

The First Church of Rome www.christianhospitality.org [Online Index](#)

APPENDIX 7 — THE PRE-NICENE DATING OF THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF JESUS

Irenaeus

Irenaeus on the date of Jesus' birth (Adv. Haer. [ed. Harvey] III. xxiv. 2 [in alternative referencing systems: III. xxv. or III. xxi. 3]):

“Our Lord was born around the forty-first year of the rule of Augustus.”

Beyer reckons that what is referred to here as the 41st year of Augustus ran from August 3 BC to August 2 BC (Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology, 1998, p. 284 n. 30 and *ibid.* §§ 487, 489, 491). The date is therefore “around” 3/2 BC.

Irenaeus on the age of Jesus (Adv. Haer. [ed. Harvey] I. i. 1 [otherwise I. i. 3]):

“These, then, are the 30 Aeons of their erroneous system, the ‘silent’ Aeons, the ‘unknown’ Aeons. This forms what they call the invisible, spiritual Pleroma (‘Fullness’ [of the Godhead]), split three ways into an Ogdoad, a Decad and a Dodecad. And it is for this reason, they claim, that the Savior (they do not want to name Him ‘Lord’) did nothing in public for 30 years, since He was adumbrating the mystery of these Aeons.”

(*Ibid.* [ed. Harvey] II. xxxii. 1 [otherwise II. xxxvi. and II. xx. 1]):

“They involve the parables and acts of the Lord quite improperly and inconsequentially in their imaginary scheme. We can prove this in the following way: that internal turmoil which they claim resulted from what happened to the twelfth Aeon, they try to prove is the Passion which the Savior suffered as a result of the twelfth Apostle and in the twelfth month. And in fact they represent Him as having preached for one year only following His baptism.”

(*Ibid.* [Harvey] II. xxxii. 6, xxxiii. 1-4 [in alternative referencing systems: II. xxxviii, xxxix, or II. xxii. 1, 5-6]; Latin translation of the lost original, except where indicated):

“xxxii. 6. We can prove that by their own account the whole system based on the number 30 fails, because sometimes fewer, sometimes more, Aeons feature in the reckoning as it stands. That means there are not actually 30 Aeons, and it was not for this reason that the Savior came for baptism at 30 years of age, to prove that the silent years were their 30 Aeons. In that case they will be excluding, nay banishing, the very first Aeon from the total Pleroma. They claim that He suffered death in the twelfth month, which means He was actively preaching for one year after baptism, and they try to prove the same from the words of the prophet (as it says in the Scriptures, ‘to announce the accepted year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance’), being blind indeed, though they claim to have plummeted the depths of Bythus, and insensible of what it was that was called by Isaiah the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance. It was certainly not a day comprising 24 hours that was spoken of by the prophet, nor a year comprising 12 months. The prophets spoke many things in parables and allegories, and not according to the literal sense of the words, as they too admit

“A demonstration that Jesus did not preach for one year only after baptism, but attained every possible age-range.

“xxxiii. 1. It is certainly to be wondered at, however, that those who claim to have discovered the deep things of God, have not made a proper examination of the Gospels, to find out how many times after His baptism, when the Passover came round, the Lord went up to Jerusalem, as was the custom for all Jews from wherever they lived every year, to gather at this time in Jerusalem and there celebrate the Passover festival. The first occasion was when He turned water into wine in Cana, the village in Galilee, and then went up for the feast of the Passover. It is written in the Scriptures concerning this occasion: ‘For many believed on Him, when they saw the signs which He performed,’ as John the disciple of the Lord recorded. Next He is found in Samaria, having left His well-trodden paths, that time He entered into conversation with the Samaritan woman. He also healed the child of a centurion at a distance with a word, saying, “Go, your child has recovered.” Subsequently He went up the second time to the feast of the Passover at Jerusalem, and healed the paralytic, who lay next to the bathing area 38 years, commanding him to get up, pick up his stretcher and go. He then left that region and went over the other side of the Sea of Tiberias. He was followed there by a huge crowd and fed the whole multitude with five loaves: twelve hampers of fragments were left over at the end. Thereafter, when He had raised Lazarus from the dead, and a plot was formed against Him by the Pharisees, He retired to the town of Ephrem. From that place, it is recorded in the Scriptures, six days before the Passover, He came to Bethany, and from Bethany went up to Jerusalem, where He ate the Passover meal, and suffered death the following day. No-one would deny, these three Passovers make more than one year. And even the month itself in which the Passover is celebrated, and in which the Lord suffered death, these people who claim to know everything could learn from Moses, is not the twelfth, but the first month, of the year. Therefore their solution for the year and the twelfth month is proved to be false, and they ought to renounce either their solution or the Gospel. Otherwise, how could it have been that the Lord preached for only a single year?

”2. Actually, He was thirty years old when He came for baptism, and, having attained the age-range of full maturity required for a teacher, He came to Jerusalem, so that He could receive the audience a teacher might rightly expect. It is not true that He was something else from what He appeared, as these people say who introduce the idea of a ‘putative’ person. What He truly was, that He appeared to be. As a teacher in actuality, He had attained, in fact, the age-range a teacher had to attain, neither rejecting nor supervening His human nature, nor abrogating His own Law of human nature in His own case, but rather elevating every age-range to a higher order of being by means of that human likeness which He had taken on. He came for this purpose, to save by His own work the whole human race, all, I should say, who receive rebirth through Him into the family of God, infants, young children, older children, those in early maturity, and the elderly. And so He Himself passed through every age-range, and for the sake of infants, became an infant, elevating infants to that higher order of being; for the sake of young children, He became a young child, elevating those who had attained that age-range to the higher order of being, and becoming an example to them, as He did so, of godliness and fair-play and submission to authority; for the sake of those in early maturity, He too became a young man, leaving an example to all young people, and elevating them to the Lord’s own higher order of being. So He became an older person also for the sake of the elderly, that He might be the teacher, in full maturity, for the whole human race, not only in respect of the ability to propound true doctrine, but also in respect of the physical age-range He attained, elevating older people, too, as He did so, to that higher order of being, and becoming an example to them at the same time. Then, at last, He experienced even death, that He might become ‘the firstborn from the dead, He Himself holding

the preeminence in every realm,' the first in life, having supremacy over all, and preceding all.

”3. However, in order to confirm their invented interpretation of the Scripture, ‘to announce the accepted year of the Lord,’ they say that He preached for one year, and suffered death in the twelfth month: they are oblivious of the truth to their own confusion, since they destroy His whole work, and deprive Him of that which was, in fact, indispensable, and which entitled Him, furthermore, to the respect of His peers, namely of that age-range to which He had attained — what I would call that more advanced age-range — at which, as a teacher, He became the supreme example to all men. For how did He come to have disciples if He was not a teacher? Yet He came for baptism as one who had not quite fully reached the age of 30 years, but as one who was beginning to be about 30 years old (that is how Luke, who indicated His age, put it: ‘Now Jesus was about, as He was beginning, 30 years old,’ when He came for baptism); and yet, after His baptism, He only preached one year, and, completing His 30th year, suffered death, being still a young man, and one who had not yet attained the more advanced age-range! 30 years is really just the age-range of the young man in his prime, and from that point up to the 40th year, as is generally accepted, a progression is made, and then, from the 40th and 50th year, a declension, further into the age-range of the older person, and it was on attaining to this age-range that Our Lord became a teacher [Latin: *Quia autem triginta annorum aetas prima indolis est iuvenis, et extenditur usque ad quadragesimum annum, omnis quilibet confitebitur, a quadragesimo autem et quinquagesimo anno declinat iam in aetatem seniore, quam habens Dominus noster docebat.*]. This accords with the account in the Gospel [Greek preserved here:] and all the elders, who companied with John, the Lord’s disciple, in Asia, bear witness that John handed down these truths to them. For he continued present with them till the times of Trajan. [Back to the Latin from here:] But some of them not only were eyewitnesses of John, but also of other Apostles, and heard the very same truths from them; their testimony agrees with this account. Whom are we to believe? Such people as Ptolemaeus? He never saw Apostles with his own eyes, not so much as a glimpse of an Apostle in his dreams!

