A Handbook
of Dates

For students of British history

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Contents

Contents

1

Reckonings of time*

ɪ The Julian calendar: Old Style

Throughout the Middle Ages, and in some countries for much longer, the calendar in use was that known as the Julian, because it was originally introduced by Julius Caesar in 45 BC. This way of reckoning is now known as the Old Style, in contradistinction to the New Style, that is to say reckoning by the Gregorian calendar, introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582.

The Julian calendar set up a common year consisting of 365 days, while every fourth year was to contain an extra day, the sixth calends of March (24 February) being doubled and the year therefore being described as *annus bissextilis*. This latter device was intended to rectify, at regular intervals, the accumulated discrepancy between the calendar year of 365 days and the solar year, calculated by the astronomers at 365¼ days. The mistake was made, however, of counting in the current year when deciding which was 'every fourth year', and in practice the bissextile years occurred in what we should call every third year. Thus an error rapidly accumulated, until the Emperor Augustus got rid of it by ordaining that twelve successive years should consist of 365 days only. The next bissextile or leap year was AD 4, and thereafter, as long as the Old Style lasted, every fourth year, in the modern sense, was a leap year.

ɪɪ The year

The Christian era

The use for dating purposes of the Christian year (*annus domini, annus ab incarnatione domini, annus gratiæ*) arose somewhat unexpectedly through the compilation of a table for calculating the date of Easter, made by the monk Dionysius Exiguus in AD 525. This was intended to continue to AD 626 the Easter Table then in use, of which the cycle would end in 531. Dionysius, a Scythian by birth, but living in Rome and *moribus omnino*

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*Chiefly revised by Dr Richard Sharpe.

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romanus, constructed a list of years calculated not from the prevailing era of Diocletian, the pagan emperor, but from the Incarnation of Our Lord. A continuator carried on the table to AD 721. At the synod of Whitby, in AD 664, Wilfred, as part of his advocacy of all things Roman, secured the acceptance in Northumbria of the Dionysian Easter Table. Dionysius himself had had no thought of establishing a new era, but now his device was adopted for chronological purposes by Bede. Starting from English usage in the eighth century, the new era gradually spread to the Continent until in every country of Western Europe except Spain (see below), Christians reckoned from AD 1.

In England this method was used for the dating of official documents long before it was adopted by continental chanceries. The year *ab incarnatione* is found in Anglo-Saxon diplomas very soon after the death of Bede to replace or supplement dating by indiction, and was commonly used for such royal documents as bore dates (even when they also used the regnal year) until late in the twelfth century. Outside the royal chancery the reckoning is to be found in English legal instruments of all sorts in the exceptional cases in which a date of any kind is vouchsafed. Later in the Middle Ages documents of ecclesiastical provenance generally, and private charters occasionally, are dated by the year of grace. The era of the incarnation also regularly provided the chronological framework of English chronicles and annals.

The Spanish era

In Spain, Portugal, and those southeastern parts of Gaul which were for a time under the rule of the Visigoths, an era was used which had been taken over by the latter from the Christians of Roman Spain. According to some authorities, the era originated in an Easter Table of which the first cycle began, not at the year of incarnation, but at 38 BC, and it was reckoned from 1 January 38 BC, though the reasons for this remain unresolved. The era was in use in Catalonia to 1180, in Aragon to 1350, in Valencia to 1358, in Castile to 1382, in Portugal to 1420. The date is always given in the form 'era millesima octava' not 'anno millesimo octavo', and to find the equivalent year of the Christian era one must subtract 38 from the date in the Spanish era.

The indiction

Unlike the Christian and Spanish eras, the indiction was originally a civil reckoning of time. It is a cycle of fifteen years, counted as *indictio prima,*

secunda, and so on, to 15, reverting then to 1. The first cycle was counted from AD 312, but there were three chief methods of reckoning the opening date:

- (*a*) The Greek, or Constantinopolitan, Indiction, beginning on 1 September. The popes seem to have used this fairly regularly till 1087, after which the practice of the papal chancery varied till Alexander III (1159–81).
- (*b*) The Bedan, or Cæsarean, or Imperial Indiction, or the Indiction of Constantine, beginning on 24 September. This was probably introduced by Bede into England, where it became usual, and was adopted by the papacy under Alexander III.
- (*c*) The Roman, or Pontifical, Indiction, beginning on 25 December (or sometimes on 1 January), was in fact only occasionally used in the papal chancery, but is found in other places at various periods.

The use of the indiction-year as an element in the dating of documents goes back to imperial Rome, when it was added to statements of the consular and imperial years. It continued to be used by the papacy and the royal chanceries of the West in the early Middle Ages for the more solemn privileges and legal records. It is also found in some private charters. But by the end of the thirteenth century it was generally ignored except in one class of document: the instruments drawn up by public notaries continue to exhibit the indiction together with other dating elements until the sixteenth century.

