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Author:	Rüpke, Jörg
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EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN



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III. Greco-Roman Antiquity and New Testament

In the Mediterranean basin, calendars were foremost a local phenomenon, usually based on lunar months of conventionalized length, that is sequences of months of 29 and 30 days. Even if calendrical systems, that is sets of names of months and practices of intercalation, might have been similar in larger regions (e.g., in the Hellenistic states or in Italy), the start of the year and decisions about actual intercalations were a local matter. Such decisions to add a day to a month or a month to a year were usually taken on the basis of short-term political or fiscal considerations. Thus, regular systems to bring a calendar of lunar months in a long-term correspondence with the solar year, were known at least from the 5th century BCE onwards (Meton and his pupil Euctemon). Greek months were usually structured by periods of ten days, some of which were dedicated to recurring cults. The months were frequently named after important festivals or seasonal characteristics, from Hellenistic times onwards increasingly for names of rulers or members of a ruling family. This holds true for Ptolemaic Egypt as for the Imperial city of Rome (Scott). With a change of the dynasty or even ruler, names of the months or the New Year's day were subject to potential change, too. These frequent changes were experiences of urbanized societies, in which precise datings were highly valued and much used, due to juridical systems and economic exchange far beyond a weekly market day. The word "calendar" is derived from the Latin word *calendarium*, pertaining to a book of debts (to be paid on the beginnings of the month, the *kalendae*). For translocal exchanges, synoptic lists of calendrical systems, so-called *hemerologia*, were in use (Kubitschek).

Rome was somewhat unusual in having a luni-solar calendar transformed into a solar one by the end of the 4th century BCE (Rüpke 2006: 27–34). This calendar was improved and permanently protected against irregular intercalation by the "Julian" calendar reform of Caesar in 46 BCE (Rüpke 2011). For the first time in the Greco-Roman world (outside of Egypt), a civil calendar could be used to date astronomic events with precision instead of itself being permanently corrected by referring to the latter. As a consequence, the graphic form of a calendar of 12 columns of months, starting on the 1st of the month called "January" (*kalendae Ianuariae*), was popularized as a book calendar and monumentalized in inscriptional forms (*fasti*; Degraßi; Rüpke 1995). The listing of the days was organized by the recurring letters A to H (for a continuous week of

eight days) at the beginning of every entry. The main information concerned the juridical character of the day, especially indicating its juridical status, i.e., whether it was *fas* ("right") to perform certain important legal steps or not (*nefas*). The *comitia*, the Roman legislative body of the people, could not meet on such *dies nefasti*. Religious traditions, too, were integrated in two forms: *feriae*, a special class of days given to the gods as property (and hence free from every mundane activity), were marked in a particular way, that is, as *dies nefasti* whose violation made piacular sacrifices necessary (marked by the letters NP, abbreviations of the festival names, and historical notes, if the holiday was due to an imperial victory, birthday, etc.). In addition, the anniversaries of temple foundations were marked in the calendars for the city or Rome, briefly indicating the divine owner and the location (the graphic form was the same as before the reform; such a calendar of 13 months, including an intercalatory one, is known from a mural painting from the city of Antium, produced around 60 BCE; see fig. 21). Within a few years, antiquarian research produced learned treatises "On calendars" (*De fastis*), which are known from later lexicographers or commentators on Vergil (Servius, Macrobius). Around the start of the era, Ovid published a commentary in verse form, covering each month in a book of its own. These *libri fastorum* (cf. Bömer) are one of the most important sources for the history of Roman religion.

Rome did not consciously export this calendar, but it was the calendar referred to in Roman law, and it was the calendar used by the Roman army and Roman administration throughout the empire (visible e.g., in the military *Feriale Duranum*; Fink 1971: no. 117). Many colonies and towns in the western part of the empire adopted it directly, many eastern calendars renamed months, refixed their New Year's day, or stabilized the length of months in order to achieve close parallels, while at the same time keeping the appearance of traditional local calendars. That said, it must be stressed that even a Roman colony in Sicily, Tauromenium, held to the use of Greek dates far into the Imperial period (Rüpke 1995: 133–38). At the same time, festivals like the Roman New Year or the Saturnalia in mid-December were celebrated throughout the *Imperium Romanum*.

Greco-Roman historiographical texts were not interested in precise data. Narratives might be structured by eras; synchronisms were important to connect local history to the ever-growing political and cultural spaces of the Hellenistic and Roman empires, but normally referred to years, not to days or months (see Feeney: 7–67). Thus, dates are hardly used in the texts canonized as the NT and in contemporary Judeo-Christian literature. Very occasionally, major Jewish festivals are referred to