”4. Even those Jews who disputed at the time with the Lord Jesus Christ showed very clearly what is stated here is true. For when the Lord said to them, ‘Abraham your father rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad,’ they said to Him in reply, ‘You are not yet 50 years old, and you have seen Abraham?’ Such an assertion is properly made to one who has passed 40 years of age, but who has not reached his 50th year, yet is still not far off his 50th year. But to one who was 30 years old it would unquestionably be said, ‘You are not yet 40 years old.’ Doubtless those who wished to prove Him a liar would not by any means extend his years much beyond the age-range which they saw, by personal observation, He had attained. Rather, they described the age-range as accurately as they could, either because they knew it by some census entry, or because they guessed it, using as a guide the age-range He seemed to them, by personal observation, to have reached, above 40, but certainly not the age-range up to 30 years old. It is against all reason, then, that they could be wrong by 20 years, when they wanted to demonstrate that He was younger than the times of Abraham. No. What they observed, they voiced. And He Who was before their eyes was not some putative person, but reality. Therefore, He was not far removed from 50 years old, and so they said to Him, ‘You are not yet 50 years old, and you have seen Abraham?’ Thus, He did not preach one year, nor did He suffer death in the twelfth month. For the interval between the 30th year and the 50th year can never be one year, unless perchance, in the realm of their Aeons, the years deputed to those who are granted a place, quite outside the normal order, in Bythus, within the Pleroma, are of this higher magnitude, such ones as Homer the Poet also spoke of, himself likewise under the inspiration of the Mother of their error: ‘The gods granted seats beside Zeus took counsel together in the Chamber of Gold.’”

This passage of Irenaeus is often misrepresented, particularly by those who doubt his claim to be an authentic transmitter of the doctrine of the Apostle John. Its meaning has been wrested, to give the impression that Irenaeus believed the preposterous notion that Jesus was almost 50 towards the end of His ministry. What Irenaeus actually said was Jesus looked as though He was between 40 and 50 years old, according to His Pharisaic enemies, and was, indeed, within the older age-range of 30 to 50 years, when He exercised His ministry. A major part of the problem has been the interpretation of the Latin *aetas* as “age in years” when it actually means “period of life” or “age-range.” It is clear from a perusal of the context that Irenaeus held this older age-range, the *aetas* of the senior, to be the proper *aetas* of the teacher (magister) or Rabbi. Hence Jesus must have attained that age-range when He called His disciples or students, and thereafter He ministered for at least the three Passovers referred to in the Gospel of John. He was, therefore, at least 30 + 3 years old at the time of His Crucifixion. According to His enemies, as Irenaeus pointed out, Jesus looked even older, between 40 or 50, and they certainly would not have exaggerated His age too much, when their aim was to emphasize the superior antiquity of Abraham. Irenaeus thought, perhaps, the Pharisees had access to the census records and knew Jesus was in the age-range of the senior. These Scriptural evidences are used here with great aplomb by Irenaeus to discredit the Valentinian theory that Jesus ministered for a single year at the age of 30.

Irenaeus:

Date of the Nativity “around” 3/2 BC (41st year of Augustus)

Date of the Crucifixion: at earliest “around” AD 31/32 (as Jesus was at least 33 years old at His Crucifixion)

Unidentified and Gnostic (Basilidian) Calculators apud Clement of Alexandria

Dating from an era slightly later than Irenaeus are the calculations recorded c. AD 200 by Clement of Alexandria in the *Stromata* (I. xxi = 144,4-146,4). Clement is quoting authorities other than himself, and, from his personal remarks on these calculations, it can be gathered he reserves judgment on their accuracy. First the introductory computations:

“Some set down the dates of the Roman emperors thus: —

“Caius Julius Caesar, three years, four months, five days; after him ... [etc.] ... Commodus, twelve years, nine months, fourteen days. From Julius Caesar, therefore, to the death of Commodus, are two hundred and thirty-six years, six months. And the whole from Romulus, who founded Rome, till the death of Commodus, amounts to nine hundred and fifty-three years, six months.

“And our Lord was born in the twenty-eighth year, when first the census was ordered to be taken in the reign of Augustus.

“And to prove that this is true, it is written in the Gospel by Luke as follows: ‘And in the fifteenth year, in the reign of Tiberius Caesar, the word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zacharias.’ And again in the same book: ‘And Jesus was coming to His baptism, being about thirty years old,’ and so

on.

“And that it was necessary for Him to preach only a year, this also is written: ‘He hath sent Me to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ This both the prophet spake, and the Gospel. Accordingly, in fifteen years of Tiberius and fifteen years of Augustus; so were completed the thirty years till the time He suffered.

“And from the time that He suffered till the destruction of Jerusalem are forty-two years and three months; and from the destruction of Jerusalem to the death of Commodus, a hundred and twenty-eight years, ten months, and three days.

“From when the Lord was born, therefore, to the death of Commodus are, in all, a hundred and ninety-four years, one month, thirteen days.

“And there are those who have determined, with still greater attention to detail, not only the year of our Lord’s birth, but also the day; and they say that it took place in the twenty-eighth year of Augustus, and in the twenty-fifth day of Pachon. And the followers of Basilides hold the day of his baptism as a festival, spending the night before in readings. And they say that it was the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, the fifteenth day of the month Tybi; and some that it was the eleventh of the same month. And treating of His passion with precise calculation, some say that it took place in the sixteenth year of Tiberius, on the twenty-fifth of Phamenoth; and others the twenty-fifth of Pharmuthi and others say that on the nineteenth of Pharmuthi the Savior suffered. Further, others say that He was born on the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth of Pharmuthi.”

The death of Commodus was 31st December AD 192. Clement dates back from that point in time to the year, not the day, of Christ’s birth, as is shown by the statement immediately following that “there are those who have determined, with still greater attention to detail, not only (i.e. as in the preceding calculation) the year of our Lord’s birth, but also the day.” If Clement was using the Roman calendar, the date of Christ’s birth to the nearest year would be 18th November 3 BC, which seems nonsensical, as no calendar in the ancient world began or ended a year on that date. If Clement was using his native Egyptian calendar without intercalation, however, the same interval of 194 years (each year exactly 365 days long in the Egyptian calendar), one month (30 days per month), and thirteen days results in a date for the year of Christ’s birth of 6th January 2 BC. This certainly is the method to be understood, as 6th January was the Egyptian winter solstice and New Year’s Day, and 2 BC was the 28th year of Augustus’ reign in Egypt. According to the usual reckoning of the years of Augustus’ rule in Egypt (Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology, 1998, Table 134) his 28th year ran from August 29th 3 BC to August 28th 2 BC. In the Orthodox East 6th January is still celebrated as the memorial day of Christ’s birth. From this statement of Clement we can conclude that some calculators known to him dated Jesus’ birth to 2 BC, which agrees with the year-date for that event given by Irenaeus.

