Chapter 2
The Numan Year, the Romulean Year and the *Feriale Antiquissimum*

The oldest Western calendar with a clear link to astronomy is traditionally attributed to the second King of Rome, Numa Pompilius (715–673 BCE).

His twelve-month lunar year began in March. Four of his months—i.e. March, May, July and October—were 31 days long; the other months (see Fig. 2.1) lasted 29 days, except for February, which had 28 days (see Summary Chart).

The Numan year was 355 days long, compared with a natural length of 354.3672 ($=12 \times 29.5306$); the absolute error was $+0.6328$ days, or 1.78×10^{-3} in percentage terms.

However, the Roman tradition retained traces of a calendar that predated the "Numan" calendar, which was attributed to the city's founder, Romulus (754–716 BCE),[1] and even to the Albans. The "Romulean" calendar divided the year into 10 months—four 31 day months and six 30 day months—and a total of 304 days. At first sight, there is nothing astronomical about this calendar; however, in later chapters, we will examine the relationship between the Romulean and Numan

[1] On the Romulean and Numan calendar, Censorinus, *de die natali*, 20.3–5, writes: "These 10 months lasted 304 days, distributed thusly: March 31, April 30, May 31, June 30, Quintile (i.e. July) 31, Sextile (i.e. August) and September 30 each, October 31, and November and December 30. The four longer months were known as whole months; the other 6 months were known as incomplete months. Afterwards, Numa […] created 12 months and 355 days […] We know as a certainty that 51 days were added to the old year; as these days were insufficient to form 12 months, 1 day each was removed from the six empty months; these 6 days were added to the 51 days to make a total of 57 days, which were then divided to make 2 months: January, lasting 29 days, and February, lasting 28 […], *Hi decem menses dies CCCIIII hoc modo habebant: Martius XXXI, Aprilis XXX, Maius XXXI, Iunius XXX, Quintilis XXXI, Sextilis et September tricenos, October XXXI, November et December XXX; quorum quattuor maiores pleni, ceteri sex cavi vocabantur. Postea sive a Numa […] XII facti sunt menses et dies CCCLV […] Certe ad annum priorem unus et quinquaginta dies accesserunt; qui quia menses duo non explerent, sex illis cavis mensibus dies sunt singuli detracti et ad eos additi, factique dies LVII, et ex his duo menses, Ianuarius undetriginta dierum, Februarius duodetriginta […]*".

On the Romulean and Numan calendars, see also Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.13.

© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2015

L. Magini, *Stars, Myths and Rituals in Etruscan Rome*, Space and Society,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-07266-1_2



Fig. 2.1 The month of April, detail the second month of the Numan calendar and its festivities. *Fasti Praenestini*, detail. *Fasti praenestini*, between 6 and 9 CE, Palazzo Massimo/Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome. Photo by Marie-Ian Guyen-Wikimedia Commons

calendars and how it may have been possible to move from one to the other (see Chaps. 26 and 27).

Both Romulean and Numan calendars contained feast days. The so-called *Feriale antiquissimum*—a modern name—is a list of officially-sanctioned festivities dating back to the earliest Roman kings. A handful of these feast days—such as *Parilia* and *Saturnalia*—already existed before the foundation of Rome; some of them were established by Romulus; and many others were decreed by Numa Pompilius.

In more recent times, the *Feriale* consisted of forty-five feast days, plus the twelve *Idus* dedicated to Jupiter, making a total of fifty-seven feast days. The following feast days were designated in official calendars using capital letters:

- in March, the *Equirria* on 14, the *Liberalia* on 17, the *Quinquatrus* on 19, and the *Tubilustrium* on 23;
- in April, the *Fordicidia* on 15, the *Cerialia* on 19, the *Parilia* on 21, the *Vinalia* on 23, and the *Robigalia* on 25;
- in May, 3 days of the *Lemuria* on 9, 11 and 13, the *Agonalia* on 21, and the *Tubilustrium* on 23;
- in June, the *Vestalia* on 9, and the *Matralia* on 11;

- in July, the *Poplifugium* on 5, 2 days of *Lucaria* on 19 and 21, the *Neptunalia* on 23, and the *Furrinalia* on 25;
- in August, the *Portunalia* on 17, the *Vinalia* on 19, the *Consualia* on 21, the *Volcanalia* on 23, the *Opiconsivia* on 25, and the *Volturnalia* on 27;
- in October, the *Meditrinalia* on 11, the *Fontinalia* on 13, and the *Armilustrium* on 19;
- in December, the *Agonalia* on 11, the *Consualia* on 15, the *Saturnalia* on 17, the *Opalia* on 19, the *Divalia* on 21, and the *Larentalia* on 23;
- in January, the *Agonalia* on 9, and 2 days of the *Carmentalia* on 11 and 15;
- in February, the *Lupercalia* on 15, the *Quirinalia* on 17, the *Feralia* on 21, the *Terminalia* on 23, the *Regifugium* on 24, and the *Equirria* on 27.

September and November were the only months not to have any feast days, with the exception of the Ides. Some feast days—such as the mysterious *Agonalia* on 21 May, 11 December and 9 January—return to fall on different days during the year; others, such as the *Lemuria* on 9, 11 and 13 May, fall on three consecutive odd-numbered days. Incidentally, only the *Equirria* on 14 March and the *Regifugium* on 24 February fall on even-numbered days.

Indeed, even numbers seem to be a distinguishing characteristic of the two calendars: the Romulean calendar has 6 months of 30 days, and lasts for a total of 304 days, while in the Numan calendar February alone has an even number of days, and the year lasts a total of 355 days.[2]

[2] Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.13.5, attributes to both Numa and Pythagoras a predilection for odd numbers.
Virgil, *Bucolica*, 8.75, recalls: "*numero Deus impare gaudet*, God is pleased by odd numbers". See also Joannes Lydus, *de mensibus*, 3.44.

http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-07265-4

Stars, Myths and Rituals in Etruscan Rome
Magini, L.
2015, XXXI, 181 p. 59 illus., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-3-319-07265-4