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THE YEAR AS PERIOD.

1. The Ten Month Year in
Ancient Rome
 2. The Latin Year
 3. The Sopotit Year
 4. Survey
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by

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The Ten Month Year in Ancient Rome

In the oldest legal traditions of Rome, a year of ten months is preserved. Theodor Mommsen has computed it as being of 304 days. Absurd as this length is, he says, the existence of a year of ten months cannot be doubted. And he goes on to say that anybody with any historical tact must accept the absurd fact because the most venerable and tenacious memories are connected with it. The best and the oldest authorities on the Fasti mention the year of ten months. The time span of the armistices was computed by years of ten months. Mourning in the family, restitution of a dowry ran within a year of ten months. Explicitly and technically the year here is defined as ten months; when instead of payment in cash, credit is given, this credit is usually given for ten months.

This year is older than Numa's reign and calendar. Now we know that even in Numa's calendar, Juppiter und Juno were not mentioned and therefore neither was the day of the kalendae, the New Moon, nor the day of the Idus, the full moon, consecrated by either Juno or Juppiter. We have in the word "mensis," no hint for any connection of this unit with the moon. Yet, Mommsen takes it for granted that the month, the single mensis of the tenmonth year must have been related to the moon. Hence, he takes it for granted that the oldest Latin, pre-Roman year, must have been 304 days long. This is pure conjecture.

The indications are not in his favor. March first ^{began} ~~was~~ the New Year's first mensis. Now, in Alba and in Tusculum, the month of March was 36 days long. This number represents one-tenth of 360 days. A mensis of 36 days has no connection with any lunar cycle.

The March was preceded by five days which began at the Regifugium, the 24th of February. On this day, in all leap years, the month of February ended. The day of Matthias, the 13th apostle, replacing Judas Ischarioth, was placed on February 24. On February 24, the leap month was intercalated. In other

words, the month of February never was extended -- after February was inserted -- beyond the Regifugium. On this day, then, the five epagomenai began which open the New Year.

This connection is explicitly mentioned by later writers. It explains the mortal danger for the king. On these five days, the cardines of the firmament recede. The 5 days before March 1 begin the Latin year. We conclude. The Latin (or Etruscan?) year divided the year of 365 days into ten months of 36 days each, plus five days which began at the Regifugium. The numbering of the Latin months from Quintilis to December, and the legal rules, and the treatment of the last days of February down to our own times, with regard to leap years, are the remnants of this year.

Numa introduced a twelfth-month year, id est, he added January and February, and he tried to intertwine moon and sun. This is stated by Censorinus, Polemius Silvius, Solin, Macrobius, Ovid, Servius, Gellius Plutarch. It has not found any consideration solely because the pre-Numan 'mensis' was thought as having had thirty or thirty-one days. But the 36 days are proven for Tusculum and Alba Longa. When Numa redistributed the months, he tried to give uneven, odd numbers to all months. February forms the strange exception; 31 days or 29 days all the months had, but February, 28. But had February 28 days? In the eyes of the priests, February must still have consisted of 23 plus five days as the leap month proves. Hence, February did not break the rule of superstition that the month should have an odd number (which by the way coincided with the astronomical fact that the moon nowhere has a thirty day or a twenty-eight day period, a fact strangely never mentioned in modern discussions). The term for April could linguistically be derived from a-parilia, odd. And this name might have been chosen at a time when the month of April was fixed at the unfortunate even number of 30. A special festival then was created, the Parilia, to cure this ill. The later God Pales -- with his

festival called 'Parilia' instead of Palilia -- has nothing to recommend himself, except the typical afterthought of antiquarian explanators. Certainly, the month is not called Parilia but aperilis. The term parilitas is the lasting Latin expression for parity. Hence, the existence of the three problems. First, that Numa tried to give his lunar mensis a period which should exclude even numbers^{*}; second, that aprilis and parilitas both seem linguistically related; third, that some special ritual for protecting a month against its reduction to the ominous and sinister status of an even number (thirty) would be in order, seem to permit the suggestion that april and aperilis originally are identical. The a in parilis is short. Only the nominative case-, from *parr, has the a long, but the other casus are all of a short a.

The texts in Th. Mommsen, *Römische Chronologie* 2. ed., p. 12.

In 509, the aristocrats pushed a further reform of the calendar in connection with the new Triad on the Capitol, Jupiter, Juno, Minerva. Now, the calendae and the nonae and the idus were called out, but their immediate observation shows how new this consideration for the moon was.^{**} (* For details, Krister Hanell, *Das Eponyme altrömische Amt*, Lund 1946, p. 107ff.