Two different calendar dates are also offered for the Nativity, using Egyptian calendar names: 1) 25th Pachon 2) 24th/25th Pharmuthi. In Julian dates, and using the native Egyptian calendar, 25th Pachon is 20th May and 24th/25th Pharmuthi is 19th/20th April. Clement speaks with reserve concerning these chronological calculations, merely repeating what he had heard from others. Still, his sources were unanimous that Jesus was born in the spring.

It is remarkable that Clement offers the same date (25th Pharmuthi) both for the birth and for the

death of Jesus. The belief became increasingly widespread in the early Church that the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Jesus occurred on the same day, though in the post-Nicene era the spring date of the birth of Jesus was replaced by the winter solstitial date (25th December in the West, 6th January in the East), and the spring date of the Incarnation was reinterpreted as the day of the conception, rather than of the birth, of Jesus. In fact, Epiphanius, at the end of the 4th century, records (Panarion LI. xxix.) a traditional date for the conception of Jesus of XII. Kal. Jul. or Jun. = 20th June or 21st May. The latter is only one day different from 25th Pachon = 20th May, which Clement of Alexandria says was a date he had heard of for the Nativity, but which is a month or more later than all other pre-Nicene dates for the same event. It is possible that already in Clement of Alexandria's day, the "birth" or "incarnation" of Jesus was believed by some to be the same thing as the conception. A difference of one day can easily arise in chronological computations like these which deal with events in Jewish history (compare, for example, "24th or 25th" of Pharmuthi in Clement's list here), as the Jewish day lasted from sunset of one day to sunset of another, and therefore a single Jewish day spanned two days in other calendars, such as the Egyptian and Roman, which started their days at midnight.

Note that the shortened chronology of the life of Jesus is referred to in the introductory computations recorded by Clement of Alexandria, in a context where Basilidian Gnostics are the only individuals named as having been involved in the calendrical calculations. The arguments of the proponents of this chronology are identical to those of the Valentinians refuted by Irenaeus (ut. cit. sup.), namely the age of Jesus at His baptism, followed by a single year's ministry for which the quotation "acceptable year [singular] of the Lord" serves as a proof text. The Passion is dated to the 16th year of Tiberius, which corresponds, according to one way of reckoning his regnal years, to AD 29, or alternatively to AD 30 (Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology, 1998, Table 150).

Unnamed and Basilidian calculators apud Clement of Alexandria:

Date of the Nativity: 19th/20th April or 20th May 2 BC (28th year of Augustus' rule in Egypt, 194 years, 1 month, 13 days preceding death of Commodus).

Date of the Crucifixion: 21st March or 14th or 20th April AD 29/30 (16th year of Tiberius).

Statue claimed to be of Hippolytus

There is in the Vatican Library Rome a statue claimed to be of Hippolytus, which dates from the generation either contemporary with or not long after Hippolytus himself, and which bears dates of Passover for the years AD 222 to 333. In the Paschal Tables on the statue the "Birth (Greek *genesis*) of Christ" is placed on IV. Non. Apr. = April 2nd in the 2nd year of the First Cycle. (Lightfoot, Apostolic Fathers, Part I, vol. 2, p. 392.)

The statue has been restored from its original, damaged, condition, and the name Hippolytus was nowhere on it when it was discovered in the 16th century. It seems originally to have been a statue of a seated woman. The 16-year Paschal Cycle inscribed on it is said by Eusebius to have been the invention of Hippolytus, and writings listed on the back of the statue are similar, in some instances identical, to those ascribed by tradition to Hippolytus. Its discoverers in the 16th century confidently

labeled the statue that of the famous pre-Nicene divine. Even if the statue is actually Hippolytus, there is nothing to prove that the Paschal dates and the entries next to them, including the Nativity date, were the work of Hippolytus himself, as opposed to the notion of the 16-year cycle. In that case, the statue was commissioned as a mark of respect to the memory of Hippolytus by his admirers in a not far subsequent, if not contemporary, generation, perhaps by the same people who built the magnificent memorials to early Roman martyrs in this area of the Porta Tiburtina. They could have used it to advertise, or lend the weight of Hippolytus' name to, their own Paschal system or some, at least, of the Paschal entries. In fact, the birth date of Jesus on the statue, in the 2nd year of the First Cycle, is separated by not quite 31 years from the entry dating the Passion to VIII. Kal. Apr. (25th March), in the last year of the Second Cycle, and this is at variance with Hippolytus' chronology of the life of Jesus in the Commentary on Daniel, where Jesus is said, in the unamended text, to have suffered in the 33rd year subsequent to His birth. The shorter chronology of the Paschal Tables reflects a known heretical tradition, condemned by Hippolytus' own master, Irenaeus (Adv. Haer. I. i. 3 [ed. Harvey I. i. 1], II. xx. 1 [ed. Harvey II. xxxii. 1], and above, xxii. 1-6 = [ed. Harvey II. xxxii. 6 to xxxiii. 1-4]), that Jesus ministered for only a single year following His Baptism.

As regards the year of the Nativity, Hippolytus' Commentary on Daniel (see *infra*) says 2nd April in the year of the Nativity was a Wednesday. That was the case in 2 BC and 8 BC. There is a broad consensus in the pre-Nicene Church Fathers, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Origen, Africanus, as well as the sectarian Tertullian, that the year of the Nativity was 3/2 BC (Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology, 1998, Table 139), identified variously as the 41st (variant 42nd) year of Augustus, the 28th year of Augustus' rule in Egypt, the year of Adam 5,500 (variant 5,502), and the 2nd year of the 194th Olympiad. Wednesday 2nd April 2 BC would be the preferred date of the Nativity according to this computation. It necessitates the acceptance of the more recent dating of the death of Herod to 1 BC, rather than the commonly accepted, but increasingly disputed, 4 BC.

This date for the Nativity, in combination with the date Friday 25th March AD 29, marking a day in the life of Jesus, if not the day of His Crucifixion, accurately reflects historical chronology in the first century AD. There is, in fact, only one chronological scheme possible within the widest range of dates which could be proposed for the life of Jesus, say from 15 BC at the earliest to AD 40 at the latest, when April 2nd fell on a Wednesday and March 25th on Friday, with an interval between of not quite 31 years, and that is precisely the scheme which commences on Wednesday 2nd April 2 BC and ends on Friday 25th March AD 29. (In AD 223, the 2nd year of the First Cycle of the Tables, and in AD 253, the last year of the Second Cycle, the dates April 2nd and March 25th likewise fell on a Wednesday and Friday respectively, which seems to provide the rationale for the memorial dates relating to the life of Jesus placed at those points in the Paschal Tables.) This means that the dates of the termini for this period in the life of Jesus are internally consistent, and the consensus of the early Church Fathers as regards the year of the Nativity at the same time strengthens confidence in the year, if not the calendar date, for the Nativity here given, and its more specific determination as 2 BC rather than 3 BC.

