

Don Cerow: The Astrological Ages

Writeup by Sarah Laurent

No words of mine can do justice to Don's presentation last month. You had to be there. First there was Don himself: Aquarius rising, Leo Moon, Taurus Sun. He looks good in a cape. Then there was the presentation itself, a visual feast of mythological and astronomical images. Don showed us the night sky at various stages of the precessed equinoxes, with the constellations and the equinoctial points clearly marked so that we could see exactly what he was talking about. You can find all of the images, including a picture of Don in his cape, on his website, www.athenasweb.com. It's a big website, and the search feature comes in very handy.

Center and Circle

If you ran a line from the north pole into outer space, eventually you'd hit Polaris, the North Star. The imaginary line between our north pole and the north star is called the celestial pole. But if you had done this 4,000 years ago, your imaginary line would have run into the star Thuban, in the center of the constellation Draco. The north celestial pole is important because it defines the center of the celestial equator, which is what you'd get if you extended the earth's equator into space. The other important circle is the ecliptic, or the Sun's apparent path around the heavens. Because of the earth's tilt, the angle between the ecliptic and the equator is a little over 23°. When the Sun is heading northward, the point at which it crosses the celestial equator is called the vernal equinox. It crosses again, six months later, at the autumnal equinox. From the vantage point of earth, the vernal equinox occurs when the Sun sits exactly on the horizon, and night and day are each exactly 12 hours in length.

But as time passes, the point on the ecliptic cut by the celestial pole drifts backward, from stars in the constellation Gemini, to the horns and later the tail of the bull Taurus, then through the ram, on to Alpha Piscium, the first star of Pisces, and finally to its present position, Omega Piscium.

Astrology and mythology began together. A knowledge of the stars goes back further than we think - to pre-written history. Mythology is how the ancients recorded and passed along information. It's all a story of circle and center. Circle = the celestial equator. Center = the celestial pole. We live in a circle, and our myths reflect that.

The Astrological Ages

Between about 6456 BC and 2152 BC, the vernal equinox was passing through Gemini. Its symbol is the Roman numeral II - duality. The Nommo people in Africa link creation to the celestial twins of heaven. Images from this period are predominantly birds and the spiraling serpent. There's a snake goddess and a bird goddess. Sometimes they are separate, sometimes united. The snake was the dominant motif of European art during this period. Draco, the snake constellation, was at the north celestial pole. The line from the North Pole cuts this serpent at various points along its body, depending on where we are in the precessional timeline. St. George slaying the dragon is a modern depiction of much ancient art that showed the piercing or killing of a serpent-like creature.

Between 4304 BC and 2152 BC, the bull replaced the bird. Egyptian artists often depicted a solar disk between the horns of a bull. In later art, Hathor wears a crown of horns and a solar disk. Based on their observation of the heavens, Sumerian astronomers developed longitude and latitude, hours and minutes. Time is the beginning of civilization. Once you have a calendar you can have agriculture. As the Age progressed, somebody figured out how to transfer the burden of plowing from him- or herself to an animal; thus the yoke was born. Once agriculture developed, populations grew. Everything became about feeding people and keeping the civilization going. Snakes were still popular: the pharaohs wore the image of the Uraeus (fire-spitting cobra), superimposed on a solar disk and the Babylonian Marduk (“Bull-Calf of the Sun”) became head deity after defeating Tiamat, a sea-dragon.

The Old Testament is set against the backdrop of the Age of Aries (2152 BC - 0 BC). A serpent caused Adam and Eve to be cast out of the Taurean garden. Moses encountered God in a burning bush. A ram was substituted for Isaac. In Greek mythology, Jason was sent to gather the golden fleece. Cadmus slew a dragon and founded Thebes; its teeth became his fighting men. War and conquest; heroism and individual achievement were exalted. Religion moved from earth to heaven, from many gods to one. The central tenet of Aries is “God’s will in heaven is done on earth.” The age of Aries began with invasions by nomadic tribes and ended with the first professional army: the Romans. Order had been established in the secular world.

Finally we come to the age of Pisces: 0 BC to 2152 AD. Images of rams and fire begin to be replaced by those of fish and the sea. When reality shifted gears and it was time to take a new message on the road, the Pharisees and Sadducees asked Jesus for a sign. He refused to give them one, saying “The only sign that will be given is the sign of Jonah the prophet.” Jonah’s sign is Cetus, the Whale, which bridges the constellations of Aries and Pisces. Jesus spoke in metaphor because imagery is the language of the subconscious. And in true Piscean fashion, his followers were not the nobility and the bluebloods (Aries) but the common people, who lived and died behind the scenes.