

Lunar madness!

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 13 Aug 1999

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 13 Aug 1999, 10:42

Whoops--I left out more steps than I thought.

Re: Lunar reckoning and calendars, my sense of it is (and I probably got this from some comic book) . . .

At the earliest stage people reckon by the lunar phases, which yeilds a month of 29.5 days, which is rounded down to 29 days--but still, nothing is written down, the Moon is just like a calendar in the sky. The system has no anchor to the solar year, cannot adequately cope with even 360 days to a year, and has an inherent fuzziness due to the fraction.

At a later stage the system of alternating long months (30 days) and short months (29 days) adjusts the system to phase reality (accounts for the fraction). It does a better job of approximating the solar year.

At some stage, the Lunar college figures out that the revolution period is around 28 days (27.332).

Then the astronomers and/or cultural administrators hit upon the seven day week (other numbers are possible, of course--ancient Egyptians at some point had a ten day week with a 30 day month), in part due to counting celestial bodies, in part due to some mystical weirdness. (It is interesting to see how different civilizations have used or ignored the concept of the seven day week--likewise, it seems to be just an administrative unit in the Commonwealth: the days do not have names. I believe this was the situation in medieval Japan, and much later, when they finally got around to giving names to the days, they put the Western system through their now-famous reverse engineering process.)

The seven day week and the 28 day month fit together quite well. You can get quite close to a solar year with a little tinkering; plus you take away the power from the peasants and make them rely upon administrators to make calendars, since the phases no longer signify.

From there the evolution of the calendar goes on and on.

So! Wolfe, in giving the month as 28 days, is either using a ballpark figure (in which case Urth Lunar months are impossible as they seem to be described) or an exact number (in which case the system works like the earliest 29.5 day system, with the advantages of fitting into a solar year and having exactly four weeks per month).

I didn't mean to be arguing with John Bishop--I was juggling apples and oranges at the time. The Urth calendar (if the month really is exactly 28 days) is a blend of the earliest Lunar reckoning and the final administrative model Lunar calendar (13 months), this second thing being a beast which was probably never used anywhere in history (hard to guess about prehistory), yet might account for 13-o-phobia, and it still crops up as "new calendar" model from time to time.

Regarding "years used to be longer" as a physical reality. Well, seems to me that if we can't shift Urth's orbit a tad closer to Verthandi, then years can only be longer in a subjective way by having shorter days, which leads to "more" days in a solar year.

Re: collection of Moons--great haul, Roy! Alas, Spading Moon continues to elude us.

Re: agricultural behavior. Well, my limited observation was of a monsoon fed rice culture, so I don't know how much bearing this has upon Western quasi-medieval (and the agricultural technology really has to be =much= better than that to support Nessus) agricultural behavior in an imaginary continent, but!

IIRC, after the autumn harvest and stubble burning, the former rice paddy was plowed and a "winter" crop of barley was sown. That is to say: the field is not allowed to be unproductive for the period between autumn harvest and spring sowing; the farmer works it as much as seasonally possible (and I don't remember exactly, but I'm pretty sure they harvested whatever barley they had before the winter snows came--almost certainly before astronomical winter began).

So in my very limited experience I can see how a Spading Moon could come after a Harvest Moon.

Then again, why are they spading at night? That is: Harvest Moon gives the farmer extra hours of light in which to gather up the crops before rain and/or early snow ruin everything. Harvest Moon is therefore something like "Indian Summer" with just light and not heat; a happy little bonus just when you need it. Likewise, "Hunter's Moon" gives the hunter a boost in hunting. But why spade at night--what's the rush? Well, this might be a case of the Moon being just a symbol for "month-when-said-activity-takes-place" rather than any kind of "light-source-for-said-activity."

Finally, I previously mentioned Halloween-like holidays not located in Autumn. More specific:

Lemuria (ancient Roman) in May

Setsubun (Japanese) in Feb (now but previously "beginning of Spring")

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ASTRON. EVENT DATE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE EVENT

Vernal Equinox Mar 20 Southern Hemisphere Autumn begins

+Setsubun (then) Mar 20-ish

mid-Spring May 1 mid-Autumn

+Lemuria May

Summer Solstice Jun 21 S. Hemisphere Winter begins mid-Summer Aug 1 mid-Winter Autumnal

Equinox Sep 23 S. Hemisphere Spring begins mid-Autumn Nov 1 mid-Spring Feast of Cath. A.

Nov 25 last quarter of Spring Winter Solstice Dec 22 S. Hemisphere Summer begins mid-Winter

Feb 1 mid-Summer

+Setsubun (now) Feb

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=mantis=