The other terminus, Friday 25th March AD 29, is not viable as the historical date for the Crucifixion of Jesus. The objection that 25th March did not coincide with 14th Nisan, in AD 29, as calculated according to current or more recent, Rabbinic, calendrical principles, is well nigh insurmountable. It is true that we do not know precisely how the Jews calculated Passover in the era of the Second Temple. But, allowing for generous post-dating of Passover 14th Nisan several days beyond the true full moon, as a result of late observation of the first visible crescent, or as a result of some other

astronomical consideration, 25th March is still a long way from when the Passover should have fallen that year, at the full moon on 18th March (Julian), or, if Passover was postponed one month, on or some time shortly following the full moon in April. Equally serious is the shortened chronology of the life of Jesus which it implies and which, as we have seen, has heretical associations.

Paschal Tables on the Statue claimed to be of Hippolytus:

Date of the Nativity: 2nd April (2 BC)

Date of the Crucifixion: 25th March (AD 29)

Hippolytus

A spring date for the Nativity is found in the earliest (10th century) MS of Hippolytus' Commentary on Daniel, IV. xxiii. 3, in the defective form *pro tessarôn Apriliôn*, which is, as reconstructed, IV. Non. Apr., 2nd April (Julian). (For the Greek see Appendix 13 §8.) The passage reads in translation:

“The first coming of Our Lord, that in the flesh, in which he was born in Bethlehem, took place on the IVth <of the Nones> of April {the earliest extant MS adds here anomalously: “on the VIIIth of the Kalends of January”} on the 4th weekday [Wednesday], in the 42nd year of the reign of Augustus, in the 5,500th year from Adam.”

In the earliest MS. of Hippolytus this spring date for the Nativity, *pro tessarôn Apriliôn*, is found incongruously juxtaposed to the date for the Nativity commonly accepted in the post-Nicene era, December 25th (VIII. Kal. Jan., see the Greek and its translation above), and in the other MSS. of Hippolytus' Commentary on Daniel, the latter date has completely ousted the former. Hypothetically, the text could be read IV. <Kal.> Apr. (= 4 days counted inclusively before the Kalends [1st] of April), viz. 29th March, or IV. <Id.> Apr. (= 4 days counted inclusively before the Ides [13th] of April), viz. 10th April, rather than IV. <Non.> Apr. (= 4 days counted inclusively before the Nones [5th] of April), viz. 2nd April, but the date IV. Non. Apr. on the statue claimed to be of Hippolytus, which employs Hippolytus' 16-year Paschal cycle, favors the restoration suggested here.

On the year-date of Augustus, 42, rather than 41 as in Irenaeus, but its equation likewise with 3/2 BC, see *infra* on Eusebius. The 42nd year of Augustus counting in Julian calendar years on the accession-year system was 2 BC (Finegan, *op. cit.*, Table 132), and this may have been the particular chronological system employed here by the Roman Hippolytus.

Hippolytus goes on to date the Crucifixion, not to the consulship of the Two Gemini (AD 29), but, in the unamended text, to the year 33 years subsequent to the 42nd year of Augustus and equivalent to the consular year AD 32. Using an improbable grammatical construction, the text of Hippolytus dates the Crucifixion to the consulship following that of Tiberius Caesar (the Vth occasion, AD 31), in the 10th year distant from — which can, in the circumstances, only mean preceding — the consulship of

Gaius Caesar IV and Gaius Cestius Saturninus (= AD 41). However, as we have seen, this section of the Commentary on Daniel, which includes the passage relating to the Nativity already cited, has been interpolated. If, as seems probable, the date VIII. Kal. Jan. for the Nativity is not authentic, then the calendrically related VIII. Kal. Apr. for the date of the Crucifixion in the succeeding passage, as well as the reference to the consulship of the Two Gemini, must be excised along with it. Even the spring date IV. Non. Apr. for the Nativity, though older than the winter date, is defective on the face of it, and may be an addition to the text, since it features as the Nativity terminus on the statue claimed to be of Hippolytus in tandem with the spurious VIII. Kal. Apr. = 25th March for the Crucifixion. The relevant lines, which immediately follow the passage relating to the Nativity, read in translation:

“He [Christ] suffered (crucifixion) in the 33rd year {the text reads here: “on VIII. Kal. Apr. [= 25th March]} on the Preparation day [Friday], and in the 10th year (in the interval) following [lit. from] the consulship of Tiberius Caesar [= AD 31] {the text adds anomalously here: “of Rufus and Rubellio [the Two Gemini = AD 29]} preceding [lit. and from] that of Gaius Caesar for the IVth time (with Gaius Cestius Saturninus [= AD 41].”

If the calendar date 2nd April is genuine, then Jesus was born, according to Hippolytus, several days (15 according to the later Rabbinic method of calculation) after the Passover full moon in 2 BC, around 28th Nisan. In fact, every one of the pre-Nicene dates suggested for the Nativity falls after the Passover full moon in 2 BC. Hippolytus states Jesus died in the 33rd year subsequent to that date. The reference to Jesus' age is likely based on an earlier reckoning by the Jewish calendar, probably on the 30th year of Luke, equated with the 15th year of Tiberius, followed by at least three Passovers, leading up to the 18th year of Tiberius = AD 32. This means Jesus would have turned 33 years old, in terms of the Jewish calendar, around 28th Nisan, i.e. after the Passover, in AD 32, and in that case, the only Passover possible for the Crucifixion of Jesus at age 33 would be the Passover in AD 33, not that in AD 32. The same holds true if the interpolated dates 25th December (VIII. Kal. Jan.) for the Nativity and/or 25th March (VIII. Kal. Apr.) for the Crucifixion are retained. The discrepancy is explicable if Hippolytus, like Africanus (see *infra*), was basing his calculation on a source which employed Olympiads rather than consular years. Dionysius of Halicarnassus dated Olympiads by the Roman consular year in which they began, rather than the consular year in which they ended. This practice was followed by Eusebius (Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology, 1998, §§320, 191). Hippolytus' consular date for the Crucifixion, AD 32, would correspond, under that arrangement, to the 4th year of the 202nd Olympiad, which began in summer AD 32 and ended in summer 33. This Olympiadic year was accepted as the year of the Crucifixion by Hippolytus' pupil, Origen, and by the latter's friend, the famed Christian chronographer, Africanus (see *infra*). There was only one Passover in that Olympiadic year and that was the Passover at the full moon on 3rd April AD 33, when Jesus was 33 years old, according to the texts of the Commentary on Daniel, as extant.

Given these conclusions, the original text may be reconstructed as follows (for the Greek, see Appendix 13 §8):

“He [Christ] suffered (crucifixion) in the 33rd year on the Preparation day [Friday], in the 18th year of Tiberius Caesar [= AD 32].”

The êta and îôta at the end of the word paraskeuêi (Preparation day) seem to have been confused at some point in the manuscript tradition with the êta and îôta immediately following that word and representing the numerals in the phrase oktôi [êta] kai dekatôi [îôta] etei Tiberiou Kaisaros (“in the

eighteenth [lit. eighth and tenth] year of Tiberius Caesar”). This led to the disappearance of the numeric êta (“eighth”), so the phrase now read: *paraskeuêi kai dekatôi [iôta] etei Tiberiou Kaisaros* (“on the Preparation day and in the tenth year of Tiberius Caesar”). This was nonsense as it stood, since Jesus was baptized in the 15th year of Tiberius and could not have suffered in Tiberius’ 10th year. It could only make sense if it meant “... and in the tenth year from Tiberius Caesar,” understood as a reference to the 10th year following the consulship of Tiberius Caesar (in AD 31), viz. AD 41, the consulship of Gaius Caesar for the IVth time with Gaius Cestius Saturninus. Hence the appearance in the current text of the word *‘upateuontos* (“when he was consul”) following the name *Tiberiou Kaisaros*, and of the names of the consuls in AD 41. At some point the heretical dating to the VIII. Kal. Apr. and the consulship of the Two Gemini was also inserted.

