dealt with astronomical content sufficiently, but through attendance at a current series of seminars at the University of London on Minoan and Mycenaean themes led by experts in the field, it has dawned that, yet again, there is an astronomical underpinning to the imagery taken

over from the Levant. Mostly through the work of professors at Uppsala University I have come across a whole series of wonderful work done on the Minoan and Mycenaean calendars which will eventually go into **Chapter 22** (which deals with the last handful of **Sky Anchors**) with the main themes suggested at in the Back Lunge Catalogue for interpreting a series of superb Minoan and Mycenaean seals showing lion-bull attacks. Again (surprise, surprise) the solstices/equinoxes represented by the Labrys double axe icon - not forgetting the Goddess/planet Venus - will feature centre stage. Speaking of which, I originally wrote a short piece on Venus Worship in relation to the Great Bear for a friend's website, and I have now placed an expanded version of it for your interest on this website on level 2 (reached via the centre square of level 1) - click on the link in the Goddess enthroned box. A shortened version is also given as the Cosmokrator 2012 Newsletter.

I was so interested to receive one response to **Chapter 19** on **Mesopotamian Astronomy** from a correspondent in Israel who leads tours in the Negev desert to look at the Neolithic rock art abounding there. Yehuda Rothblum feels some of the groupings of animals (most notably ibex with possibly the human figure of Orion or Perseus) suggest these are very primitive star maps (see the pictures on his website [www.israelrockart.com](http://www.israelrockart.com)). The Neolithic period takes me beyond my orbit of detailed knowledge, but anything that fills in the preamble to the formalisation of astronomy in the ancient near east and its calendar is extremely useful.

His difficulties in following some of my arguments made me re-read **Chapter 19**, having written it three years ago, and I decided to revamp its format and go through the text and cross-references with a tooth-comb (having gained further editing skills since I first did it) and I have now reposted it under the **Chapter 19** link, hoping it now runs more smoothly. Having said that, some of the material is in itself tough to follow, and you need to spend time familiarising yourself with the stars from a star map - as well as going out and looking at the sky itself - this is our primary document which cannot be faked. Learning the symbols for the Signs and Planets will also help you avoid stumbling at passages where they are used as shorthand for the words. I also suggest you first read through it just picking on the aspects of relevance or interest to you, and skip the hard bits for a further reading until the time you have absorbed the subject more! I have had to write it as part tutorial, part exposition knowing readers may not already have a background in traditional astronomy. If you were put in the desert for a year without watches or telescopes, you would find yourself in the position of Neolithic Man and quite soon would start to use the sky to tell the time of day and year! My challenge to Yehuda is to try this experiment! It's something I would love to test myself. There are no books on the rock art of Israel, so Yehuda's next task seems clear.

*Remember, I can post you a hard copy of any of my web documents on request, charged at cost, but I am not willing to release electronic versions!*

**ASIA HALEEM**



Last year's newsletter follows below

## *LAYISH NEWSLETTER 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!

**ASIA HALEEM**

