

Christian Pagan Nexus

Copyright © 1994 Nikhilaanda Dasa, Shyamasundara Dasa, Varnadi Dasa

editing: bh. Jan Mares

Text 355019: 20-Feb-94 Nikhilaanda (das) ACBSP (D)

Subject: Star of Bethlehem

The Skyglobe program is real fun to use. Thank you. I really like watching the planets in actual motion. Only one little puzzle. Maybe someone knows the answer:

When I watch the sky at the birth time of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, suggested by B.V. Raman in his "Notable Horoscopes" hypothetically as 10.18 PM, 25th Dec. of 7 BC, all the planets are identical, except that in the Skyglobe you see the moon at the beginning of Aquarius while B.V. Raman gives the moon's position as 6o41' Pisces which is an inaccuracy of about two days for the moon.

Who of the two made the mistake? Did Raman miscalculate from his ephemeris or does Skyglobe go wrong in some cases? (I do not have an ephemeris for that year). Kindly dispel the doubts clouding the sky of my thoughts.

y.s.

Nikhilaanda das

Text 355189: 20-Feb-94 Shyamasundara.ACBSP@com-link.org

Subject: Candra and Jesus

Hare Krsna!

It appears that Skyglobe loses accuracy with time. The position that B.V. Raman gives for the Moon is correct (for his ayanamsa) but his position of Sun and Mercury appear to be off. Otherwise all other planets are correct. You, Nikhilaanda, could have checked it yourself. You have a copy of the Vedic Jyotish program that you purchased from me in 1990 or so. Anyway that program has an accurate ephemeris that is good for 3000 years--from 600 BC to 2400 AD.

The year is indeed speculative as Christian scholars admit. But Raman's choosing of Dec 25th is a little strange because it is well known that Jesus appeared during the warm season when the shepherds were in pasture. Not during

the depths of winter. Dec 25th was chosen to coincide with the pagan Mithraic (Mithra is a Pahlavi corruption of the Sanskrit Mitra the Sun god) holiday of Saturnalia at about the time of the winter solstice.

(Comment in text 355513 by Nikilananda (das) ACBSP (D))

Text 355217: 20-Feb-94 Varnadi (das) HKS (NE-BBT Dutch)
Comment on: Text 355019 by Nikilananda (das) ACBSP (D)
Subject: Star of Bethlehem

It is a public secret that Jesus was born in springtime (beginning of June) and not at Xmas time. So why do the Christians celebrate this memorable event in December? Well, different strategies were used by the Christians for the conversion of heathens in Europe. To gradually make their traditions disappear and simultaneously establish the Christian traditions was one of them. That was of course not easy, but at the cost of many priests and heads it gradually worked out.

One method for example was to cut down all the holy trees and replace them by churches. In Holland and Belgium every city name ending on "loo" or "lo" (like Waterloo) indicates it was a Germanic sacrificial place (loo) with an "Irmisul" or holy tree. During the 8th century Charles the Great destroyed many of these places in order to establish Christianity. The councils of Frankfurt (794) and Trier (1227) explicitly stress the destruction of holy trees. Priest Bonifatius ordered the huge Donar-oak at Geismar (Germany) to be cut down. In a museum in Holland one can still see his Bible with sword cuts in it, with which he tried to defend himself after ordering the cutting down of a holy tree in Friesland (North Holland). He lost his head. But in the long run it worked out. Nowadays practically all places that used to have a holy tree have a church instead and are commonly known for their Christian fanaticism (and in Holland also for their incest and child abuse cases).

Another strategy was to put the major Christian festivals on the same days as the major heathen festivals. At our present Christmas time, the heathens had one of their many midwinter festivals, during which they would abundantly decorate their holy trees. The modern Xmas tree has nothing to do with the birth of Christ, it's just a remnant of the original midwinter festival. The same for Easter and Pentecost.

Another example is the Roman Amburnale or torch festival (2nd of February, remembering Ceres' journey to the dark kingdom of Pluto to find her daughter Proserpina). According to Cardinal Barinius this festival was officially adopted into the Roman Catholic church in 701 by Pope Sergius I. From that time on it had to be called "Candlemas," to remember the "purification" of Mary 6 weeks after the birth of Christ. The reason for this adoption was

stressed again by Pope Innocentius III (1198-1216), “To neutralize this heathen superstition and change it into something better.”

