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 × 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 CCCLVIII hoc modo habebant: Martius XXXI, Aprilis XXX, Maius XXXI, Iunius XXX, Quintilis XXXI, Sextilis et Septembris 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 accessorunt; 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.
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;

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
• 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 Aramilustrium 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.
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