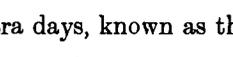


SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE EGYPTIAN CALENDARS OF LUCKY AND UNLUCKY DAYS

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With Plate xlv

At the present day there are many persons who believe the 13th to be the unluckiest day of the month, and Friday the unluckiest of the week. In many places, moreover, the 29th of February in Leap Year is believed to be unpropitious. Beliefs in lucky and unlucky days are very ancient and have a wide geographical distribution, and in Egypt we have evidence that every day in the year was classified as good or bad, or as partly good and partly bad. Many days in the year were the anniversaries of various events in the mythological history of the gods, and thus acquired a happy or an unhappy reputation according to the nature of the event commemorated.

We need not here go into any detail as to the nomenclature employed in Egyptian dating, but may merely repeat the well-known fact that the year was divided into three seasons of four months each. These months were each of thirty days, making 360 in all, and from very early times five extra days, known as the  "the five days over and above the year"¹ or the Epagomenal Days, were interpolated between the last day of the old year and the first day of the new, in order to bring the vague civil year into line with the solar year of 365 days. This equation, of course, was not accurate, for in every fourth year the civil year was almost one day shorter than the solar year, which in course of time with cumulative error threw all reckoning out of gear. This aspect of the question, and the steps which were taken to correct it, likewise do not now concern us, but we will merely confine ourselves to the statement that in the year of 365 days each day had its calendrical name, as with us. The three seasons were , 'Akhet (Inundation), , Prøet (Spring), and , Shōmu (Harvest). In dated documents of Pharaonic times the months were cited by their numbers, *i.e.* 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th month of each respective season. If they had names in ancient times, these names were not used in dates. Under the Copts and the Greeks the months were referred to by their names. These names were derived from the principal festivals which fell in each month: some betray their origin at a glance, *e.g.* Thoth, Hathyr, Pachons, and most of the others are scarcely less transparent, *e.g.* Paophi (Opet), Khoiak (*k'-hr-k'*), Phamenoth (Amenophis), Pharmuthi (the harvest-goddess Ernütet), Mesore (birthday of Rē^c), etc.

The first day of the month of Thoth was New Year's Day, although there is evidence that the New Year was reckoned from other dates at certain periods². This, however, does not concern us at the moment, and what has been said above is merely to summarise the usual nomenclature of the days of the year.

Now for the Egyptians every day of the year had its significance, and calendars were drawn up in which each was enumerated in turn and described as lucky or unlucky, or as

¹ *Pyr.* 1961; *Pap. Leyden* 346. 2, 5 *et passim.*

² GARDINER, *Zeitschr. f. äg. Spr.*, XLIII, 136 ff.

good or bad. Two such calendars are preserved in papyri in the British Museum. The first of these is the well-known Papyrus Sallier No. IV, which was long ago the subject of an interesting brochure by Chabas, and to which we will hereafter refer as S.¹ The other is written on the verso of the Budge Papyrus, the recto of which contains the literary text known as the Precepts of Amenemôpe²: this will be cited as B. A fragment of a third calendar of the same type found at El-Lahûn (Kahun) was published by Griffith³: cited as K. In these calendars, for the purpose of designating a day as good or bad, each date was labelled with the sign \uparrow or \curvearrowright respectively, the "good" sign being always written in black ink, and the "bad" sign in red. K. uses only the sign \curvearrowright for "bad," but S. usually replaces this by \curvearrowleft and sometimes by \uparrow . The former of these is clearly a corruption of \curvearrowright ⁴. B. employs only the sign \uparrow . A day might be entirely good, entirely bad, or partly good and partly bad. For good days the notation in K. is simply \uparrow , for bad \curvearrowright , and for mixed days $\uparrow\curvearrowright$ (the converse $\curvearrowright\uparrow$ does not occur). In S. and B. each day is considered as consisting of three equal parts, and a wholly good day is accordingly labelled $\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow$, and a wholly bad day $\curvearrowright\curvearrowright\curvearrowright$. A day of which the first two-thirds was good and the evening bad, was marked $\uparrow\uparrow\curvearrowright$, and so on. In the accompanying plate, and henceforth in this article, the formulae are expressed in English letters: GGG, BBB, GGB, etc.

