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participants, as we have seen; and both orations dwell on the luxury of the market and its nocturnal illumination in terms that recall Libanius's description and John's censure of Antioch during the Kalends. St. Stephen's festival had a market whose "stalls that have been exceedingly well built with olive branches and colorful cloth of gold and silver match the abundance and luxury of the goods," and the illumination was nothing but spectacular: "Everywhere flames in glass containers [...] . . . that make the night compete with the day." The human craving not just for community and the rituals that shape it, but for moments of communal luxuriance, has been stronger than any episcopal censure and deterrence.

## The Kalends in Byzantium, 400–1200 AD: A New Interpretation

Anthony KALDELLIS

The celebrations of ancient Roman kalends survive, albeit dimly, in Greece today in the form of carols (*ta kalanta*) that are sung by children mainly on Christmas, New Year, and the Theophany (or Epiphany: 6 January). In exchange, they are now given cash. Other symbolic actions, varying from region to region, are also performed by households at this time to ensure good fortune for the coming year.<sup>1</sup> Before the population exchange between Greece and Turkey (1923), these traditions were practiced throughout the lands of the former Byzantine empire, indicating that they derived from an established and widespread Byzantine custom, which was probably also characterized by regional variation. This custom, in turn, was a descendant of the ancient Roman festival of the kalends of January, which was adapted by the Greek East in the period of late antiquity (roughly 300–600 AD). Even though the kalends have changed so that an ancient Roman would recognize in the modern version little more than the name and date, we are still dealing with a continuous history of 2,500 years, marked by slow change and adaptation. For example, New Year's is also, according to the tradition of the Church, the feast day of St. Basileios of Kaisareia (ca. 329–379), one of the most important Church Fathers for the promotion of monasticism, Orthodoxy, and literary education, and so some of the *kalanta* carols are about him. St. Basileios has also become the Greek equivalent of Santa Claus: in Greece the jolly character who brings the gifts to children, the one who was redesigned by Coca Cola, is Hagios Basileios (or Ai Vasilis), and is known only by that name (Santa Claus is not a household name). This has resulted in a mixed conception: the saint comes from Kaisareia according to the *kalanta* tradition but also from the North Pole in the new capitalist conception of Christmas, and thus he is a figure who simultaneously occupies two different sites of modern culture.

<sup>1</sup> I thank my colleague Tom Hawkins for his valuable suggestions and Charis Messis whose careful reading saved me from two critical errors (and who would have saved me from another). – G. A. Megas, *Ελληνικές γιορτές και έθιμα της λαϊκής λατρείας* (Athens: Odysseus, 1998), 59–79 (demotic version of the 1956 original in *katharevousa*); summary English trans. as *Greek Calendar Customs* (Athens: Press and Information Department, Prime Minister's Office, 1958), 37–48.

The evidence for the kalends celebrations between 400 and 1200 AD, the period that will be discussed here, is sparse and so we cannot track or explore its evolving religious and social nuances in any depth. Nor do we have for any one moment in that long period a concentration of textual evidence comparable to that which is studied in the contributions of my colleagues on the kalends in the fourth century AD (see the two previous papers).<sup>2</sup> In the mid-twelfth century, the scholar Ioannes Tzetzes (ca. 1110–1180) included a section on “wandering vagabonds (ἀγύρται)” in his massive commentary on his own letters known as the *Histories*. First he talks about the gradual corruption of athletes in antiquity, who at first would compete for honor, not money, but as they began to win prizes and receive gifts they evolved into people who went around collecting money. He then turns to contemporary parallels:

such as are among us all the wandering priests  
who roam across the land and beg for more  
at the beginning of the month of January  
and the birth of Christ and the day of Epiphany,  
all who knock on our doors begging for more  
by song or charm or word of praise.<sup>3</sup>

These verses confirm the continuity of the kalends celebration on key points between the twelfth and the twenty-first centuries, in that people would knock on doors and receive gifts in exchange for singing and blessing the household. These activities were, moreover, not limited to 1 January but had been extended already by the twelfth century to Christmas and the day of Epiphany. We should also notice, however, the different social dynamics: a tradition carried on today by children was associated by Tzetzes with wandering priests and beggars (we should not try to be more precise about the meaning of *μηναγύρται* here).<sup>4</sup>