When twelve months replaced the decembral year as we might call the ten month year, the Saturnalia might have remained at the end of the hitherto last month, Decembris, as they fit very well with the regifugium, the temporary interruption of the king's reign and safety, for the most ancient calendar of the Latins as investigated in the Golden Bough without Frazer, quite realizing that these celebrations depended on the New Year in the sky and on earth, and not on the life of the king. Also, since the old "decembral" year now lived on in petrified "Blue laws" of contract, inheritance, etc., the names of the old and original ten months of originally 36 days shrank and only

covered the shortened length of these months. Names always in national life are more important than facts. In the United States, 384,000 people elect two senators to the United States Senate, and 14,000,000 people elect two senators. But the 384,000 are hiding behind the sacred name 'Vermont,' and the 14,000,000 people are tied up as New Yorkers. This realism of names is not more rational than the fact that the ancient ten months year shrank from 365 to 304 days when two new months wedged their way into the old purely solar year. A man who borrowed money on March first, of course had to pay it back as before, on the end of December, as this credit was a mere usage around sales, an accommodation of the buyer. Our explanation is the only one, which explains the regifugium, the five epagomenai from regifugium to March first, the very fact never explained before of the obstinate perseverance of a ten month calendar, the complete indifference of the original traditions to the moon, possibly the Saturnalia and the name aprilis.

2. The Latin Year

The hoary age of the Latin calendars in Tusculum and in Alba Longa may have been the cause that their calendars never have been considered far more authoritative for the oldest Latin year than the much later Roman traditions. But a month of 36 days obviously never has been anything lunar. And our explanation as far as I can see, is the only way of incorporating these months in the centers of Latium, into the story of the Italian calendar. If this is added to the list of explanations in the paragraph above this, the value of our proposal seems to be considerably increased. It is well believable that armistices, id est, a law between nations, were ruled by the ten month year to the end as no one-sided change by one city, even Rome, changing its calendar, could change international law. But this armistice duration in

turn makes the 365 day year an institution of universal scope.

When Censorinus mentions (22,6) the thirty-six days of the month of March in Alba Longa, and the much shorter length of other months in other towns of Latium, we have to remember that Martius, March, in the religious center of the Latini, would keep its oldest character the longest, because Mars was the God of the Latins, par excellence. The newest treatment of Mars in the Pauly-Wissowa of 1940 suggests the etymology Mars from mas, maris, the male. This reminds of Horus and the Ka of the Pharaoh. And the regifugium once more would become understandable all the better. The potency of the cosmic order centers in Mars and his embodiment, the triumphant King.

With regard to a calendar of 360 plus 5 we find that those parts of Greece where we find pre-Greek traditions most tenaciously preserved, were called "pro-selenoi." This expression has been variously interpreted, as though it should contend: These people are so old that they are older than the moon; they have been in this country before the moon ever shone over it. However, Censorinus very reasonably says that the name simply meant: people who did not include the moon cycle into their calendar, id est, people of a prelunar calendar. That this explanation of the term is tenable cannot be denied. The fervor with which the moon has been thought of as the first measurement of time has blinded people to the hard core of our traditions. The gist of the matter is this: Neither the sun nor the moon lend themselves for an annual calendar in the beginning. Nomads, of course, watch the moon as for warfare, travel, etc.; dark and light nights offer totally different situations. They did compute the next few moons ahead of time, and I do think that this was very often a moon of the next six months which was precomputed and prefigured. For a year of six months' length -- we should not call it a year but a period -- is in our oldest traditions all over the globe. From May first to the end of October, from then (November first) to the end of April,

ran the two moon 'almanachs' as we might call these 'six moons' of summer and six months of winter. Such a calendar also had deep religious importance as during the summer and during the winter -- as these two half years may be called -- the Spirits behaved differently. From Walpurgis onward, men went out to meet the spirits outdoors. From All Souls to April, the Spirits came to the huts and caves of men indoors. This varies with the climate but the central opposition of the two almanachs seems to have been very universal. A Canadian writer has shown this already in 1860.

3. The Sopdit Year

Under these conditions, neither the planets nor the zodiac nor the solstices nor the equinox were of any interest. All these later problems could not come into existence before priesthoods had observed the sky professionally twenty-four hours a day over centuries. Our problem, then, is to find and to explain the period which lies between the two half years of moons approximately prefigured, the old nomadic almanach, and the much, much later solar calendar with its "points of the year."

