

“An Iconological Study on the Lion Horoscope Relief of Nemrut Dag Hierothesion”

I-Introduction¹

The history of the Lion Horoscope Relief goes parallel with the history of Nemrut Dag Hierothesion (holy seat). The site was first discovered by Karl Sester in 1881. In the following year, Sester brought Otto Puchstein to the site and they started the excavations. The relief was probably found at that date. From the very beginning, they defined the relief as a horoscope, a depiction of the ephemeris of a particular date. In 1883 Osman Hamdi Bey visited the site and made some comments on the Horoscope. Same year Karl Humann joined the excavation team. From 1890-1938 the works on the site was held off due to the battles, even though many scholars including famous Mithralogist Franz Cumont, Ramsay, astronomer Bouché-Leclerc, Vermaseren etc. studied on? the site. In 1938 Dörner and Rudolff Naumann came to the site and started the researches. They published “Forschungen in Kommagene” in 1939. After World War II, in 1951 Dörner returned Nemrut but this time he expanded his research to the other parts of Kommagene. He discovered Arsameia. Same date architect Theresa Goell also arrived at Nemrut. They worked together until 1958 in the area. After this date, Goell continued the researches alone until 1983. From 1883 to 2007 different scholars made astronomical dating studies on the Horoscope. Each study yielded a different date. The table below lists the researches and results of different scholars:

The Director of Research	Scholar (Astronomer)	The Date of Research	The Date Determined	The Event that Horoscope Indicates
Osman Hamdi Bey	Osman Hamdi Bey-not an astronomic study.	1883	AD 38-72 IV. Antiochos era	-
O. Puchstein	Paul Lehmann	1890	BC 98-07-17	Anthiochos' conception
T. Goell-K. Dörner	Otto Neugebauer	1959	BC 62-07-07	Antiochos's coronation
-	Vladimir Tuman	1984	BC 55-02-04,05	Antiochos' birth date
Maurice Crijnns	J. Meeus, J. Rademaker, C. Jager, G. Schilling	2001	BC109-07-14	Antiochos' fther Mithridates' coronation
	A.Talat Saygaç	2007	BC 62-07-03 18:43 Geographical Coordinates 38° 02' 36".36 North, 38° 46' 29".18 East; Top of the Tumulus	-

¹ Introduction part is compiled from the report of “Kommagene Nemrut Koruma ve Geliştirme Programı” (2008)

II- The Physical Analysis

i-The Description of the Relief

The relief measures around 1.70 x 2.40 meters. It is carved on tufa stone which reaches to 46 cm width at maximum. The depth of the engravings varies between 4.5 cm to 1.6 cm. The general scene depicted on the relief is a lion surrounded by 19 star shaped dots, a crescent and an inscription. The detailed description of these elements and their iconographical aspects are given below.

The Lion

The lion occupies nearly 87% of the total area and it is the most dominant figure of the relief. It is a male lion, standing and positioned 1/3 frontally looking. The head is covered by hairs. The claws and the saber teeth are highlighted. The hairs at the arms are formed as flames and chest hairs are braided. All these stylization makes the general appearance of the lion brutal, ferocious and quite majestic. With these features it resembles the Hellenistic East lion depictions².

The Stellar Bodies

The stellar bodies carved are 19 stars and the crescent. Stars are carved as eight lines crossed on a dot. The sixteen of the stars carved on the body of the lion resembles the *Leo*, the constellation of lion. Three more are carved on the lion and according to the descriptive inscription, which will be mentioned soon, are planets Mars, Mercury and Jupiter. The Regulus (*Leo α*), the best visible star in *Leo* is shifted from its original position to the chest, probably on purpose, to form a collar with, again intentionally upturned crescent.

The Inscription

The inscription on the Horoscope is “ΠΥΡΟΕΙΣ ΗΕΡΑΧΛΕΟΣ ΣΤΙΛΒΟΟΝ ΑΠΟΛΛΟΝΟΣ ΠΗΑΕΤΟΝ ΔΙΟΣ” and can be read as “Pyroeis Heracleos Stilboon Apollonos Phaeton Dios” It means “the flaming one of Heracles, the gleaming one of Apollo, the radiating one of God/Zeus”. Each two words are written on a single planet and identify it. Accordingly, “Pyroeis Heracleos” should refer to the planet Mars since the planet was called as *Pyroesis* (the flaming one) by Greeks due to its reddish appearance and the connection between Heracles and Mars/Ares³. *Stilboon* refers to planet Mercury. Mercury can be observed twice a day; the morning star and the evening star, both are the same planet; however ancient Greek astronomers thought there were two different stars. Therefore they called the morning star as *Apollon* and the evening star as *Hermaion*. Here the epithet “stilboon Apollonos” refers to the planet Mercury in the morning⁴. Lastly the Phaeton Dios may well be indicating the planet Jupiter⁵ because; the Dios (Godly, Divine) is an adjective of Zeus/Jupiter⁶.