Hippolytus’ Commentary on Daniel (omitting what seem to be interpolations):

Date of the Nativity: (April 2nd?) 2 BC

Date of the Crucifixion: at the earliest AD 32 and more probably Passover (March/April, and in this particular year 3rd April) AD 33.

Africanus

Hippolytus’ contemporary, the learned and accurate Sextus Julius Africanus, similarly dated the Crucifixion to AD 32/33. Africanus’ Chronography only survives in fragments, but, according to the extant sources, he dated the parousia (public advent) of Jesus to the 5,531st year from Adam or Adam’s “restoration” (Gk. *anastasis*, cf. Luke 2:34, the antonym of *ptôsis*, “fall”), and to the 16th year of Tiberius (in Africanus = AD 30, as proved by the following Olympiadic date) and to the 2nd year of the 202nd Olympiad (which ran from summer AD 30 to summer AD 31). (Frag. 50 apud Georgius Syncellus, = ed. Mosshammer, 392. 5-6, 27-28, 393. 28-30 = ed. Dindorf, 611-612, 614.) He also accepted Phlegon’s entry in his 13th book to be a reference to the darkness at the Crucifixion (see *infra*). Phlegon’s date for the event was the 4th year of the 202nd Olympiad (see *infra* under Eusebius), which ran from summer AD 32 to summer AD 33. Since there was only one Passover in the latter Olympiad, and that was in the spring of AD 33, it is clear Africanus dated the Crucifixion to Passover AD 33. If, as we have surmised, Hippolytus in the Commentary on Daniel was following the practice of Dionysius of Halicarnassus in dating Olympiads by the Roman consular year in which they began, rather than the consular year in which they ended, then his consular date for the Crucifixion, AD 32, is identical to the Olympiadic date for the Crucifixion accepted by Africanus, Ol. 202, 4 (beginning summer AD 32 and ending summer 33). These Church Fathers, the highest authorities in the pre-Nicene period, implicitly rejected the short, Gnosticizing, chronology, which dated the Crucifixion to the consulship of the Two Gemini AD 29. Since Eusebius was careful to preserve all relevant data relating to New Testament chronology from his predecessors in the intellectual ambit of Origen, which included Africanus and Hippolytus, yet himself was unable to offer calendar dates for the Nativity and the Passion, but only regnal and Olympiadic years (see *infra*), it is highly unlikely that either Hippolytus or Africanus, in the earliest texts or derivative texts of those authors available to Eusebius in the early part of the 4th century AD, gave such calendar dates.

From the Chronography of Julius Africanus (fl. first half of the third century AD), a fragment

preserved in the original Greek apud Georgius Syncellus (ed. Mosshammer, 391. 1-23 = ed. Dindorf, 609-610): "FROM AFRICANUS ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES CONNECTED WITH OUR SAVIOR'S PASSION AND HIS LIFE-GIVING RESURRECTION. As to His works severally, and His cures effected upon body and soul, and the mysteries of His doctrine, and the resurrection from the dead, these have been most authoritatively set forth by His disciples and apostles before us. On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun. For the Hebrews celebrate the passover on the 14th day according to the moon, and the passion of our Savior falls on the day before the passover; but an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun. And it cannot happen at any other time but in the interval between the first day of the new moon and the last of the old, that is, at their junction: how then should an eclipse be supposed to happen when the moon is almost diametrically opposite the sun? Let that opinion pass however; let it carry the majority with it; and let this portent of the world be deemed an eclipse of the sun, like others a portent only to the eye. Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth manifestly that one of which we speak. But what has an eclipse in common with an earthquake, the rending rocks, and the resurrection of the dead, and so great a perturbation throughout the universe? Surely no such event as this is recorded for a long period. But it was a darkness induced by God, because the Lord happened then to suffer."

On the Nativity: Africanus dates the birth ("appearance," epiphaneia) of the Saving Word to the year 5,500 from Adam (Frag. 10 apud Georgius Syncellus, ed. Mosshammer, 18. 7-10 = ed. Dindorf, 31). Reckoning back from the 5,531st year from Adam which is equated with 16th year of Tiberius = AD 30, the year 5,500 from Adam is 2 BC.

Africanus:

Date of the Nativity: 2 BC (5,500th year from Adam, with year 5,531 from Adam falling in 16th year of Tiberius, AD 30 = Ol. 202, 2 = AD 30/31).

Date of the Crucifixion: Passover (March/April, and in this particular year 3rd April) AD 33 (Ol. 202, 4).

Origen

In a Greek fragment of the Homilies on Luke (Frag. 82 on Luke 3:1, Origenes Werke, vol. 9, Die Homilien zu Lukas, ed. Max Rauer [GCS, 2nd ed., Berlin, Akademie, 1959] 260) Origen says Christ was born in the 41st year of Augustus, that Augustus reigned 56 years, and that after the birth of Christ there remained 15 years. In Rome, after the part year in which Julius Caesar died and before the part-year in which he himself died, Augustus reigned 56 full calendar years. From and including 2 BC Augustus reigned another 15 full years 2 BC to AD 13. Beyer reckons what is here called the 41st year of Augustus ran from August 3 BC to August 2 BC (Finegan, op. cit. p. 284 n. 30 and ibid. §§ 487, 489, 491). The date is therefore 3/2 BC.

The account of Phlegon is summarized as follows by Origen, a friend of Africanus:

“And with regard to the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place, Phlegon too, I think, has written in the thirteenth or fourteenth book of his Chronicles.” (Origen, Against Celsus 2. 33)

“Regarding these we have in the preceding pages made our defense, according to our ability, adducing the testimony of Phlegon, who relates that these events took place at the time when our Savior suffered.” (Origen, Against Celsus 2. 59)

Origen:

Date of the Nativity: 3/2 BC (41st year of Augustus)

Date of the Crucifixion: Passover (March/April, and in this particular year 3rd April) AD 33 (Ol. 202, 4).

Tertullian

The Gnosticizing, short, chronology was adopted by Tertullian, a Cataprocian Montanist. He dated the birth of Jesus to the 41st year of Augustus, with 15 years remaining of his rule thereafter (= 3/2 BC), and the Crucifixion to AD 29, the consulship of the Two Gemini, and to the calendar date VIII. Kal. Apr. = 25th March (Adv. Judaeos VIII. 11, 18):

Adv. Judaeos VIII. [11] “videmus autem, quoniam in quadragesimo et primo anno imperii Augusti, quo post mortem Cleopatrae vicesimo et octavo anno imperavit, nascitur Christus. Et supervixit idem Augustus ex quo natus est Christus annis XV”

“Now we see that Christ was born in the 41st year of the reign of Augustus, in the 28th year he ruled as emperor after the death of Cleopatra [3/2 BC]. Also the same Augustus lived on 15 years from the year Christ was born”

VIII [18] “Quae passio Christi ... perfecta est sub Tiberio Caesare, consulibus Rubellio Gemino et Rufio Gemino mense Martio temporibus paschae, die octavo Kalendarum Aprilium, die primo azymorum quo agnum occiderunt ad vesperam, sicut a Moyse fuerat praeceptum.”