The dating formula, *indictio prima*, etc., simply shows the place which the year occupies in an unspecified cycle of fifteen years. The rule for calculating it is to subtract 312 from the number of the year of grace and divide by fifteen: the remainder will correspond with the number of the year in indiction and the quotient will be one less than the number of the indiction (but the latter is seldom mentioned in documents). Since the beginning of the year of grace does not, in most systems of reckoning, coincide with the beginning of the indiction, the equation must take account of the day of the year. As an example, take a document dated 1 November 1094: $1094 - 312 = 782$; $782 \div 15 = 52$ with a remainder of 2. Therefore, the number of the indiction *for the greater part of* 1094 is 2. But the date in question (1 November) falls in the lesser part of the year according to the Greek and Bedan indictions: it is therefore *indictio tertia* by these reckonings, *indictio secunda* by the Roman reckoning. This is illustrated in figure 1.

Greek indiction 2	Greek indiction 3							
Bedan indiction 2	Bedan indiction 3							
Roman indiction 2					Roman indiction 3			
Calendar year	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.		
Anno domini	1094				1095			

1 Sep. 24 Sep.   1 Nov.   25 Dec.

Roman indiction 2
Bedan indiction 3
Greek indiction 3

Figure 1 Calendars for 1094–1095

The regnal year

From ancient up to modern times it has been a common practice to date official documents by the year of the rulers or magistrates from whom the documents emanated or within whose jurisdiction they were issued. Roman law demanded that certain classes of documents should bear the names of the consuls for the year; and, in the absence of exact information, dating by reference to past consuls was sometimes preferred (e.g. *post consulatum Flavi Fausti iunioris*). In AD 537 Justinian provided that the years of the emperor's reign should be added and thereafter the *post-consulatum* element, though it lingered on in various forms, ceased to be of practical importance. But the system which had been used by the consuls of the Roman people and the emperors was copied by popes, bishops, kings, dukes, and lesser men. It found its way, moreover, from official documents to literary narratives. Sometimes the regnal year was used to the exclusion of the indiction or year of grace, sometimes it accompanied these elements. For the method of its use in the English chancery and the papal chancery the reader is referred to the notes which precede the lists of kings and popes (pp. 21–2 and 48–50).

III The date of Easter

As noted above (p. 1), it was the calculation of Easter that led Dionysius to devise the numbering of years that we now use, and, incidentally explains the necessity of this *Handbook*, since it is because of the movable character of Easter that the annual calendar has also to accommodate other movable feasts. Easter was 'movable' in the sense that it was fixed in relation to the moon's phases and the day of the week, and these do not recur at the same

point in successive calendar years. After many disputes, which produced divergences in other parts of Christendom,[1] the Latin Church determined that Easter should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon on or after 21 March.[2] The result, in short, is this: that Easter never falls on the same day of the month in two successive years and it may fall on any of the thirty-five days between 22 March and 25 April (both included.[3] The ecclesiastical calendar for the entire year is controlled by this fact of a movable Easter. To enable students to see clearly the ecclesiastical calendar for any given year from AD 400 to AD 2100, a series of tables is provided later in this volume (**8**/1–35). Confronted, for example, with a document dated on the Tuesday after Trinity, AD 1288, the student first discovers from the chronological table on p. 229 that Easter fell on the 28 March in 1288; then on turning to Table **8/7**, it will be found that the date in question is, in modern terms, 25 May 1288.

The medieval computists, faced with similar problems of calculating the incidence of movable feasts, adopted various devices for relating the days of the week and the lunar month to the calendar. The scaffolding of the tables they compiled provided material for elaborating statements of date which for ordinary purposes were quite long enough already. Thus the Anglo-Saxon solemn diploma might set out not only the indiction

1. Some of these are indicated in table **7**; for more detail on Easter in the Celtic British Church, see also D. McCarthy and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'The "lost" Irish 84-year Easter Table rediscovered', *Peritia*, 6–7 (1987–8), 227–42.

2. Because 21 March was taken to be invariably the date of the vernal equinox. In fact it is not; and therefore some accurate astronomical calculations of the paschal moon differ from the approximate historical reckonings. But generally only the latter is in question when Easter is concerned. The Protestant states of Germany observed Easter according to an improved calculation in 1724 and 1744. The divergence of Swedish usage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is more complicated (see Grotefend, *Taschenbuch*, 12th edn (1982), pp. 27–8).