So referring to Jesus’ birthday as 10.18 pm, 25th Dec. of 7 BC, I would say Raman made a miscalculation. Concerning the inaccuracy of the Moon’s position, I think Shyamasundara Prabhu can provide an excellent answer.

Y.s.

Text 355513: 21-Feb-94 Nikilananda (das) ACBSP (D)
Comment on: Text 355189 by Shyamasundara.ACBSP@com-link.org
Subject: Candra and Jesus

You are right, Shyamasundara Prabhu. I found the year 7 BC in my Blue Star Vedanta Jyotish. Excellent program. Jesus Christ! Why did I not think of looking there? Anyway, your answers were all right. Does anyone have a clue as to the actual year of the Christ’s birth? I guess this is difficult.

Also, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur gives a different Lagna for Lord Caitanya’s chart when we look at Raman’s: He gives great importance to Sri Caitanya’s Lagna as Simha in Rasi, which would transfer Venus from the 7th to the 9th and makes more sense. When we look in Navamsa we find: Lagna is Vargottama (Simha instead of Vrscika) and Mercury is in exaltation in the second, producing an even more distinct Neechabhanga. I think, this also speaks against the unequal house-system. What are your findings on positions in Lord Caitanya’s chart?
y.s. Nikhilananda das

Text 355526: 21-Feb-94 Shyamasundara.ACBSP@com-link.org
Subject: Christian-Pagan holidays

Very interesting. What about the famous Valentine’s Day? I always suspected that it was made to supersede the Roman festival of Lupercalia which took place on the Ides of February (as mentioned in Julius Caesar by Shakespeare).

You also mentioned Easter. As far as I could find this word is not actually found in the Bible. (Perhaps someone with Bible folio type program could do a search.) It is actually a corruption of Ishtar-Ashtarte the fertility goddess whom the Greeks called Aphrodite and the Romans called Venus. It is curious that the Easter festival falls in the spring when many animals give birth and that its symbols are “eggs” and “rabbits” both clearly fertility symbols.

Certain Christian groups recognize the pagan antecedents of modern Christian holidays and reject them.

Text 356409: 23-Feb-94 Shyamasundara.AC BSP@com-link.org
Subject: Christian-Pagan connection

Hare Krsna!

The following is from a letter to me by Varnadi Prabhu in which he gives us more historical insights into connections between Christian techniques for increasing their “market share” by tailoring indigenous Celtic-Germanic beliefs to Christian ideas.

However I still think there is a strong connection between Easter and Ashtarte-Ishtar-Aphrodite. If I ever have time I will look it up.

I also found out that the worship of the old Persian sun god Mithra was transformed, especially in the Hellenist period, to a secret cult only for men. It is said that the worship of Mithra came to Rome in the first century, but that it had its peak in the second and third centuries. Mithra was mainly worshiped as a god of soldiers.

I couldn't find any direct connection with the word “Easter,” but I did find the following.

The Ambernale, or torch festival, was already celebrated by the old Germanic tribes (Germans, Batavians, Belgians), Celts and Scandinavians as “Women's Day,” and therefore later of course dedicated to Mary. On that day every valentine would find her valentin (an old Norse word meaning “lover”). After that there would be “Vette donderdag” (Fat Thursday), “Vastelavond” (Evening of prosperity), “Palmpaas” (Palm Sunday) and “Meidag” (Mayday). This whole series of festivals were all meant to ensure fertility for the coming year, both for man and nature.

But it actually already started with the pagan new year, at midwinter, after which the sun would start climbing again. Round the 5th of December the Batavians (now Holland) had a festival dedicated to Wodan (Odin) and his son Thor, who would ride through the sky on Wodan's eight legged, white horse Sleipnir, announcing the change of year. Later their names changed into Kunne Klaas and Tijn, and during the Christian invasion into Sinterklaas (from Sint Nicolaas). His white horse was still there, but now with four legs, and his son had disappeared, as had his function of match maker in the fertility festivals.