² Greek and Greko-Roman lions with few exceptions were depicted more smoothly and Greek artists preferred female lions unless it is not an allegorical depiction. (See App.)

³ Sheeham, W. "Motion of Mars". *The Planet Mars: A History of Observation and Discovery*

⁴ Staff (2008). "MESSENGER: Mercury and Ancient Cultures". NASA JPL. Retrieved on 2008-03-02.

⁵ Rogers, J. H. (1998). "Origins of the ancient constellations: I. The Mesopotamian traditions". *Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, **108**: 9–28. Retrieved on 2008-02-04.

⁶ Indeed, both Zeus and Jupiter are derived from the same Indo-European root *Dyaus*. *Dyaus* simply means god, like Greek *theos* and with other attributes indicates a certain god. *Dyaus Pita*, “the Godly, Magnificent Father” is the Indian counterpart of Roman Jupiter.

ii-The Iconology of the Elements

The Lion and Constellation *Leo*

In many cultures the lion figure represents the aspects of power, magnificence and ultimate dominancy. It has been the symbol of both political and military power. The august appearance of the animal itself might contribute it to be a symbol of power; however the image of conquering lion finds its sources in ancient astronomy. We can trace back the history of the symbol as far as 4000 BC in Near East. Today, *Leo* is the fifth constellation of the zodiac and occupies area of 947 sq. deg. between the coordinates Right Ascension: 11 hours Declination: 15 degrees. It is visible between latitudes 90 and -65 degrees. However, considering the fact that the precession of the equinoxes over long periods causes a very considerable change in the position of celestial pole and of the celestial equator in regard to the ecliptic, which is the result of the obliquity of *axis mundi*, world's axis, we have to reconstruct the starry heaven such as it once looked to the observer at the time of the Elamite and Mesopotamian settlements. At that time constellation *Leo* was occupying exactly the zenith with the royal star *Regulus* standing only ca. 8° from the zenith point (marked Z)⁷. "This fact", states W. Hartner "needs hardly a justification, that this striking moment, occurring once a year, should be paid due to attention and finds its expression in pictorial representations of various kinds: The triumphant Lion, standing at zenith and displaying thereby its maximum power, [...], there can be no doubt that this and nothing else has been the origin of the celebrated motif"⁸. Sumerians called the constellation *Leo* as *mul-Ur.gu.l* =Lion and *α Leo*, *Regulus* as *Sār.ru*=the King. The motif is depicted on various kinds of art objects including idolatrical furnishings such that flags, banners or reliefs on the buildings⁹. The most common usage of the motif in Near East corresponds to the Achaemenid Era. From palaces to the border stones, the symbol appeared everywhere. Not a coincidence, current flag of Iran includes a lion and the sun.

Moreover, A. Krappe suggests, the existence of an Anatolian Lion God on the basis of the research of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. According to Krappe, this god was a lion shaped solar divinity, a prototype for Greek Heracles, slayer of the Nemean Lion. The cult extended from Anatolia to Syria and Palestine and Egypt and became the base for the story of many Semitic stories including Melqart, Samson and the Lion of Judah, King David.

In Nemrut Hierothesion, the lion statues constitute the 28% of total statues dug out (18 of 56) and occupies nearly %50 of all artistic work. It is the major motif of King Anthiochos' thiaras in the in the *dexiosis scenae*¹⁰. All depictions share the same iconographical features as the Lion Horoscope relief. This also indicates that the lion as a symbol of royalty was continued in Kommagene.

The Stellar Objects

The iconology of constellation *Leo* was already been made. Other stellar elements are three planets and an upturned crescent moon. As identified by the inscription, the three planets were, in order of appearance, Mars, Mercury (as morning star) and Jupiter.

⁷ See Diagram I

⁸ Hartner W., "The Earliest History of Constellations in the Near East and the Motif of the Lion-Bull Combat" JNES. Retrieved on 2008-04-03.

⁹ For a detailed research on the iconography of lion motif in art please see W. Hartner's study mentioned before.