“The Passion of Christ ... was fulfilled under Tiberius Caesar, in the consulship of Rubellius Geminus and Rufius Geminus [AD 29], in the month of March, on the VIIIth of the Kalends of April [25th March], on the first day of unleavened bread when they slew the lamb towards evening, just as was commanded by Moses.”

Montanists had a particular interest in observing days and years, which they held to be enjoined by the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit). The orthodox shunned the celebration of religious feast-days, and held such celebration, in fact, to be a mark of paganism and heresy (cf. e.g. Origen, Hom. in Lev. PG XII. 495, Comm. in Matt. PG XIII. 893f.). When we find a Montanist confidently announcing the precise day of the Crucifixion of Jesus, in a shortened chronology which was espoused by paganizing Gnostic heretics, and that day is known to have been one of the most important feast-days in pagan Rome, in

the very cult, of the dying-god Attis, which the orthodox accused the Montanists of emulating (Tertullian, *De Jej. 16*), we feel justified in doubting the veracity of that assertion.

The context of the chronological notices relating to the Nativity and Crucifixion of Jesus is an interpretation of Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks. Tertullian explains the prophecy in such a way as to avoid a fulfillment with the arrival of the Messiah at a point in time subsequent to AD 29, i.e. Tertullian's date for the Crucifixion. An example of the rival, orthodox, interpretation is that offered by Africanus, in which Daniel's 70 weeks are fulfilled in the 16th year of Tiberius, AD 30, with the Messiah present on earth at that time.

The dating of the Crucifixion to the 25th of the month in the instances listed by Clement of Alexandria reinforces the conviction that these were schemes similar to Tertullian's, and perhaps the ultimate source of it. The pseudo-asceticism of Syrian Gnosis, which gave birth to Basilides, certainly preceded the pseudo-asceticism of Montanism chronologically, and, according to one interpretation of a statement in the Muratorian Canon, Basilides was the actual founding father of Montanism. In that case there would be a direct historical connection between the chronological speculations of the Basilidian Gnostics referred to by Clement and the chronological scheme of Tertullian.

The Montanists replaced the Jewish lunar (or rather luni-solar) calendar with a solar one, like that used in the pagan cultures around them, in which sun-worship was the prevalent form of religious expression. In the Montanist system, therefore, the notional date of the spring equinox, 24th/25th March in the West, 9 months prior to the notional winter solstice date 25th December, and 6th April in the East, 9 months prior to the Egyptian winter solstice date 6th January, became the fixed solar dates corresponding to the Jewish 14th Nisan (Sozomen, *Ecc. Hist. VII. 18*). Hence the appearance of 25th March as the date of the Crucifixion in Tertullian, in place of the historical 14th Nisan.

Tertullian:

Date of the Nativity: 3/2 BC (41st year of Augustus).

Date of the Crucifixion: 25th March AD 29.

Montanist Tract AD 243 (*De Pascha Computus*)

That Montanists were interested in building on the chronology of Hippolytus to further their own liturgical ends is demonstrated by a North African tract of a Montanist cast, datable to AD 243, and known from the title of one of the two surviving forms of the text as *De Pascha Computus*. The calculations contained in it run up to, and no farther than, the consulship of Arrianus and Papus (= AD 243). One of the two surviving texts of this tract (codex Remensis) claims to be the work of Tertullian's devotee, Cyprian. However, the date AD 243 precedes Cyprian's acceptance of Christianity. This codex may, therefore, preserve a reworking, perhaps, in fact, by Cyprian, of an earlier tract, represented, imperfectly or in part, by the other codex (codex Cottonianus in the British Museum, Cal., A 15, fols. 97v-105v). This lacks the ascription to Cyprian and the title *De Pascha Computus*, and preserves a chronology of the Passion at variance with that of the former and similar to that of Tertullian. Both forms of the tract attempt to apply the Paschal Cycle credited to Hippolytus

to the problem of computing the dates of Passover, in terms of the Julian calendar, from the Exodus to AD 243. The author of the original tract claims to have arrived at his solution, as a Montanist might be expected to do, by divine inspiration. His results were embodied in a Table (pinax) like that found on the statue claimed to be of Hippolytus.

Working on the understanding that the spring equinox on the 25th March was the first day of creation, the author of the Cyprianic form of the text (codex Remensis) points out the parallel that Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, was born on the same weekday, Wednesday, and on the same calendar date, 28th March, that the literal sun was formed (the 4th day of creation):

De Pascha Computus 19: “O quam praeclara et divina Domini providentia, ut in illo die quo factus est sol in ipso die nasceretur Christus V. Kl. Apr. feria IIII. et ideo de ipso merito ad plebem, dicebat Malachias propheta: orietur vobis sol iustitiae, et curatio est in pennis eius.”

“O how admirable and divine is the providence of the Lord, that on that day on which the sun was made on the same day was Christ born, the Vth of the Kalends of April, the 4th day of the week, and so rightly did the prophet Malachi say to the people: ‘the sun of righteousness shall rise upon you, with healing in his wings.’”

Equal emphasis is put on the day of the week, Wednesday, and the calendar date, 28th March, to draw out the typological comparison with the days of creation. These days are numbered according to the Jewish method: the first day of the week (the first day of creation) is Sunday, and the 4th day of the week (the day of the formation of the sun, moon and stars) is Wednesday. The Nativity date 28th March in the Cyprianic text (codex Remensis) is also Passover (defined as the XVth day of the moon), as 2nd April is in the Paschal Tables on the statue claimed to be of Hippolytus. The slight difference in calendar dates for the Nativity is matched by a difference in calendar dates for the Passion. That is dated, not to Passover 25th March in the 16th year of Tiberius, as on the statue, but to Passover, Friday, 9th April, in the same imperial year (De Pascha Computus 9). 9th April in AD 29, however, is astronomically even more remote from the true Passover full moon that year than 25th March. The preceding full moon was 18th March Julian and 9th April falls a third of a lunar month before the next full moon. Historically, therefore, 9th April AD 29 is not a viable date for the Crucifixion. The year is dated (ibid. 22) 215 years before the consulship of Arrianus and Papus (AD 243), which is correctly, if counted inclusively, AD 29. Like the Table on the statue, the author adheres to the Gnosticizing scheme in which Jesus ministered for a single year only, terminating in the 16th year of Tiberius. He is said to have been born and to have died on the Passover, and therefore to have been precisely 31 years of age at His death.

In the Cottonian codex, contrariwise, the birth day 28th March is omitted (the creation equinox being dated in the Alexandrian style to 22nd March) and the Passion is dated to 25th March. The Passion date represents more perfectly the widespread Gnosticizing scheme already referred to. Like Tertullian, the Cottonian codex dates the Passion, following a single year’s ministry, to 25th March in the 16th year of Tiberius, and the Nativity 31 years earlier, i.e. to 2 BC, passing by the calendar date of the latter event.

A consideration — of relevance because of the tract’s Montanist milieu — is that, as the notional date of the spring equinox, March 25th had a special place in the fertility cult of Attis. It was not only the dawn of the season of light, but also, more specifically, the festal day Hilaria, on which the god’s revival of life was celebrated. Here, then, in the Cyprianic chronology of the birth of Jesus we may

detect an attempt to incorporate the Nativity into the annual cycle of the paganizing Montanist liturgy, as the date of the Passion had already been, by identifying the new-born Christ with the Sun, which, in turn, was identified with Attis and was the chief deity in the pagan pantheon.