3. It is a relatively simple matter now, with a computer, to use an algorithm to calculate the date of Easter, since the cycles on which the ecclesiastical moon is based can be easily programmed. The following algorithm can be used to compute the date of Easter in the Gregorian calendar. All variables are integers and all remainders from division are dropped. The algorithm takes the year (y) and yields the month (m), and day (d) of Easter. The symbol * means multiply:

$$c = y/100$$
$$n = y - 19*(y/19)$$
$$k = (c-17)/25$$
$$i = c - c/4 - (c-k)/3 + 19*n + 15$$
$$i = i - 30*(i/30)$$
$$i = i - (i/28)*(1 - (i/28)*(29/(i+1))*((21-n)/11))$$
$$j = y + y/4 + i + 2 - c + c/4$$
$$j = j - 7*(j/7)$$
$$l = i - j$$
$$m = 3 + (l+40)/44$$
$$d = l + 28 - 31*(m/4)$$

This algorithm is due to J.-M. Oudin (1940), is reprinted in the *Explanatory Supplement to the Astronomical Almanac*, ed. P. K. Seidelmann (London, 1992), ch. 12, 'Calendars' [by L. E. Doggett], and was kindly brought to the editor's notice by Amanda Hill, Archivist, Rhodes House, Oxford.

year, the regnal year, and the day of the month in Roman form, but also the golden number, the epact, the dominical letter, and the concurrents. These elements also find their way into dating clauses of documents at other times and places during the Middle Ages. Used in this way, as parts of a dating clause, they indicate the position of the year in cycles of years, and thus might fittingly have found a place in the preceding section of this chapter; but their original purpose was purely to establish the place of the Church's festivals in the calendar, and so they may logically be described at this point. We shall make no attempt to do more that state how they are computed. For a more complete discussion the reader is referred to Giry's *Manuel*, on which this brief account is chiefly based.

Golden number (*numerus aureus, cyclus decemnovennalis*). For calculating the date of the paschal moon, which in turn governed the date of Easter, computists have made use of the close approximation of the lunar and solar cycles after a lapse of nineteen solar years. The slight inexactitude of their calculation has had no effect on the fixing of dates: the cycle of nineteen years has been generally accepted. The years of the cycle are numbered from I to XIX in direct series and the number for each year is known as the Golden Number. The cycle is computed from the year 1 BC and is usually held to begin 1 January in that year. To find the golden number of a year of grace, add 1 to a year of grace and divide by 19. The remainder is the golden number, unless the remainder is 0, when the golden number is XIX.

Epact (*Epact lunaris*). The position of the year in the nineteen-year cycle is also represented in another way for the purpose of calculating the date of Easter. For this purpose it is necessary to establish the relationship between the solar year and the phase of the moon at 22 March, the earliest date for Easter. Since the solar year was estimated to have eleven days in excess of twelve complete lunar cycles, this relationship changed by eleven days annually; the moon begins each year eleven days older than it was a year ago. When a new moon falls on 22 March the golden number is I (e.g., AD 1482: 1483 divided by 19 leaves a remainder of 1), and the epact, which represents the age of the moon, is nil (*epacta nulla*). In the next year the epact is eleven, and the next year twenty-two. The progression through the nineteen-year is straightforward, except that thirty is deducted from numbers in excess of thirty.[4]

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4. The cycle thus becomes 0, 11, 22, 3, 14, 25, 6, 17, 28, 9, 20, 1, 12, 23, 4, 15, 26, 7, 18. This cycle, and the above description, only hold good for the Old Style calendar. It seems unnecessary to enter into the complexities of the New Style reckoning of epacts, since the epact only appears as an element in the dating of documents during the Middle Ages.

To find the epact of any year of grace, divide the year of grace by 19, multiply the remainder by 11, and divide by 30: the remainder is the number of the epact.

While the annual mutation of the epact occurred, according to some medieval computists, on 1 January, it seems that other reckonings were also employed. When the calendar year began on 25 March or 1 September, the epact probably changed at that point.

Dominical letter (*littera dominicalis*). To determine the date of Easter one must know the sequence of the days of the week following the paschal full moon, and for this purpose special tables were devised in early Christian times. There are seven possible relationships of the days of the week to the calendar of the year, and the letters A to G were used to indicate the cycle of seven days beginning at 1 January. The dominical letter for the year is the letter allocated, according to this system, to the first Sunday in the year. Thus, Sunday fell on 4 January 1545 and the dominical letter for the year is the fourth letter, D; in 1549 it fell on 6 January and the dominical letter is F, and so on. In the sequence of years the dominical letters run in retrograde series, for the year beginning on Monday (dominical letter G) is commonly succeeded by a year beginning on Tuesday (dominical letter F). A complication is introduced in the leap year. The extra day, or *dies bissextus*, has the same letter assigned to it as the day which it doubles. This produces a change in the cycle during February, so that the dominical letter for the period after *bis vi kal. Mar.* (24 February) – or after 29 February, if the modern system of dating is employed – differs from that for the preceding period. Thus the dominical letter for 1 January–29 February 1944 (a leap year) is B (1 January was Saturday), while for the remainder of the year it is A. The dominical letter for the next year 1945 (a common year) is G (1 January was Monday). It follows from the existence of leap years that the dominical letters move in cycles of twenty-eight, not seven, years.