The old Dutch word for match maker was “hijlicmaker” (marriage maker),

cunningly changed to “heiligmaker” (same pronunciation, but meaning “holy maker”). Now he was supposed to simply have come from Spain for chastising the naughty children and rewarding the brave ones with gifts from his never ending sack of presents, stuffing them through the chimneys while riding his horse on the rooftops. Of course he also had a huge book in which everything was noted down about the kids and a bunch of black, dwarfy helpers (supposed to be Moors from Spain). Doesn’t that sound familiar? Yes, later Sinterklaas and his entourage were banished to the North Pole, to become the fatty Santa Claus and his dwarfs of modern times, who have nothing to do with Jesus, Xmas or fertility festivals. “Ho ho ho, another pagan belief changed to something better!” Amazingly enough he even returned to Holland in this new form and now both festivals are celebrated there!

During the days between midwinter and Easter there were many fertility rites. The men would cut “rods of life” (as Sinterklaas had), with which they would beat the girls and even the cattle. Another of these rites involved the hiding of eggs. In the 19th century this rite was still performed by young men on the Paasweide (Easter field) at Arnhem (Holland). Another rite was that the children went from door to door with a wet rod to collect candy. If the owner of the house would refuse to make a donation, they would beat him up. This practice is still known in England, France, Germany, Belgium and Austria. Many of these pagan practices were later brought to America by colonists. Traces of that can still be found in Santa Claus and Halloween.

At the first of May the May Tree (usually a hawthorn, but later also other trees) would be planted. After the planting, young couples would dance figures around it symbolizing the trail of the sun. Originally these figures were carved in rock or placed as small pathways into fields and hills, called “tribergen” and “trojabergen” (spiral hills). Later they were carved into church floors and renamed “pathways of prayer”. Although this great summer festival was meant to be covered up by the Christian Pentecost, it did not succeed in many places. Especially in England famous Maypoles are still erected for the same reason as was done all these thousands of years.

In Glastonbury (England), an ancient holy place of the Celts, there grew a hawthorn that was said to blossom every year on the evening before Xmas. It had no real connection with Christian rites (although some later argued that the hawthorn descended from the stick of Joseph of Arimathea) but up till the time of Charles I a blooming branch of this hawthorn was carried along in the Xmas procession. When it didn’t blossom on the eve before Xmas in 1753, the inhabitants of Quanton (Buckinghamshire) decided not to celebrate Xmas until the wonder would take place -- what happened on the fifth of January, 1754. So much for uprooting pagan superstition!

In Holland groups of farmers used to have a mutual piece of land that was called “baaken” (beacon), a place where fires were lit to warn neighboring

villages in case of emergency and were the local holy tree (baokenboom) was worshiped. Fires were also lit during festivals as an honor to the tree and, curiously enough, the Easter fires are still called “baokenvuren” (beacon fires). Often these baokens were situated on hills with sacrificial places called “waraburchten” or “trojaburchten” (spiral fortresses) Many of these trees and hills still exist. A good example of such a place is the nicely renamed Sint Johannes Heuvel (Saint John’s Hill), being the center of a Batavian “star forest” where traditionally seven pathways come together. All holy trees of the old pagans were dedicated to planets. The oldest type of beacon tree is the Taxus baccata (Yew tree), the first tree to represent Ygdrasil, the tree of life, whose twigs still turn up as “palm twigs” on Palm Sunday, the first Sunday of Easter.

So the pagans had many ceremonial festivals related to nature and demigods that had to be uprooted by the Christians so they could establish Christianity as the all in all. Therefore nowadays we find all these inexplicable folkloric festivals, beliefs and customs that somehow or other always seem to coincide with Christian (or Christ related) festivals. Xmas tree, the mysterious Santa Claus, Easter rabbits and eggs, Pentecost’s May Tree, are just a few. No doubt that Valentine’s Day is related to one of the pagan’s fertility festivals, if not to “Women’s Day” directly.

It became quite a long text without much astrology talk, so I decided to send it to you as a personal letter. If you think it could be of interest for the members of Vedanta Jyotish anyway, you are free to add them as receiver.

Y.s.
Varnadi Dasa