¹⁰ See "the Inventory of the Statues at Nemrut Dag Hierothesion" Güney, Ö. 2008-05-13

Mars, with its reddish color, has always been the symbol of Ares/Mars, the god of war. Although he was among the Olympian Twelve, Greeks did not praise him. There was only one temple dedicated to him in Greek territory, in Athens and a spring in Thebai. However his Roman counterpart Mars was one of the most well-liked Roman Gods. He had a huge temple in Rome called the *Mars Gradivus*. The Roman army would gather at the Mars Gradivus before leaving into battle. There was also a sacred field called *Campus Martius*. Campus Martius was the site of the Roman army's training and contests of skill. The Romans named the month of March (Martius) after Mars, and celebrated Him on not one but two state holidays, March 1st, *Feriae Marti* and October 19th, *Armilustrum*, when all weapons were ritually cleaned and put away for the coming winter. This affinity of Romans was perhaps originated from their consecration of Roman War Machine and their creed that Mars was the father of Remus and Romulus, the mythopoic founders of Rome. In all cases, Ares/Mars was the lord of war, fighting for both sides in battles and enjoys fighting for the sake of the battle. In many art objects he was depicted to remind the military power. One of its symbols, the planet Mars certainly represented the same notion. In the Lion Horoscope it was defined by the name of Heracles, perhaps, to improve the concept. Heracles/Ares/Artagnes was one of main deities in Dexiosis Stelae¹¹.

Mercury, *Stilboon* as mentioned before recognized by two different God, because it was observed twice a day, morning and evening, and ancients supposed there were two different stars. The morning star was named after Apollo and the evening star was known by Hermes. The morning star was the herald of the Sun, the daylight, so that it was the *Stilboon Apollonos*, the gleaming one of Apollo. On the other hand evening star was the sign of soon coming night, darkness and it was named as *Stilboon Hermaion*, the gleaming one of Hermes, the protector of thieves. In Lion Horoscope the planet was meant to represent both Hermes and Apollo. Its anthropomorphic depiction with his Greek and Persian names Apollo/Hermes/Helios/Mithras was made in a dexiosis (hand shaking) stela in Hierothesion¹².

Planet Jupiter was defined with Phaeton Dios, the radiating one of God/Zeus/Jupiter in the Horoscope. Zeus/Jupiter was the patron god, ruling the worldly and heavenly affairs. He was depicted in Dexiosis Stelae as *Zeus/Ahura Mazda*¹³. Jupiter was also the patron god of Kommagene, named as Jupiter Dolichenus, (Jupiter of Doliche) and its worship spread as far as West Europe by Roman soldiers. He was most possibly derived from a much older deity, Te.sup, the God of Storm. Iconographic features of two Gods indicate the strong relevance¹⁴.

Crescent moon, in many cultures was the symbol of lunar deity. Artemis/Selene, Luna, Sin, Men was different names reminding the same deity to its followers. She was the goddess of fertility in Kommagene and depicted as *Tyche/Kommagene* (the only female figure in the Hierothesion) in statues of East and West terrace¹⁵.

¹¹ See App I.v

¹² See App.I.vi

¹³ See App.I.vii

¹⁴ See App.I.viii-ix

¹⁵ See App. I.x

III-Conclusion and Comments

For a recollection, the Lion Horoscope is composed of three elements: The Lion, the inscription and the stellar objects. The lion, the constellation *Leo*, represents the royalty, military and political power. We can follow its usage in numerous cultures in history, all meant to be built for the same opinion. The inscription “Pyroeis Herakleos, Stilboon Apollonos, Phaeton Dios” is a label for three planets Mars, Mercury and Jupiter. These planets were the symbols of Gods praised in Hierothesion and they were depicted with Greek and Persian names, as being hand shaking with King Anthiochos in dexiosis stelae. Crescent is the symbol of moon goddess who is the source of fertility and known as Goddess Tyche/Kommagene and she was also depicted in the Statues of Gods in East and West terrace.

With these facts, I suggest that the Lion Horoscope is a pseudo-horoscope, an apparatus to contribute to the self-divinization program of King Anthiochos. He might be seen as the conquering lion, ultimate domineer of the land¹⁶ wearing a lion embroidered thiara, seating on a lion carved throne. So that he is at the center of his Horoscope. In the dexiosis stelae, King Anthiochos is depicted with five deities as being hand shaking, which refers that he has their approval and consent. In the Horoscope, the five deities, symbolized by their astronomical symbols surrounding him to remind and celebrate the same idea.

Such instruments used beyond the history. The famous two were of Augustus’ and of Christ’s. The horoscope of Augustus indicates that his natal star was α *Libra*, to remind his balancing and peaceful policy. In the 4th century the birth date of Christ shifted to the date of vernal equinox when the birth of Sol Invictus (unconquerable sun) was celebrated. Hebrew Christ under Roman dominion became the Sun God. The artists well served to this change by depicting him with halos- a well known attribute of the sun god. Seeing the Horoscope as a star map pointing to a real particular date would be a great fallacy because it means that such a great stellar combination and its prophetic climax in the personality of King Antiochos confers the Astrology.