Concurrents (*concurrentes septimanæ*). To each year was allotted by the computists a number (1 to 7) which represents the concurrents, or number of days between the last Sunday in the preceding year and 1 January. Since the concurrents are designed to serve the same purpose as the dominical letters, there is a regular correspondence between the two reckonings. This can be simply expressed as follows:

Dominical letter	F	E	D	C	B	A	G
Concurrents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

It will be noticed that the concurrents are counted as 7 when the preceding year ends on a Sunday. It should also be observed that in leap years the

concurrents correspond to the dominical letter for the *latter* part of the year.

Christian festivals in a leap year

An anomaly arising from the Church's adoption of the Roman calendar requires brief consideration. Using the Roman calendar, The Intercalary Day (*bis VI Kal. Mart.*) preceded the common *VI Kal. Mart.* When the simple numbering of days was adopted, the intercalary day *appeared* to be 29 February, but canonically it was 24 February, the exact equivalent of *bis VI Kal. Mart.* In leap years therefore St Mathias was commemorated on 25 February rather than 24 February, which was counted as *Vigilia S. Matthei apostoli*. This came to be regarded as a popish custom in England, and in the 1680s St Mathias came to be kept on 24 February, and the saints of the remaining days of February were not postponed; 29 February became *de facto* the intercalary day.

IV The beginning of the year of grace

Historians' errors in translating dates are most often due to carelessness about the various starting-points of the year of grace. Half a dozen different reckonings have been used at one time or another, and it is not uncommon to find two reckonings simultaneously used in adjacent countries or even in one country in different types of record. This has long been a matter for remark among historians. Gervase, the twelfth-century monk of Canterbury, bewailed the confusion arising from various computations: he himself had wavered between the systems of Christmas and the Annunciation before finally adopting the former for his chronicle and even then he made a concession to the more popular system for one famous event, the death of Thomas Becket on 29 December 1170. R. L. Poole furnishes an excellent illustration of the varieties in use in the Middle Ages: 'If we suppose [he says] a traveller to set out from Venice on 1 March 1245, the first day of the Venetian year, he would find himself in 1244 when he reached Florence: and if after a short stay he went on to Pisa, the year 1246 would already have begun there. Continuing his journey westward, he would find himself again in 1245 when he entered Provence, and on arriving in France before Easter (16 April) he would be once more in 1244.' To take a case from the simpler conditions of the eighteenth century, a traveller who left England in January 1720 would arrive in France to discover that the French had begun the year 1721.

Students must therefore do their best to discover what reckonings their authorities employ before they accept their chronology as it stands. Two graphics for the years 1099–1101 and 1153–5 can be used to illustrate the range of possibilities for the start of various different 'years' simultaneously in use in the central Middle Ages; their significance is explained in more detail below.

The reckoning of years still used, that of Dionysius, counts the number of years since the Incarnation, and Dionysius estimated when Jesus Christ was born. Other ideas of the Christian era existed. It became a Christian convention to view the past in three eras: the first, Nature, began with Adam; the second, Law, began with the delivery of the Law to Moses; the third era, the divine dispensation which through Christ superseded the Law, was named Grace.[5] When did Grace come into the world? Different answers were the birth of Christ, the beginning of his mother's pregnancy, and the redemption achieved by his death and resurrection. Hence different views existed as to when the year of grace began.

Christmas Day

Bede, following Dionysius, took for granted that the year of Grace must begin with the Nativity, Christmas Day, though in his *Ecclesiastical History*, since he was dealing with documents dated by the earlier reckoning from the Indiction of September, he started his own year in September also.[6] The reckoning from Christmas was soon in general vogue. It was used in the Empire until the second quarter of the thirteenth century, by the popes from 962 to 1098 (and even later in letters, as distinct from *privilegia*), in France and most of western Europe, except Spain, till the twelfth century. The Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings of England used it and Benedictine writers, with characteristic conservatism, still employed it after it had been abandoned in most quarters of Plantagenet England; as late even as the fourteenth century, the *Chronicon de Lanercost* still used the Nativity style. This fact has too often been overlooked by later historians. Thus, for example, Edmund of Cornwall, cousin of Edward I, is very commonly said – on the authority of Matthew Paris – to have been born on 26 December 1250. But Matthew Paris used the Christmas reckoning, and the historical date is therefore 26 December 1249. The whole octave of the

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5. See *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British sources*, s. v. gratia 5; the term derives from Romans 6:14–15.
6. In his technical treatises on chronology, of course, he used the solar year of twelve months from 1 January as the basis of all dates.