These three calendars cannot be compared as equal with equal. They belong to widely separated periods, K. being of Twelfth Dynasty date, S. of Nineteenth and B. of Twenty-first, or even later. The first-named comes from the Fayyûm, where it is possible that considerable differences in the observation of feast-days might have obtained as compared with the corresponding events at Thebes, from whence the two other documents hail, even if they were contemporary in date. Moreover K. is a mere fragment, and contains one month only, although it has its thirty entries complete⁵. S. is a school-book, and, as might be expected, the text abounds in errors and corruptions. Presumably it was originally complete, but in its present state the first eighteen days of the month of Thoth are lost from the beginning, and the last nineteen days of Pachons and the whole of the months of Payni, Epiphi and Mesore are missing from the end, as are also the Epagomenal Days, if they were ever included. B. is quite complete for each day of the twelve months, but the Epagomenal Days are not included. It consists of twelve columns of consecutive monthly dates, each marked with its "good" or "bad" notation, but without any explanatory text. S., on the other hand, usually states some mythological event connected with the date from

¹ Brit. Mus. 10,184 recto. First published in lithographic facsimile in *Select Papyri*, Pls. 144 ff. Republished in colotype in *Hieratic Papyri Brit. Mus.* (2nd ser.), Pls. 88 ff. CHABAS, *Le calendrier des jours fastes et néfastes*, Chalons-sur-Saône, 1870: reprinted in *Œuvres diverses*, II, 127-235.

² Brit. Mus. 10,474 verso. Facsimile in *Hieratic Papyri Brit. Mus.* (1st ser.), Pls. 31-32. The recto is published in *op. cit.* (2nd ser.), Pls. 1 ff.

³ *Hieratic Papyri from Kahun and Gurob*, Pl. 25.

⁴ Cf. *Pap. Sallier IV*, 2; *Pap. Leyden 346*, 2, 7 and 3, 1; MÖLLER, *Paläographie*, II, Nos. 113 and 320.

⁵ In S. sometimes $\curvearrowleft\curvearrowleft\curvearrowleft$ or $\curvearrowleft\uparrow\uparrow$.

⁶ It is not possible to identify the month represented by K., as the entries do not correspond with those of any month in S. or B.

which the day derives its good or bad character. Besides this, there is often an injunction as to procedure on the day, such as: "go not forth from thy house on this day," "do no work on this day," or "burn no incense on this day"; and sometimes a forecast of the fate of those whose birthday falls upon that date: "whoever is born on this day will die of old age," or "whoever is born on this day will die of plague," etc. From the nature of the context the character of the day is usually apparent, and by this means we are often enabled to correct the palpable errors of the scribe, who, for instance, sometimes writes GGG against a date, which, from its text, is clearly a very bad one, or even omits the notation altogether¹. From what remains of the context we can often restore, in damaged passages, the notation of the days which are lost in lacunae, and from the sizes of lacunae themselves we can often restore the notation with confidence.

In the accompanying Plate xlv, the contents of the three calendars are set out in tabular form to facilitate comparison. In the case of B. the actual notation as stated in the papyrus is given in every instance (a few orthographic corrections are noted at the foot of the plate); but as regards S., I have emended a number of entries where the context or other indications seems to demand such alteration. By this means the two calendars are brought into closer harmony, and they do not differ so widely as would appear at first sight from a comparison of the manuscripts themselves. For the dates whose entries, after every legitimate emendation has been made, wholly or partly disagree, no explanation can be given, since B. has no explanatory text to account for the classification. Having in mind the nature of the two documents, one naturally feels more confidence in B. than in S., but until another complete calendar is discovered, the claims of neither can be vindicated. The entries in S. which I have emended are marked in the plate with a dot, and are as follows:

