

The beginning of the Seventh Volume of ISR allowed me as Editor to speculate about the origin of the enigma surrounding the Number '7'. Seven has a symbolic, some claim an almost mythical and holy, significance among all peoples throughout recorded history. I enjoyed looking up strange and unusual references in the Library of the British Museum to find exceptional examples. The issue was published in January 1982.

Many obvious ones sprang to mind, from the Seven Days of Creation to the Seven Sisters—the Pleiades, the Seven-Years, the Seven-Weeks and more recently the Seven-Days Wars; the trail of seven is continuous in time. It is also ubiquitous, the Chinese have their Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, the Muslims their Seventh Heaven, the Jews their seven-canded Menorah and the American Mercury spacecraft with one astronaut aboard, between 1961 and 1963, all had the figure 7 included in their name, as for example John Glenn's *Friendship 7*. Boeing aircraft types all have two sevens in their names, the most famous being the 747. One must also remember James Bond, 007!

I found in the British Museum Library the classic paper by von Andrian of 1901, a 50-page communication to the Anthropological Society of Vienna, in which he listed all possible and plausible collocations of seven in literature. He also mentioned names of towns, like Sevenoaks, Siebenbürgen and Sept-Isles, but not the Seven Seas, first so named by Rudyard Kipling in 1896.

But what were the origins of this universal veneration of the figure seven?

I was able to point to an astronomical origin, the naked-eye observations of the lunar months ( $4 \times 7$  days) and of the seven moving bodies, among the fixed stars, the Sun, Moon and five planets. When in prehistoric times agriculture had reached a certain level and days had to be designated for a regular exchange of produce, an interval between the long year and the short day had to be invented, and thus the week came into existence. This interval could have been any number of days, but the first great empire builder, King Sargon I of Akkad (2335 to 2279 BC), decreed a seven-day week in his Empire. He lived for 56 years, established the first Semitic Dynasty and defeated the Sumerian City States. Thus the Akkadian language spread, it was adopted by the Babylonians, and the seven-day week was similarly inherited from him.

It is well-known that the Babylonians were good astronomers, in one of their calendars the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th and 49th days are specially listed. Did the Jewish sabbath derive from Sargon's seven-day week? Not all mysteries of the seven have been solved, and Sargon's city Agade has not yet been located and excavated. The influence of seven has on the whole been beneficial to mankind, but for the present, its origin remains a subject for further investigation.