Solar imagery of the kind employed in the Cyprianic *De Pascha Computus* became more extreme as time went on. It was adopted by the later tradition, at first in the Western, and subsequently in the Eastern, branches of the Church, and molded to new purposes. The birth of the Son of God was now identified with the birth, not the formation, of the sun, or, rather, of the Sun-god, *Sol Invictus*, on the winter solstice date, December 25th (VIII. Kal. Jan.). The post-Nicene Church thus baptized the mixed pagan-Christian festival which had been invented long before by the first-century heretic Cerinthus and the lections for which were the work of the second-century heretic Artemon: this according to the medieval Armenians, who opposed that particular date for the Nativity and adhered to the Oriental 6th January. Ananias of Shirak (fl. c. AD 600-650) reports the tradition that the followers of Cerinthus first separated the Savior's birth (on December 25) from His baptism (on January 6). This is further explained by Paul of Taron (ob. AD 1123) *Adv. Theopistum* 222, who says Artemon calculated the dates of the Annunciation as March 25 and the birth as December 25 ("the birth not, however, of the Divine Being but only of the mere man" according to Artemon's Adoptionist theology), calculating the dates from those of the conception and nativity of John the Baptist (implying the latter was at the summer solstice by his reckoning, with a 6 month interval between, Lk. 1. 26). Earlier traces of a similar tradition are the entry in the 6th century *Liber Pontificalis* (Book of Popes) which ascribes the introduction of the Midnight Mass, and the singing of the *Gloria in Excelsis* on the birthday of the Lord, as well as the 40-day Lenten fast before Easter, to the early second century Bishop of the First Church of Rome, Telesphorus (sub nom.: "hic fecit, ut natalem domini nostri Iesu Christi noctu missas celebrarentur: nam omni tempore ante horae tertiae cursum nullus praesumeret missas celebrare, qua hora dominus noster ascendit crucem; et in ingressu sacrificii hymnus diceretur angelicus, hoc est: Gloria in excelsis deo et cetera, tantum noctu natale domini:" "he [Telesphorus] made services [Latin: missas] to be celebrated by night on the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ [another reading: of the Lord Christ]: the reason being that none should presume to go ahead and celebrate services before the third hour [9 AM], since it is on that hour that our Lord goes up upon the cross; also at the entrance of the sacrifice [another reading: before the sacrifice] the angelic hymn should be recited, that is 'Glory to God in the highest,' etc. only on the night of the birthday of the Lord:" and "hic constituit, ut septem ebdomadas ante pascha ieiunium celebraretur:" "he ordained, that for seven weeks before Pascha a fast should be celebrated."), and the allegation in an early, pre-Nicene source that Artemon's theology was that of all the bishops of the First Church of Rome in the 2nd century BC preceding Victor, which would include Telesphorus (Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.* V. xxviii. 1-3). A key concept of the same theology of Artemon, in its latter-day reincarnation, the Monarchianism of Paul of Samosata, viz. the homoousion, became the watchword of the victorious partisans of Rome in the Council of Nicea. It was, in that case, Artemon's solar date which now supplanted the historical spring Nativity date in the post-Nicene period.

Montanist tract AD 243 (C = Codex Cottonianus), *De Pascha Computus* (R = Codex Remensis):

Date of the Nativity: Passover Wednesday 28th March (R), 2 BC (31 years before the 16th year of Tiberius).

Date of the Crucifixion: Passover Friday 25th March (C), or Passover Friday 9th April (R) AD 29 (16th year of Tiberius).

Eusebius

Though he wrote on the boundary of the Nicene age, Eusebius preserved numerous excerpts and traditions from pre-Nicene writers, particularly those, like the chronographer Africanus, in the circle of Origen. In his *Ecclesiastical History* c. AD 325 (I. v. 2) Eusebius dates the birth of Jesus to the 42nd year of Augustus and the 28th year of his reign in Egypt. Likewise in Jerome's edited translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle* the Nativity is dated to the 42nd year of Augustus. The year is 3/2 BC, using a different method of reckoning Augustus' Roman regnal years than that employed by some earlier Christian chronographers examined here, but the same Egyptian regnal year (Finegan, *op. cit.*, Tables 128, 129, 92, §§ 337, 492).

The following excerpts are from Jerome's edited Latin translation of the original Greek of Eusebius' *Chronicle* (with variations in the Armenian translation of the *Chronicle* introduced by "Ar."). The numbers in square brackets [] are years from Abraham.

Ol. 194.2 {= summer 3 BC to summer 2 BC} [2014] [2008 in Ar.] In addition to the cruelties mentioned above, Herodes killed the husband of his sister Salome, and after he gave her in marriage to another man, he killed him as well. He also murdered the scribes and the interpreters of the holy law.

[not in Ar.] Tertullianus, in his book "Against the Jews", states that Christ was born in the 41st year of Augustus, and suffered in the 15th year of Tiberius.

Ol. 194.3 {= summer 2 BC to summer 1 BC} [2015] Jesus ["Christ" — Ar.], the son of God, was born at Bethlehem in Judaea.

Ol. 194.4 {= summer 1 BC to summer 1 AD} [2016] [2015 in Ar.] Quirinius was sent to Judaea by decree of the senate, to hold a census of the people and their possessions.

[2015 in Ar.] From Abraham up until the birth of Christ, there is a total of 2,015 years.

Immediately following the passage cited earlier from Africanus, Syncellus quotes Eusebius' *Chronicle* verbatim in the original Greek as follows (ed. Mosshammer, 394. 1-11 = ed. Dindorf, 614):

"Jesus Christ ... underwent his passion in the 18th [in the Armenian translation of the *Chronicle* 19th] year of Tiberius [AD 32-33]. Also at that time in another Greek compendium we find an event recorded in these words: "the sun was eclipsed, Bithynia was struck by an earthquake, and in the city of Nicaea many buildings fell." All these things happened to occur during the Lord's passion. In fact, Phlegon, too, a distinguished reckoner of Olympiads, wrote more on these events in his 13th book, saying this: "Now, in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad [summer AD 32 to summer AD 33], a great eclipse [ekleipsis = failure] of the sun occurred at the sixth hour [noon] that excelled every other before it, turning the day into such darkness of night that the stars could be seen in heaven, and the

earth moved in Bithynia, toppling many buildings in the city of Nicaea.”

Eusebius:

Date of the Nativity: 3/2 BC (42nd year of Augustus by his reckoning).

Date of the Crucifixion: Passover (March/April, and in this particular year 3rd April) AD 33.

CONCLUSION

Date of the Nativity:

All agree on a calendar date in April, either 2nd, 19th or 20th, except for one 28th March, which is omitted in the other form of the relevant text, and a second 20th May, which was possibly originally a date for Jesus' conception: all further agree on the year-date 2 BC. The year-date is agreed on by all, heretical and orthodox, but the calendar-date is not attested amongst the orthodox, unless the 2nd April entry in Hippolytus' Commentary on Daniel is original (which is unlikely).

Date of the Crucifixion:

Orthodox: All agree on a year-date of AD 32/33, with the most reliable accepting the precise date that can be deduced from Phlegon's Olympiad entry, April 3rd AD 33.