- Thoth 20, 22, 23. Written GGG, but BBB evidently or probably required by the context.
- Paophi 4. Last sign lost in lacuna, which is, however, too large for G.
- Paophi 15. Chabas reads the first sign as B. Restoration to G seems certain, and is consistent with context.
- Paophi 20. Written BBB, but there is nothing in the text to warrant it.
- Paophi 26. Written GGG, but prohibition of work, etc., in the text calls for BBB.
- Paophi 29. Lost in lacuna, but lacuna not big enough for BBB.
- Hathyr 6. Not stated, but GGG required by context.
- Hathyr 12 and 13. Lost in lacunae: the debris of the text seems to require G rather than B.
- Hathyr 18. Written GGG, but context better suits BBB.
- Hathyr 22. Not stated, but GGG required by context.
- Hathyr 29. GGG should apparently be read in the Budge calendar, see note 2 on plate.
- Khoiak 19. Written GBB, but as the G is in *red*, BBB evidently meant.
- Khoiak 25. The whole entry for this day has been omitted by the scribe.
- Tybi 26. Written BBB, but context suits GBB.
- Mechir 12. Not stated, but GGG required by context.
- Mechir 29. Written BBG, but context requires BBB.
- Phamenoth 17. Written GGG, but context better suits BBB.
- Pharmuthi 5 and 6. Perhaps these two entries have been transposed, but I have not altered them.

¹ *E.g.* Hathyr 6 and 22 and Mechir 12.

Pharmuthi 9. Written BBB, but context suits GGB.

Pharmuthi 23. Written BBG, but there is nothing in the text to justify the BB.

Pharmuthi 30. Lost, but context requires GGG.

Pachons 2. Almost entirely lost in lacuna, but such tiny traces as remain appear to be written in red.

Now B. and S. correspond for a period of 233 days, from which we must deduct two days, because in S. Thoth 21 is entirely lost, and Khoiak 25 was carelessly omitted by the scribe: the calendars are therefore comparable for a period of 231 days. If the above specified emendations are admitted, this comparison gives the following results:

In complete agreement	176 days, or 76 per cent. ¹
In partial agreement	26 " 11 "
In complete disagreement	29 " 13 "
	<u>231</u> " <u>100</u> "

Taking B. as the basis, because complete, out of the three hundred and sixty days tabulated, the following are the proportions of good and bad days in the year:

Entirely good days	190 or 53 per cent.
Entirely bad days	132 " 36 "
Mixed days	38 " 11 "
	<u>360</u> " <u>100</u> "

The Epagomenal Days, as we know from other evidence, were all bad days, and were fraught with such manifold dangers that special incantations were devised for protection on those days, and upon them no work was to be done². Therefore, out of the total of the 365 days of the year, bad elements entered wholly or partly into no fewer than 175, or nearly half the total. It will be observed that the first day of every month in all three of the calendars was GGG, and likewise the last, except in the month of Mechir.

The following table gives an analysis of the proportions of good, bad and mixed days in the calendar B.:

Month	Good	Bad	Mixed
Thoth	14	9	7
Paophi	16	10	4
Hathyr	21	7	2
Khoiak	14	13	3
Tybi	15	7	8
Mechir	14	7	9
Phamenoth	15	15	0
Pharmuthi	13	15	2
Pachons	15	14	1
Payni	17	12	1
Epiphi	17	13	0
Mesore	19	10	1

¹ These percentages are taken to the nearest unit, and disregard decimal points.

² *Pap. Leyden* 346. A calendar of the days themselves, somewhat analogous to the entries in S., is interpolated into the magical text, 2. 7—3. 2. Some of the days are marked with the sign , but all of them are "bad."

It is not within the scope of this article to enquire into the mythological or other circumstances which gave the days their lucky or unlucky character, nor to seek evidence as to whether the injunctions specified in the Sallier calendar were put into actual practice or not¹. I have merely aimed at tabulating the contents of the existing calendars as a necessary piece of preliminary "spade-work" to a fuller study of them.

¹ As a rough and ready test, I selected all the days with regard to which S. has the entry "do no work upon this day," and attempted to apply them to the *Papyrus Chabas-Lieblein* at Turin, which is a diary recording the days upon which the workmen of the Theban Necropolis were respectively idle or at work. Unfortunately, however, the entries for nearly all those days were either missing or destroyed in the Turin papyrus. A great deal of material exists, however, at Turin and elsewhere, for a fuller enquiry into the subject.