1099–1101

	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May.	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.
MODERN YEARS	1099 (1 Jan.)						1100							1101 (1 Jan.)			
NATIVITY	1099 (25 Dec.)						1100						1101 (25 Dec.)				
ANNUNCIATION (Conventional)		1099		1100 (25 Mar.)						1100						1101 (25 Mar.)	
ANNUNCIATION (Pisanus)		1100		1101 (25 Mar.)						1101						1102 (25 Mar.)	
EASTER (Mos Gallicanus)		1099			Easter 1 Apr. → 1100					1100							Easter 21 Apr. → 1101
REGNAL YEAR (Chancery)	13 WILLIAM II 26 Sept. 1099 – 2 Aug. 1100								2 Aug. / 5 Aug.				1 HENRY I 5 Aug. 1100 – 5 Aug. 1101				
EXCHEQUER YEAR	1 HENRY I 29 Sept. 1099 – 28 Sep. 1100									29 Sept.	2 HENRY I 29 Sep. 1100 – 28 Sep. 1101						
PONTIFICAL YEAR	1 PASCHAL II 14 Aug. 1099 – 13 Aug. 1100								2 PASCHAL II 14 Aug. 1100 – 13 Aug. 1101								

Figure 2 Calendars for 1099–1101

1153–5

	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May.	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.

MODERN YEARS

1153 | 1154 | 1155

NATIVITY

1153 | 25 Dec. | 1154 | 25 Dec. | 1155

ANNUNCIATION

1153 | 25 Mar. | 1154 | 25 Mar. | 1155 · 25 Mar.

ANNUNCIATION (Pisanus)

1154 | 25 Mar. | 1155 | 25 Mar. | 1156 · 25 Mar.

EASTER (Mos Gallicanus)

1153 | 4 Apr. | 1154 | 27 Mar. | 1155

REGNAL YEAR

18 STEPHEN 22 Dec. 1152 – 21 Dec. 1153 | 22 Dec. | 19 STEPHEN 22 Dec. 1153 – 25 Oct. 1154 | 25 Oct. | 1 HENRY II 19 Dec. 1154 – 18 Dec. 1155 | 19 Dec.

EXCHEQUER YEAR

18 STEPHEN | 29 Sept. | 19 STEPHEN | 29 Sept. | 1 HENRY I

PONTIFICAL YEAR

1 ANASTASIUS IV 12 Jul. 1153 – 11 Jul. 1154 | 12 Jul. | 2 ANASTASIUS IV 12 Jul. – 4 Dec. 1154 | 5 Dec. | 1 ADRIAN IV 5 Dec. 1154 – 4 Dec. 1155

Figure 3 Calendars for 1153–1155

Nativity was, of course, a time of high festival, so that in practice the new beginning on 25 December and the older reckoning from 1 January sometimes shaded into each other.

The Annunciation

Lady Day, the feast of the Annunciation on 25 March, came to be considered the more correct starting-point from a theological point of view of years reckoned from the Incarnation. This was first used in the ninth and tenth centuries, but during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it replaced reckoning from the Nativity. It is often extremely difficult to know whether a source in this period was counting years from the Nativity or the Incarnation, and the historian's predicament is made worse by the use of two conventions in counting from the Annunciation. Logically it preceded the first Christmas Day, so that the year AD 1 had to be put back nine months. This practice had only limited use, and the more common use was to begin the era from 25 March following the first Christmas Day.[7]

Reckoning from 25 March preceding started at Arles late in the ninth century and spread in Burgundy and northern Italy; it was used, though with growing infrequency, in the papal chancery between 1088 and 1145, but remained a local practice in some regions. It survived at Pisa till 1750, and has therefore been named the *calculus pisanus*. It is of little importance to students of English documents, though R. L. Poole found an isolated case of its use in a charter of Richard I. The grant, however, was to Pisan merchants in the Holy Land, so that the occasion was exceptional.

Less logical, but far more convenient, widespread, and important to the English historian was the use of 25 March *after* Christmas as the opening of the year. The origin of this practice is obscure, but may perhaps be traced to the influence of the abbey of Fleury, itself under Cluniac influence, and largely responsible for the increased emphasis laid upon devotions to the Virgin Mary in the early eleventh century.[8] In 1030 the style was in use at Fleury, and perhaps a few years earlier at Poitiers, which had connections with Fleury. Thus it long preceded the foundation of Cîteaux (1098), and cannot be due, as has often been suggested, to

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7. Cf. D. P. McCarthy, 'The chronological apparatus of the annals of Ulster', *Peritia*, 8 (1994), 57 for an example of Annunciation dates based on 25 March *following* rather than *preceding* Christmas.
8. For full discussion, see Poole, *Studies*, pp. 13–17.

the Cistercians. The latter, however, gladly adopted the practice, as one more feature among many differentiating them from the earlier Benedictines. From a sense of a different kind of rivalry, Florence preferred the method as the opposite to that in vogue in Pisa, and so the new practice came to be called the *calculus florentinus*. It spread freely in France, though mainly in ecclesiastical circles, and from 1098 the papal chancery generally used it in its more solemn documents. In England it is found as early as the middle of the eleventh century, when certain annals of the *Anglo-Saxon chronicle* were apparently dated by this reckoning, but it only came into common English use late in the twelfth century and so continued to 1752.