Heretical or Unidentified (including Gnostic and Montanist): All agree on the year-date AD 29 and most on the calendar-date 25th March (with unique variations: 9th, 14th, 20th April or 21st March).

Therefore, the pre-Nicene year-date of the Nativity may be declared, unanimously, to have been 2 BC, with a tradition preserved in unidentified or heretical circles that the month was April. Considering that the same or similar heretical traditions preserved a near-accurate calendar date for the Crucifixion (March or April in all cases), it is probable that the 2nd April date is not too far off the mark.

The orthodox pre-Nicene date of the Crucifixion may fairly be declared to have been Passover AD 33 (which can be calculated to have fallen at the full moon on 3rd April that year), and its heretical rival

was 25th March AD 29, which did not coincide with, or even fall near to, the Passover full moon that year. The more historically viable date is undoubtedly the first.

Biblical and Other Evidence of the Correctness of the Pre-Nicene Dating

Evidence relating to the date of the Crucifixion is examined in detail in *The First Church of Rome* Appendix 1.

As regards the dating of the Nativity, only one of the calendar dates in April, 2nd April, allows for a normal gestation (of 41 weeks) beginning with a known, traditional, date for the conception which has roots in the pre-Nicene era. The calendar date for the conception is the Jewish day sunset 19th to sunset 20th June 3 BC. This is one of two traditional dates for the conception preserved by Epiphanius of Salamis (*Panarion* LI. xxix), and already referred to, viz., in terms of the Roman calendar, XII Kal. Jun. (21st May) or XII Kal. Jul. (20th June).

A gestation of 38 weeks (266 days = 9 lunar months of 29.5 days each) is standard. In modern times, mortality rates for more prolonged pregnancies are as follows (figures from a study published in AD 1958): 10 out of 1000 newborn infants die at 40 weeks' gestation, 17 out of 1000 at 42 weeks and 50 out of 1000 at 45 weeks. A conception on 20th/21st May 3 BC, with a birth on 19th or 20th April 2 BC, falls outside the range of possible dates, if the gestation was anything near normal. A birth on 2nd April is also a very improbable 46 weeks after the same May date for the conception. However, a gestation of the standard 38 weeks beginning with a conception on 19th/20th June 3 BC would terminate with a birth on 13th March 2 BC and a more prolonged pregnancy would be in its 41st week on 2nd April (but at the outer range of possibility on 19th or 20th April). A slightly prolonged, but still normal, pregnancy of 41 weeks might be expected in the case of a first child born by natural processes to a young mother like Mary. This evidence tends to confirm the birth date of 2nd April.

In fact, Epiphanius preserves two traditions about the length of the gestation. One is quite improbable, that it lasted a mere seven months. This conveniently allows for a birth on Jan. 6th, which accords with the tradition of the Eastern Church: Jan. 6th is 4 days short of seven lunar months (of 29.5 days each), i.e. 202 complete days inclusive, from 19th June in the preceding year. Epiphanius defines the interval in these words — “7 months according to the course of the moon bar 4 days” — which is 202, not 201, complete days, so it is clear he believed the day of conception included 19th June and therefore the traditional date of the conception was really the Jewish day sunset to sunset 19th/20th June, rather than 20th June per se.

This improbable tradition is paired in Epiphanius with a much more probable one, and that defines the duration of the pregnancy as “10 months bar 14 days and 8 hours,” i.e. 41 weeks, the exact period identified by other evidence as the one which fits the traditional dates of the conception and birth. The unnamed adherents of this tradition looked to a verse in the book called the “Wisdom of Solomon” as scriptural proof of their calculation, in which Solomon (the lesser son of David) speaks of himself in his mother's womb as “congealed in blood in a ten-month period” (*Wisdom* 7. 2). Epiphanius makes no mention of the “course of the moon” when he cites this other tradition and the “Wisdom of Solomon” is of Alexandrian derivation, therefore it is likely the months here are the standard Egyptian solar months of 30 days each. The starting-point is, presumably, the same as in the preceding

calculation, 19th/20th June, and the period of gestation comprises, at 30 days per month, 286 complete days. 286 days from 20th June 3 BC terminate on April 2nd 2 BC, and this, therefore, may be presumed to have been the preferred birth-date in this tradition also.

It has been held contrariwise that the months here are lunar months of 29.5 days each because Epiphanius defines the period in two ways: first as “10 months bar 14 days and 8 hours” — which seems to be the tradition as Epiphanius received it, expressed in full months minus so many days, like the other gestation tradition — then “so as to comprise 9 months 15 days 4 hours” — which may be Epiphanius’ restatement of the period. The latter phrase has been taken (Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 1998, §559) to indicate that the last month was 29 days 12 hours long, and therefore that lunar months were the basis of the calculation. The period of gestation would then have comprised 281 complete days from June 20th 3 BC terminating on 28th March 2 BC — which seems to provide an explanation for that birth date in the Cyprianic *De Pascha Computus*. The birth still fell within the 41st week. This may have been Epiphanius’ understanding of the tradition. However, for the reasons stated concerning the phraseology of the passage and the better accreditation otherwise of 2nd April, the reckoning of the months as standard Egyptian solar months is preferable.

In the Gospel of Luke the Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus is dated to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist (Lk. 1. 26, 36). The Annunciation was on or near the day of the conception of Jesus, as it was around three months thereafter that John was born (Lk. 1. 56), and if the conception of Jesus was indeed on the Jewish day sunset 19th to sunset 20th June 3 BC, then the conception of John the Baptist was some time in December 4 BC.

It is possible to check this date for the conception of John against other data provided by the Gospel of Luke. The conception of John followed promptly upon an angelic visitation which occurred when his father’s priestly course, the course of the family Abijah, was on duty in the Temple at Jerusalem. Every priestly family served on rota for one week in the Temple. The angel is said to have appeared to John’s father, Zechariah, at some point during the (7) “days” of his course, and then Zechariah returned home and John is said to have been conceived “after these days.” John’s mother then retired in seclusion for “five months.” The contrast in the wording of the relevant passage between “days” and “months” suggests that the conception of John followed less than a single month after the angelic visitation. Of the two most likely schemes dating the periods of the priestly rota, the one favored by Finegan (*Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 1998, §472) places the week of ministry of the course of Abijah in November, the 10th to the 17th (Heshvan 17-24) 4 BC. That would place the conception of John no later than around the second week of December 4 BC. In the sixth month from then and not later, therefore, than around the second week of June occurred the Annunciation by Gabriel to Mary of the birth of Jesus. The conception of Jesus, as already pointed out, followed immediately upon or within a short interval subsequent to the Annunciation, since Mary thereafter visited John’s mother in Judaea and John was born three months after that episode. Allowing for the possibility of a late delivery of the infant John, up to, say, 42 weeks or 4 weeks beyond term, the most probable time for the conception of Jesus was within 4 weeks of the second week of June. The date 19th/20th June falls precisely within that time frame.

Summary of Dates:

Course of Abijah and Angelic Visitation to Zechariah: between November 10th and 17th 4 BC.

Conception of John, the Baptist early December 4 BC.

Annunciation of Gabriel to Mary, early June 3 BC.

Conception of Jesus sunset 19th to sunset 20th June 3 BC.

Birth of John the Baptist around September 3 BC.

Birth of Jesus 2nd April 2 BC.

Death of Jesus April 3rd AD 33.