

## **THE PHYSICAL OBSTACLES TO RESEARCH WORK**

Many of us are engaged on research - either while holding down a position in Academia or in an independent capacity. I have had so many setbacks this year that I am now viewing 2015/2016 as a biennial cycle - for the first time understanding why sometimes an annual routine needs to expand into a double-year due to issues that crop up. What is certain is that my usual plan of putting one catalogue a year onto the website has fallen down due to a variety of obstacles while working on *Catalogue E: The Forward Attack*, and I thought I would share some of them with you since I am sure the readers of this website will recognise the problems and take heart that they are *normal!* Do also let us know *your* own experience.

Aside from a whole host of psychological and mental dimensions which I won't deal with here let us just look at the day-to-day physical ones:

1. Delay to work due to being unable to get hold of a certain book or paper
2. Computer crashes and losing data
3. Change of software
4. Updating work due to new scholarship
5. Loss of Broadband
6. Changes in one's domestic background

Let's consider each of these in turn:

### ***DELAY TO WORK DUE TO BEING UNABLE TO GET HOLD OF A CERTAIN BOOK OR PAPER***

- I have been held up because none of the libraries I use have the publication in yet. The School of Oriental and African Studies Library can be up to four years behind in registering recently published works (the British Library is actually the fastest, being about 6-9 months retro to publication date).
- Some more unusual books have just never made it to a London library - thank the Lord that many are now downloadable.
- Again, my usual library (as also the British Library) has a habit of sending periodicals they don't think are used much out to storage. You come in expecting to find it on the shelf, only to find you have to order it in, meaning you have to come into town a second time (ditto with recalled books). The journals still with importance for my field (ones like *Syria, Iranica Antiqua.*) are not deemed so by the Librarians!
- I have to travel in to London to use my libraries, and since the train fare is £60 return I have to make efficient use of my time and thus may have to postpone even going to the library for another week, due to cost.
- This actually means that sometimes it is *cheaper* to buy the book, especially when speed is of the essence! But here's another thing - several books in my field initially sold at a price,

say, of £40 - but now they are out of print are going for £100/£150, and often far more than that!

#### **COMPUTER CRASHES AND LOSING DATA**

- This of course is the most common problem - I had one major hold-up of a month when a large document with many pictures was attacked by a virus, with a knock-on effect on everything else. For those who use many images in their work, I have found out that it really is worth:
  - paying a computer expert to monitor the health of your systems - on-site or remotely;
  - paying for top-class software protection, and
  - also paying to insert an extra RAM board to ramp up memory to cope with lots of pictures - at the same time reducing the size of pictures where possible so as not to overload the computer memory to its borderline (at which point you will no longer be able to open your document, as happened one day) and, finally,
  - at the end of every day making a duplicate by backing up on an external hard-drive which if you leave the house should be carried everywhere with you to avoid that one case in a million where you come home and find your life-time's work has been burned down!

#### **CHANGE OF SOFTWARE**

- My computer guru was finally successful in weaning me from my previous version of Word but even though all my documents were successfully transferred it still took time to go through earlier work from previous years and make it all uniform in presentation and document type. Deciding to change the font throughout, for instance, led to all sorts of wobbles inside each document which needed to be ironed out, because the spacing changes have a knock-on effect on page layouts. (In the process many errors were spotted so perhaps no bad thing to have to re-edit.)
- Without the ability to insert, enhance or edit pictures my work wouldn't even be possible. This is my main excuse for being slow with this *oeuvre* and in part explains the simplicity of my earliest catalogues which had comparatively few pictures that were stored on 3.5" discs - compared to the plethora of supporting imagery I can now insert to save myself verbiage.

#### **UPDATING EARLIER WORK DUE TO NEW SCHOLARSHIP**

- In the process of revamping earlier chapters due to upgrading my main software, I also had the opportunity to insert new evidence recently discovered, or a change in interpretation in the light of recent scholarship or conferences. In this respect I was actually glad I had been taking so long over my research since it would have soon been valueless if left at 1990s vintage. In some cases I also found I had changed my mind about dating or

iconographical readings - this means that I had to spend time updating *Catalogues A-D*, and updates will over time replace the present versions on the website.