This in-between period already formed the cycle of whole years, but it could not base this cycle on any great knowledge of the firmament. This is the Sopdit year of Egypt and its imitators all over the globe. It was based on, we may exaggeratingly say, random observations in the sky, or, shall we say, the observations on which it was based were made as they went along. They lived from hand to mouth. These were the decani, the decadic observations. They were not much more complex than the observation of the phases of the moon hitherto. But, on the other hand, they were the vicars of the main star on which the right behavior of the ploughman depended, on Sirius. The relation of all the other decans to Sopdit as locotenentes, lieutenants, placeholders

of the main star, is eloquent. The visibility of Sopdit in the days of the flood, of the tear of Isis shed in Assuan, was the starting point of the calendar. But this is only one-half of the explanation. The new calendar did not start with its usefulness for war, chase, or expeditions, or camps. It started out with the discovery that from the first cataract to the delta, the sky was the one optic telegraph for people in far distant lands. The new idea of the Sopdit calendar was not solely the identity of the year's fractions for one group in one spot. The startling revolution of Egypt was the discovery that people who could not speak to each other could see the handwriting on the ceiling of the world, in the sky. To read the sky was the first idea of the newspaper of reading. Writing on the walls of the temples was a second and a consequential action. Reading preceded writing in Egypt. And the ceiling remained the most normal place for their script all the time.

For all the inhabitants of the Nile Valley could be asked to read the same script at the same time, "at once." The union of the lands by Horus only imitated the unity of the script in heaven. This, by the way, explains a number of features of the oldest hieroglyphs. First, the sun plays no part in this script except for the denomination of one single day. Day and night as dominated by moon or sun, had to be brought into this calendar as a reconciliation of the Pre-Sopdit knowledge of time to the new knowledge. As late -- relatively -- as Ra, as old is Sopdu, in the old calendar.

The second consequence of the new script was the temples in every home; they were the local newspapers where the identical news was read in the sky at the same time. There is no local origin of the temple. There is no local origin of the gods of Egypt. Horus, Hathor, Sopdit, Sopdu, Isis, Osiris are universal for the whole length of Egypt. There is no Hathor of Dendera, no Horus of Hieraconpolis. But there is Isis in Dendera or Horus in Edfu, etc.

The misunderstanding of the intent of the Sopdit year has had as its corollary the misunderstanding as though the Gods of Egypt first were local and later universalized. The opposite is true with regard to the Gods who wrote the universal script on the ceiling over the lands.

The member of the universal family in the sky by which it came down to earth and was represented on earth was Horus. But for this very reason that he was the only one on earth he had to prove his heavenly descent in every spot of Egypt by building mirrors of the sky, temples, and ascents to the sky, pyramids, and obelisks. The building craze of Egypt is the way by which he proved his membership in the sky family. For every one of these buildings betrayed his familiarity with the sky's most inward secrets and movements. The Jews worshipped the God of hosts, of the celestial army of angels and stars. Horus mastered this command of the celestial army in person by conducting Sopdit out of her bridal chamber when she met Ra, on July 19th in the morning, and by conducting all her lieutenants. The Horus on earth, however, had this divinity which the stars do not possess: to be present to his people and among his people twenty-four hours a day. The stars in the sky had one prerogative over Horus which the ruler did not possess: to be everywhere over Egypt at the same time. If God is eternal and everywhere, then it is correct to state that in the Egyptian worship of a divine family, the members of this family divided the character of divinity in this manner: the stars were -- and are -- everywhere. Pharaoh was here all the time. Not his mortality but his eternity through all the phases of the changing sky, was what made him excel in Egypt. Our notion of eternity is so abstract that we do not stoop to look into the Egyptian Pharaoh's qualification for divinity at all. But in comparison to a shiftless moon and a purely daytime sun, this mortal man was eternal as he did not disappear either in daytime as the stars nor vanish at night as the sun. From this understandable

experience of permanence, it is true, the Egyptians proceeded to bestow eternity on their ruler. And the pyramids certainly did express this eternalization. But, there is a but always overlooked in our learned discussions which are not starting where the Egyptians started. Horus on earth is the "twice divine," Sun-and-Moon-in-one, but Horus is handicapped by having to journey in order to be seen everywhere. His father Osiris, on the other hand, as he dies, loses this quality of Horus. He may be asteralized as Orion and may now circle like all the lamps in the sky throughout the year; but he is short of one quality of his son, that the son does not lose his permanent 'nowness' on earth. This is the reason why Horus, the son, must lend his eye of Horus to Osiris. The eye of Horus adds this one quality which the living king has and the stars have not. So strict is the logic of Egypt that the astralized father must be the recipient of his son's eye before he can be said to have achieved immortality. And this is not imaginary. The Horus also gives proof of this reasoning when he is given the double sign of rising, as he is both sun and moon, on earth. The hieroglyphic duplication of the sign for rise, shows how literally the analogy was felt.