From about the middle of the seventeenth century the practice of those continental countries, which had gone over to a year beginning with 1 January must inevitably have had an effect on England.[9] This influence was probably strengthened by English exiles abroad in the period of the Commonwealth. For official purposes, Englishmen continued till 1751 to use the old reckoning from 25 March, but they were wavering in their allegiance and found it convenient to give a double indication for the period between 1 January and 24 March; we commonly meet this in the form 29 February 1675/6 and we find it in all manner of official records and private papers of the period. Where no double indication is given, it is usually safe for the historian to assume that an Englishman writing in England reckons from 25 March, but it is worth remark that like medieval church calendars, the printed almanacks started their year with 1 January and used the modern historical year, and so did some, at least, of the early periodicals and newspapers.[10]

Easter day

The *mos gallicanus*, which reckoned the year from the movable feast of Easter,[11] was introduced into the French chancery by Philip Augustus (1180–1223). It spread to some regions, such as Holland and Cologne, where there were direct family or trading connections, but it never

9. The Oxford bookseller John Dorne already used the 1 January style in his accounts in 1520 (Oxford Hist. Soc., *Collectanea*, i (1885)), as did Thomas Wilson, *The art of rhetoric*, printed by Richard Grafton, which is dated 'M.D.LIII.Mense Januarij', but manifestly published under Edward VI (*ex inf.* Leofranc Holford-Strevens).
10. Thus *The Spectator* begins in the historical year 1711 and bears the date '1 January 1711' on its first page; so also *The Gentleman's Magazine* begins the historical year 'January 1751' without any double indication of date.
11. Those who used the Easter reckoning sometimes started their year on Good Friday (whence the term 'a Passione') or Holy Saturday.

became uniform for the whole of France, or popular outside court circles. Its disadvantages were obvious, and if, as Poole has suggested, Philip chose it because he 'desired to mark his conquest of the English possessions in France by the use of a style different from those which had been current in them',[12] he could hardly have made a gesture more disconcerting to his own subjects.

<div align="center">

1 January

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The historical year of what is now more often known as the Common Era rather than the Christian Era begins on 1 January. Modern chronological practice thus corresponds with the beginning of the Roman civil year adopted for the Julian Calendar.[13] January was always regarded as the first month of the calendar; the movable feasts were calculated on the basis of a solar year beginning on 1 January, the calendar of Saints' days followed the twelve Roman months, but the cycle of months was not homologous with counting years of Grace.[14] The year of Grace measured time from the Incarnation rather than counting cycles of twelve months.

There is no evidence that anyone was perturbed by this anomaly, even when the adoption of the Annunciation rather than the Nativity increased it from one week to three months or nine months. Yet it was one of three changes made by the reform of the calendar authorized by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 (see p. 18). Italy, Spain and France began the year on 1 January. In Scotland it became the official beginning of the year in 1600 following 31 December 1599. In England, Wales and Ireland the change was not effected until the day after 31 December 1751 which became 1 January 1752.

The persistence of the calendar of months, the calculation of Easter based on a solar year beginning 1 January, and simple convenience prevailed over theological correctness. Moreover 1 January had everywhere been associated with the New Year in popular estimation. Thus Samuel Pepys, who reckoned the years of his diary from 25 March, always made mention of New Year's Day when he reached 1 January. In Shetland the New Year's Eve festival continued to follow Old Style and is still kept on 11 January.

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12. Poole, *Studies*, p. 23.
13. Older Roman practice began the year at 1 March; this is reflected in the names for the months September, October, November and December.
14. 1 January was observed as the Feast of the Circumcision at least as early as the sixth century, and still earlier as the octave of the Nativity. Cf. *Decretum*, ii, 26, 7, 14, and 16.

v Divisions of the year

The Roman calendar

The division of the Julian year into months, as revised by the Emperor Augustus, has prevailed up to the present day. The Julian method of counting the days within the months also persisted for many centuries and was unaffected by the Gregorian reform. This calendar of the year is set out in Table **6** below (pp. 145–6).

The modern way of numbering the days of the month in one continuous series is found occasionally in very early times and gradually won widespread acceptance during the Middle Ages, though it never fully ousted the Roman system.

