Feeding Nessus [Digest urth.v028.n016]

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 16 Aug 1999

https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1749

John Bishop — 16 Aug 1999, 10:05

Mantis says:

..the agricultural technology really has to be =much=
better than that [quasi-medieval] to support Nessus.

Three points:

1. Gyoll is a big river, which implies a big valley upstream,
and allows river transport of bulk cargo like grain. So
a large urban population could be fed, even if local productivity
is low. There's no mention of significant food shortages
that I can recall.

2. The technology we see isn't quasi-medieval: it seems higher
than that to me. And if we allow merely modest sail-boats,
of the stort Rome had in the year 0 (assume obligatory jokes
about coins marked 54BC and pedantry about "no year 0", etc.
all made here), then we have good precedents: Classic Rome
had a million inhabitants, fed wheat from North Africa and
Egypt. This means shipping over the Mediterranean, a far
harder problem than shipping downstream on a big river.

Similiarly, the Greeks ate wheat grown on the shores of the
Black sea, and before them the Egyptians shipped grain up
and down the river to various large cities like Luxor.

3. How big is Nessus anyway? Much of it is ruined and largely
abandoned, and the actual population might be quite small.
I envisioned it as being a large, circular ruin, with small
populations living along the river and nearby. And that
population doesn't extend the full length of the urban shoreline,
as we are told that the abandoned downstream portion of the
city is huge. Indeed, we are told the population is declining,
and has been so for some time.

One last lunar trivium: the Abell discussion of the "Harvest Moon" thing is worth reading, though perhaps I can convey some of it here: Around the fall equinox, the path of the Moon is at an angle to the horizon. The daily movement of the Moon moves it west on its path; the angle means that from our point of view it moves only slightly west and a lot north [a diagram would be nice here]. This means that the Moon stays almost full for more than the usual 3 nights, and that for about a week, a bright Moon rises just about as the Sun sets, allowing workers in the fields to work longer days that usual at harvest time, when such assistance is welcome.

Those of us with indoor jobs may not feel the force of such illumination; I've seen photos of farmers using artificial light to allow harvesting at night, but even now it's expensive enough to be rare.

-John Bishop