Everywhereness of the stars, and permanent 'nowness' of the ruler throughout the year -- they interpenetrate each other in every stage of worship. They impart to the stars and to the ruler the reciprocal qualities. And they explain the construction of the first, the Sopdit Year, as 360 days plus the five tremendous days. For, on these five days at the beginning of the cycle, the divine family is introduced to each other, the dramatis personae are named, and bow to each other; and Horus originally embarked in Assuan to outride the flood and thereby to acquire the one quality denied him by his mortal nature, the ubiquitousness of his sky-relatives. The King's progress, in all the countries of a rex sacrorum, a priest king, is an important condition of the king's inthronisation. He must sit on the throne of the cosmos, in the

right and orientated seat, but also must he appropriate all the land his sky ancestors, his celestial uncles and aunts, father and mother overlook, and therefore the king's progress, the outriding of his realm, is the same on earth as the donation of the Eye of Horus to his father is for the dead soul in heaven. There exists in the make-up of the mortal a deficiency and there exists an existential deficiency in the dead king's astral soul. The ride down the Nile, then, truly is an act of deification. And the founding of temples at every bend of the river Nile, the nomes of Egypt, were no accidental afterthought, but they were the finishing touch of his acquisition of full divinity. As he cannot be everywhere at the same time, the priests in the 36 temples are his vicars exactly as the 36 decans are the vicars of Sopdit. The relation, then, is Sopdit: decans = Pharaoh: priests of the nomes, in their temples, or more explicitly: As Sopdit reaches out for union with the daylight sun, once a year at the critical moment of the Nile's rise, but has to appoint lieutenants for the other 360 days of the year for this sacred union, thus Horus reaches out for the union of the lands, through appointing the observers of the sky in every one of the thirty-six "decanates" of Egypt.

The five tremendous days (taken from the later Hebrew name for the days of New Year and Atonement) have left their mark in our calendar. The 24th of February in Europe still is considered a dangerous and ominous day. The play "The 24 of February" was very famous for its sinister plot in the 19th century. It is the day of the Regifugium in Rome, the day in which Horus and the sky must be made to meet, to square off, to fit into each other's life and movements again. But since the great event of the flood was the event which made Egypt, the transposition of the divine kingship in Europe and outside Egypt required tremendous changes. The sky, not the river, was the producer of the fecund land. And the worship of the rain God led to a change of sex, for heaven and

for earth. The stars lost their importance, in the countries in which the rain was in the sky the giver of the fertility. The Greeks and the Romans watched the thunder, the lighting, the birds in the sky, instead of the constellations, with very good reason. Only the most ancient calendars of the Mediterranean stuck to the 360 plus 5 days. But it never could vanish totally as the unity of the land, the god-given character of their territory still depended on the divinity of the earthly ruler. Kings are dioi, of divine family membership. Polytheism is not the arbitrary invention of superstition. The membership of the king in a family of Gods made polytheism. We should call it poli-theism, membership of the earthly king in the family above, the polis above, as this is the real secret of the "Olympic" Gods.

In a later period, Sun and moon in Egypt, rain and light in Europe entered on the calendar and nearly overwhelmed it. But the Sopotit year of the ubiquitous mother in the sky, the permanent son on earth, came before.

4. Survey

In retrospect, we may see that not one of the calendars ever could be given up or be forgotten completely. Every one of them has left an indelible trace on our own lives as it has led one ineluctable step outside the encircling gloom.

The direct observations of the moon which led to man's prediction of half years, belongs to that period when the poetic, creative, spiritual faculty of man was at its highest in the creation of names for every kind, species, phenomenon, around him. This fascination with the really observed fact is not a recent faculty of science. It literally is as old as Methusalem. And the terms for the moon are most universal. Whereas the word for "year" is not of Indo-European origin, the term for the month is general. Also, we ourselves in our own time, still have reason to recall May first, and November first, the Day

of New Life, and the Days of the Dead. And no human dignity can be preserved, unless the community gives in to this rhythm of worshipping both our connection with the new life in spring, and our dependence on old life, when the leaves fall. This calendar shouted with the joy of the immediate name-giving processes.