The Bolognese calendar

Another method of counting the days is known as the *consuetudo bononiensis*, or custom of Bologna. So far as concerns England it may be termed the notarial method, for it is scarcely found outside documents drafted by public notaries. According to this reckoning, the day of the month was indicated by its position in the first sixteen days (or fifteen days in months of thirty days) reckoning forwards, or in the last fifteen days, reckoning backwards. Thus, *quarto die intrante Madio* indicates 4 May, and *quarto die exeunte* (or *stante*) *Madio* indicates 28 May.

The ecclesiastical calendar

While the Christian Church could not drive out use of the Roman calendar, it introduced into common practice other methods of reckoning and stating dates. In the first place, the ecclesiastical calendar divided the year by weeks in the manner now universal.[15] Sunday was the first day of the week (counted as *prima feria* but always called *dies dominicus*) and the chief day as regards liturgical observance. But the Church also consecrated certain days of the year (irrespective of their place in the week) to festivals of particular saints, and these became material for dating events (see below **4**, pp. 64–93). Finally the Church attached special importance to commemorations connected with the life of Christ: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter Day, Ascension Day, and the like. Some of these, like the feasts of the saints were fixed points in the Roman year: Christmas, for

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15. We are only concerned here of course with the week as an element in the dating of records. For the observance of the week in the pagan Roman world and in Jewry, see F. H. Colson, *The Week* (Cambridge, 1926).

example, was always celebrated on *viii kal. Jan.* otherwise 25 December. But Easter Day was a 'movable' feast, and on Easter, as explained above (pp. 4–8) depended a whole series of other commemorations.

VI Fractions of the day

Roman custom divided the day into two periods, running from sunset to sunrise and from sunrise to sunset respectively. Within each period were twelve hours, the length of which necessarily varied with the season. The hour which formed 1/12 of the winter night, for example would be longer than a similar fraction of the summer night.[16] As a consequence of this, the seven 'canonical hours', or the times appointed for the services of the Church, similarly varied with the season until the introduction of hours 'of the clock'.[17]

By the thirteenth century clocks with bells began to be displayed in churches and other buildings, and by this means a system of hours uniform in length came gradually into use – a process encouraged by economic imperatives as employers and guilds also began to lay down hours of work.[18] The hours 'of the clock' have been usually counted in two series of twelve, from midnight and from noon respectively. But for many purposes the modern world uses a single 24-hour series beginning at midnight (a system perhaps most commonly encountered with railway or airline timetables). The development of telephony and wireless telegraphy in the nineteenth century and of more advanced methods of instant communication in the late twentieth century, including satellite links, global financial markets, and improvements in international transport facilities which enable more frequent meetings between government ministers and diplomats of different countries, have made it particularly necessary for the historian of modern times to pay attention to the exact hour of related events. In doing so the adjustments must of course be

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16. Certain evidence suggests that for purposes of dating in the early Middle Ages the day began with sunset (cf. Anscombe, in *British Numismatic Journal*, 1st ser. IV, 284–92), and the liturgical observance of a feast might indubitably begin before sunrise. But cf. *Rogeri de Wendover Flores* (Rolls series), I, 299: 'diem dominicum cum noctu sequente, qui dies dicitur naturalis'.

17. See *Dictionary of medieval Latin from British sources*, s.v. hora. The canonical hours are Matins, Prime, Terce, Sect, None, Vespers and Compline. For clear and detailed accounts of the early monastic timetable, see Cuthbert Butler, *Benedictine monachism* (2nd edn, London, 1920), pp. 275–86, and Dom David Knowles, *The monastic order in England 943–1216* (Cambridge, 1941), pp. 448–53 and 714–15.

18. Cf. J. Le Goff, 'Merchant's time and the Church's time in the Middle Ages', *Time, work and culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London, 1980), pp. 29–42.

made for discrepant methods of timing, just like those shaping events have to do. During World War II the cubicle in the Cabinet War Rooms from which Churchill telephoned President Roosevelt contained a clock showing Washington time; a local public house in Lincoln currently displays a series of clocks showing the time at the various other Lincolns scattered across the globe. Quite apart from the difference which arises from astronomical readings taken in different parts of the world (Zone Standard Times), there is also the difference between Greenwich Mean Time and Summer Time used in the British Isles (and their continental equivalents),[19] although there is intermittent pressure from some quarters to terminate this practice (an earlier experiment in doing so in Britain took place in the late 1960s).

Finally, the student of nautical records must take account of the system of reckoning found in ships' log-books from the seventeenth century until early in the nineteenth. Like the astronomer, the mariner determined his day by observation of the sun; and he recorded the events of twenty-four hours (on his log-board) from midday to midday. It was his practice to make the division of his log-book according to this scheme and to assign to each 24-hour period a date twelve hours in advance of the ordinary calendar-day. Thus, the battle of Trafalgar, fought in the afternoon of 21 October 1805, is recorded in the log-book of the *Victory* under 22 October. At about this very time, the Navy apparently began to date its log-book entries from midnight, following an Admiralty Order of October 1805; but in the merchant service it was still usual at a much later date for log-books to begin their day at noon.[20] This was, we may note, a chronological arrangement peculiar to one class of record. Throughout the period in which it prevailed, sailors used the ordinary calendar-day in their letters and journals.