¹⁶ See the Introductory part of King Anthiochos “Nomos”.

IV-Appendix

I-Pictures

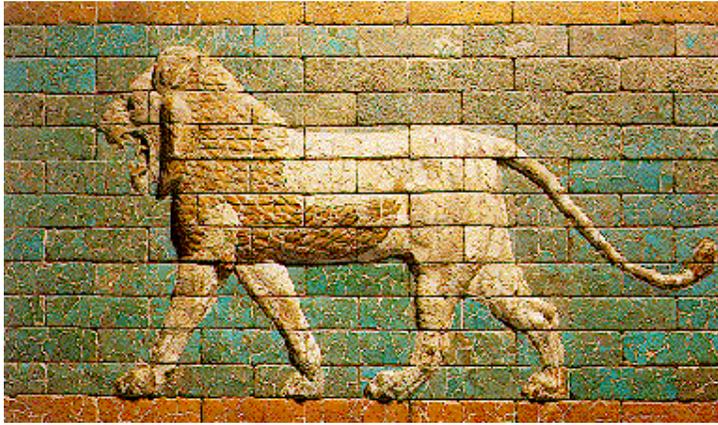
i-The Lion Horoscope in 1953 (courtesy of METU KNKGP, 2008)



ii- Plaster copy of the relief made by Puchstein in 1883 (courtesy of METU KNKGP, 2008)



iii- A Lion Relief from Isthar Gate, Babylon (ca. BC 500) (courtesy of www.stockphoto.com, 2008). The style of claws, saber teeth and the hairs at shoulders are much alike of the Lion Horoscope.



iv- A Hellenistic Lion Statue from Alexandria (ca BC 280). Same stylization is recognizable. (Courtesy of <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~nelc/akkadian.html>, 2008)



v-Dexiosis Stela-King Anthiochos and Heracles/Ares/Artagnes



vi- Dexiosis Stela-King Anthiochos and Apollo/Hermes/Helios/Mithras



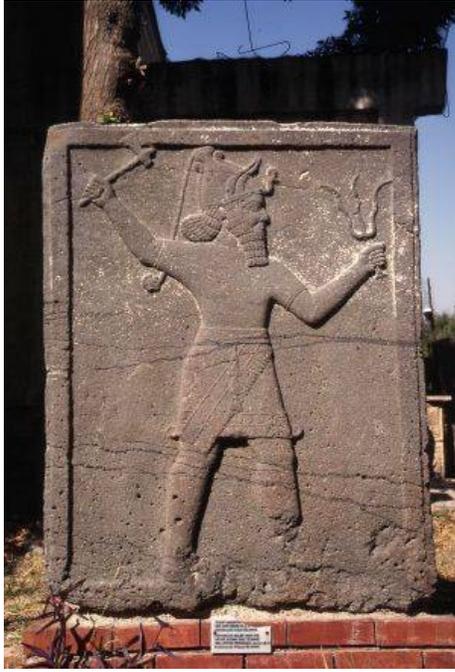
vii-Dexiosis Stelae- Anthiochos and Zeus/Oromasdes



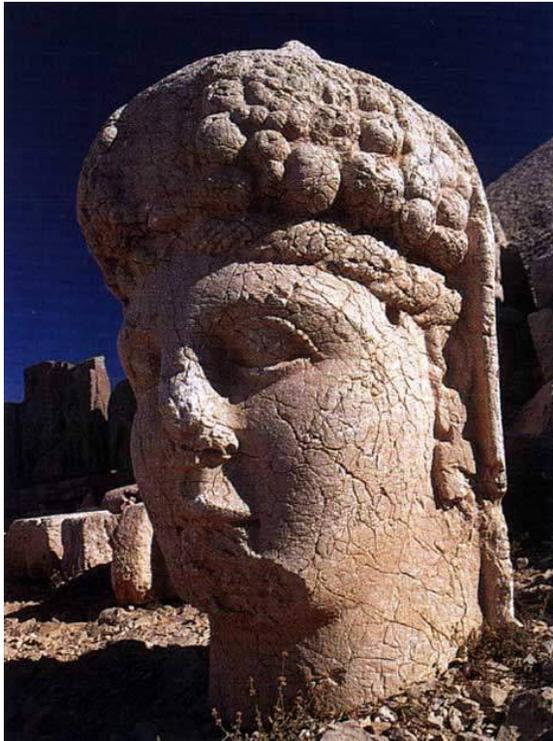
viii-Jupiter Dolichenus Relief (courtesy of <http://www.doliche.org>)



ix-Te.sup Relief (courtesy of www.gaziantep.org.tr)



x-Goddess Tyche/Kommagene



II-Diagrams

I-Star Chart for 4000 BC on Near East