The Sopdit Year, in our leap day of February 24, reminds us of man's power of determining himself the environment in which he wants to root. The inmissible decision of 'property,' of 'This is mine.' Dies ist unser (Hermann und Dorothea), of settlement, of home, is the immediate gift of the annual flood of the Nile and its making law for generations to come. All our good resolutions on New Year stem from the tremendous decision of Horus to become the executor of Sopdit and her decans, on earth. This calendar learned to read and write.

The solilunar year is a third stage. Here the observation of the unvaried journey of the stars in the sky, of the daylight sun in his movements over the firmament through the seasons, could be used. The priests of Horus had collected the evidence in centuries. Set down for the allegiance to Sopdit and her lieutenants, they now knew of Sun and Moon more than had been known before, ever. Here, the equinox, the solstice made themselves important. Also, the superstition of uneven numbers (29, 27, 31, etc.) may have crept in as the observation of the moon's irregularities may have led to the admiration of the irregular. The last stage in antiquity was the knowledge of the planets, the horoscopia individualization of the starlore, and the construction of the planetary week. This belongs to the last three hundred years before Christ and it enabled the Julian Reform. Reforms are impossible unless the subject matter has ceased to be of primary importance. Primary matters are stubbornly unreformable. In Caesar's days, even in the sky, other questions attracted the main thought and the main imagination than the length of the year. Hence, Julius Caesar succeeded in what the Ptolemys had not succeeded. Their calendar edict of Kanopus was a nice

Greek idea and found no echo in Egyptian hearts. The Julian reform found the ground well-ploughed.

The stages of the calendar in our own era all have led to a gradual awareness that we live and should live under the impact of more than one single calendar. Pluralism is the central problem of the calendars according to which we try to live in the Christian era. Church and State, work and biography have their own dates. But everyone of these calendars is unthinkable without the respectful work of antiquity.

Greek idea and found no echo in Egyptian hearts. The Julian reform 200 years later found the ground better ploughed.

The modern critics of ancient calendar lore as benighted or ignorant usually are quite unaware of the fact that they themselves live by a plurality of calendars. The very question whether mankind ever has or ever can or ever should live by one calendar is unknown to these historians of science. They do not understand that before the Church split the allegiances of man wide open, the star lore of the ancients was politics, not astronomy.

The unconsciousness of the modern explorers of antiquity about their own "calendaric" propensities and tyrannies and predilections has had very inopportune results. Rank superstition is a pet term for the inefficiencies of the ancient calendars; since Theodor Mommsen said so of the Romans. The fact of the Anglo-Saxon system of measurements as it holds out among us against the decimal system might remind the historians of science that the community lives by politics, including astropolitics, not by science. A great scientific mind, John Quincy Adams, sponsor of the Smithsonian Institute and the first astronomical observatories in the U.S.A., has explained this conflict in his Report on Measures, 1819, reprinted 1846, which not one of the modern historians of the ancient calendars seems to have read. They perhaps are so anxious to be classified themselves with the scientists exclusively, and they wish to produce the modern science out of its egg shells of ancient superstition as they take evolution to be the development out of an envelope. But that is a most unscientific bias.

Therefore, in a second part, I shall try to show that the method of thinking from cause to effect is only one of the rational approaches to a cosmic problem. The ancient thinking from the final cause to its preparations is just as rational. Natural science has laughed at the Aristotelian final

cause so intensely that now modern nuclear physicists flee into monasteries because of the bombs; they have prepared the bomb. That is not the relation of cause and effect, but the relation of final cause, or of rational purpose and wise destiny in blind competition. Only when we distinguish between destiny and purpose shall we become able to cope with the bomb today. With the bomb we must compare the ancient headache over the future of their polis, their states. Not for the sake of knowledge but for the sake of peaceful government did they cultivate the calendar. An ancient gloss of the sixth century of our era, translated "calendae" by the term operae. Operations of the community, not the remembrances of things past, were the concern of the calendar builders. Ginzel's chronology, the modern treatment of the apokatastasis and the Great Year, Kramer's new book on Roman astrology under the Emperors, they all are more fanatical in their contempt for astropolitics than even ^{the} a fanatic as Tertullian. This most absolute Christian still said: astrology was permitted to us up to the coming of Christ. This concession made by Tertullian should make us pause. Why did it have to be permitted? Why was any pre-Church world compelled to try it?

If we would read the ancient calendar backwards, from their manifest destiny as they understood it, to their almanach, perhaps we could become as wise as John Quincy Adams became wise to the ways of his farmers about avoirdupois, foot, oxhoft, etc. Destiny projected backwards, and destiny prepared forward, is quite indifferent to scientific exigencies. It is responsible not for the correct entries into the Encyclopaedia Britannica but for the continuity of the political commonwealth.