VII   The Gregorian calendar: New Style

In the course of the Middle Ages various scholars interested in chronology pointed out that the calendar year was increasingly divergent from the solar year. The reckoning of the latter at 365¼ days was a slight overestimate, and by the sixteenth century this annual error had caused, cumulatively, a discrepancy of ten days. It was not, however, until

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19. Summer Time was first introduced as 'daylight saving' during World War I, a measure renewed annually by Parliament until 1925 and made permanent thereafter.
20. H. Raper, *The practice of navigation and nautical astronomy* (1840), p. 93.

24 February 1582 that a bull of Pope Gregory XIII ordered the use of a reformed calendar. This met immediate trouble by cutting ten days out of the year 1582, so that 15 October followed immediately upon 4 October, while future difficulties were to be avoided by making only the fourth of the end-years of successive centuries a leap year. The bull allowed for AD 2000 to be a leap year, and this was adopted in later changes to the Gregorian calendar. The year was to begin on 1 January.

This desirable reform was proposed at an unfortunate date, when religious and political hostilities were so pronounced that even a measure so much to the general benefit was not regarded objectively as a mere matter of chronological accuracy, and was therefore at the time not accepted by any but states in the Roman obedience. The student of history from 1582 onwards, therefore, is in a worse plight than before, for he has to be sure, as he deals with the documents of Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant states, whether at the date concerned that state was dating by the Gregorian calendar ('New Style') or by the Julian calendar ('Old Style'). Broadly speaking, Catholic states adopted the New Style in the sixteenth century, Protestant states early or late in the eighteenth century, Russia, the Balkan States, and Greece in the twentieth century, but as Table **12** below (pp. 236–41) shows, there is a very wide disparity of practice, especially in federal states like the Low Countries and Switzerland.

It must be remembered that in every country an interval necessarily followed between the acceptance of the reform and its being put into practice, and that the methods of introduction were not uniform. In Great Britain and Ireland the change was effected by 'Chesterfield's Act' (24 Geo. II, c. 23), passed in March 1751, which decreed that throughout the dominions of the British crown the following 1 January should be the first day of 1752 and 2 September 1752 should be followed by 14 September.[21] For purposes of taxation the change would have involved calculations for a year of abnormal length; to avoid this taxes continued to be based on the Old Style year, 25 March, and then the year 1752–3 continued until 5 April rather than only having 354 days. The Inland Revenue still uses 6 April as the beginning of the financial year. Nor must it be assumed that each European state, when it adopted the New Style calendar, acted like the

21. For the effect upon George II's twenty-sixth regnal year see below p. 233, and for the complete calendar for the year 1752 see Table **11**. Robert Poole, '"Give us back our eleven days": Calendar reform in Eighteenth-century England', *Past and Present*, no. 149 (November 1995), 95–139 sets the issue in a broad context.

Papacy and England in fixing 1 January as the beginning of the year. In some countries this preceded the change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, while in a few it only followed long afterwards.[22]

Because the adoption of New Style had not been synchronized in all countries, there came into being 'one of the most dangerous traps for students using original documents',[23] to be avoided only by careful consideration of the origin of any document in use and the habits of its writer. Because of leap years, a difference of dating may amount to 10, 11, 12 or 13 days according to whether the document is written after 1582, 1700, 1800 or 1900. Thus, when William of Orange had left Holland, where the New Style was in use, on 11 November 1688, he reached England, where it was not, on 5 November. In official communications with foreign powers and with its representatives abroad, the English government sought to obviate the confusion which might easily arise from the conflict of Styles. From Elizabeth's reign onwards English correspondence with the continent often gives both forms of date. Sir William Boswell writes from The Hague to Sir John Coke on '12/22 Dec. 1635'. Nearly three centuries later we find the same practice in a country which retained the Old Style: Isvolski, Russian minister of Foreign Affairs, dates a letter to the British ambassador '16/29 Août 1907'. At times when the writer does not give a double date, he may indicate the Style employed by adding OS or NS; but more often the date bears no such indication and the historian must decide what was intended according to the nationality and the circumstances of the writer.

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22. Details of the changes on the continent will be found in Table **12**. Despite the adoption of the Gregorian calendar by eastern European countries in modern times, the Orthodox Church still uses the Julian calendar in some places like Bulgaria.
23. Stamp, *Methods of Chronology*, p. 6.

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Appendix vi: 'The beginning of the year of the incarnation of Bede's "Historia ecclesiastica"', criticizes Poole's study (see below). See also Paul Grosjean, 'La date du colloque de Whitby', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 78 (1960), 233–74.

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