Thus updated *Catalogues A* and *B* are being posted with this newsletter; updated *Catalogue C* will show up with first version of *Catalogue E* in 2016, and updated *Catalogue D*, 2017, hopefully with first version of *Catalogue F*. No doubt *E* and *F* will in time need updating - there is nothing like hindsight to show up the flaws. *G* and *H* will be very short and then finally I will be able to get on to the other chapters of the book which feed on these eight catalogues of evidence.

#### *LOSS OF BROADBAND*

- Accessing journal articles via JSTOR or library catalogues to pin down the next set of books one needs to get hold of we take for granted - until suddenly the service goes down. I have twice lost my telephone line carrying Broadband and as everyone knows the experience is horrible. Altogether I lost a whole day and on another occasion a whole month until telephone engineers replaced my line (and even then crossed the wires - I only just managed to prevent them from leaving on a dark winter's evening to insist they unscramble them). And of course it goes without saying that our chit-chat with colleagues and information about campus events is all out there in the aether waiting to get to our in-box as we sit gnashing our teeth in the outer darkness. Where I live in Britain is notorious for bad reception because of the White Cliffs barrier (of East Sussex, not Dover).

#### *CHANGE IN DOMESTIC CIRCUMSTANCES*

- It hasn't happened this year, but two years ago I lost three months of work because of a leak in my flat and extensive repairs needed, entailing the presence of builders and lots of drilling and dust - *any* change in domestic circumstances of course (marriage, children) is disruptive to routines, lines of thought, general reflection and uninterrupted reading.
  - My conclusion is that the best work is done when
    - following a daily routine;
    - eating well and sleeping well (neighbours permitting - that's another whole scenario inviting long sagas I will spare you from);
    - allowing for housework and relaxation time every day (I can't work dirty, and concentration lessens after putting in a few hours at the computer);
    - more or less being a hermit but with strong and intense sociable interludes.
- I believe, too, that we have to accept our own particular idiosyncracies of working. Some can only write early in the morning - others are night birds. Some can go for long stretches without food - others need the regular coffees and a good meal. Some need background noise - others are paralysed by it. I personally find that I just get bored with what I'm doing, at which point I get up and do some domestic chore or another that needs fixing (possibly women do this more than men: weaving in housework or children with intense bursts of thinking and typing). Some can only do academic work at their work place, with a definite split between home and job. Overall I also find that changes in routine can help

to keep the flow going, so for a few weeks I might do domestic chores only on a Monday and then devote another day solely to writing. I do my best editing of my papers on train journeys - when my mind is in a state less distracted by other things that need doing. I do believe in a day of pause every week, if not complete rest. For me there are several good programmes on TV or radio on a Saturday or Sunday which I indulge in to give the mind different food and just to keep abreast of the ordinary world. If I find I'm not getting anywhere at all, going out for a walk or doing some shopping means one comes back to a mini-fresh start - and of course meeting up with friends or visits to special events like the theatre or exhibitions can completely refresh the parts other activities don't reach. Overall I have realized the interruptions and obstacles life throws at us - of many different kinds - actually help to push up pressure to ingeniously take advantage of those free hours where you *can* proceed with the next few paragraphs, here with an urgency that prevents you from descending into entropy.

In the next newsletter I will cover other dimensions that help or hinder progress, on mental or psychological levels. I give just one here - not yet flagged up - that affected my current work this year:

***YOUR RESEARCH TAKES YOU TO PLACES YOU DID NOT EXPECT TO GO***

In making Mitanian and Mycenaean use of the *Forward Attack* lion-prey group my *Chronological Focus* this time, it led me, to put it as briefly as I can, to sites and art in Eurasia, Central Asia and India - and the relationship of the Ancient Near East to all these territories - especially the BMAC and the Indus Civilization. In opening Pandora's Box I found myself in three new main areas of study requiring consultation of a plethora of new and old publications - and attendance at conferences covering areas as different as Thebes, Greece, Oman and the Makran.

I found there were few corners I could cut, though I was at least lucky in picking up on these areas at an advanced stage of scholarship, saving some years on the development of new areas of research. After getting nowhere by rushing I decided that *Slow and Steady Wins the Race*, and am just beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. I am hoping that the new iconographical themes that have arisen as a result of these diversions will have resulted in many new angles on lion-prey iconography and aspects of Mycenaean involvement in international networks. I have certainly found it a journey full of surprises - when I thought the surprises stage would be over this far in!