One seven-century jump deserves another. Our fullest evidence for the kalends in the years right after Libanios (314–ca. 394) and John Chrysostom (ca. 345–407), who were discussed in the previous two papers, comes from a short sermon by Asterios (ca. 335–423), bishop of Amaseia (in Asia Minor, on

the Black Sea coast). This sermon, dated to the year 400, denounces the kalends, thereby allowing us to glean some insight into the customs involved.<sup>5</sup> The festival began on 1 January, when the consuls took office, and lasted for five days. There were salutations, kisses in greeting, and presents. The latter were either gifts or cash, but Asterios highlights the monetary side so as to condemn what he takes to be the mercantile aspect of the festival. He thinks this gift-giving fell short of the virtue of charity and was not offered in that spirit. Given that his primary grievance is that most people participated in the kalends rather than going to Christmas and Epiphany masses, it is amusing that many of his complaints could well be used by anti-Christmas grinchers today: the gifts were not voluntary but enforced; many presents were regifted; and the festival caused overall depression rather than merriment.<sup>6</sup> As for the festivities themselves, Asterios’ description roughly matches that of Tzetzes’ for the twelfth century, only indicating a broader popular participation and public character for the festival. He says that “common vagabonds (ἀγύρται) and stage performers” descended upon every house. On the pretext of blessing, they even harassed public buildings until the officials inside paid them to leave, and they went about this all night. Priests were mocked and soldiers dressed like women and sang in female voices. So the ancient carnival spirit was still alive in 400. In fact, it is not clear when the carnival aspect split off from the kalends festival and became self-subsisting in the period before Lent (modern Greek *Apokries*), but probably this happened after 1200.<sup>7</sup>

Asterios adds that children also took part in this fun, going from home to home offering novel gifts such as fruit wrapped in tinsel, only expecting to receive twice the value in return (which, in his view, only taught them to be greedy). This reference to children indicates that we should probably not take Tzetzes’ verses quoted above to be a complete account of the festivities as they were in the twelfth century (Tzetzes, we recall, refers only to priests or vagabonds). The prominent participation of children was probably a constant of the festival from the era of Asterios to the present, and in fact it probably gained in importance as the carnival aspect of the kalends retreated after 1200, until it finally became dominant: the play of children finally eclipsed or even replaced the ludic carnival of the adults.

Asterios’ sermon has been interpreted as a Christian response to Libanios’ defense and praise of the kalends which, Graf argues, was itself a pagan response

2 Phaidon Koukoules’ encyclopedic entry is based almost exclusively on the fourth-century evidence: *Βυζαντινῶν βίος καὶ πολιτισμός* (Athens: Ekdoseis Papazese, 1948), vol. 2, pt. 1: 13–19. N. G. Polites, *Μελέται περὶ τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς γλώσσης τοῦ ἑλληνικοῦ λαοῦ: Παραδόσεις*, vol. 2 (Athens: Sakellariou, 1904), 1267–1271, includes some twelfth-century evidence. The standard history of the kalends in the early empire is Michel Meslin, *La fête des kalendes de janvier dans l’empire romain: Étude d’un rituel de Nouvel An*. Collection Latomus 115 (Brussels: Latomus, 1970), whose discussion of the later empire focuses on the Latin West.

3 Ioannes Tzetzes, *Histories* 13.239–244 in P. Leone, ed., *Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae* (Naples: Libreria Scientifica Editrice, 1968), 523.

4 Cf. the change in Christmas gift-giving in the USA between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries: what used to be a communal event that stressed charity is now largely domesticated and nuclear-family oriented.

5 Asterios of Amaseia, *Homily 4 against the Kalends* in C. Datema, ed., *Asterius of Amaseia: Homilies I–XIV* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 39–43; translated into English by G. Anderson and E. J. Goodspeed, *Ancient Sermons for Modern Times* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1904).

6 Cf. T. Flynn, *The Trouble with Christmas* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993).

7 Little has been written on this. See Koukoules, *Βυζαντινῶν βίος καὶ πολιτισμός*, vol. 6: 155–158.

to the attack against the festival by John Chrysostom.<sup>8</sup> If Asterios was in fact born between 330 and 335, he would have been slightly younger than Libanios and slightly older than John, and if indeed he had studied rhetoric in Antioch it is possible that he knew the two personally. (In fact, it is not clear that Asterios' text should necessarily be read as a "sermon." It may well be a rhetorical exercise in invective, a *psogos*, a reversal and response to Libanios' *enkomion* of the festival.) Yet all three men were obviously out of touch with popular sentiment. Writing in the last decade of the fourth century, at precisely the time, that is, when Christians began to outnumber pagans, Libanios claimed that the kalends were a religious event in honor of a great *daimon*. In his separate *ekphrasis* of the New Year's celebration, he anachronistically claimed that those who were raising the horses for the races "sacrificed and asked for victory from the gods."<sup>9</sup> These were the years when Libanios felt acutely that his religion was being threatened and wrote the *Defense of the Temples*. By highlighting the kalends' religious aspect, he emphasized to a largely Christian society that the festivals and other pleasures of life which they took for granted were really pagan in essence (as those who do not like Christmas today insist on its pagan aspects, precisely to discomfit Christians). Libanios made a similar argument with regard to his own profession, the study of letters, claiming that it too was linked to the worship of the gods.<sup>10</sup> Yet whatever the facts of the matter, this was hollow rhetoric. Christians could apparently celebrate a festival whose origin was pagan but which had long since become thoroughly integrated into secular social and civic life; they were not worried about this.<sup>11</sup>

The same social logic, however, cut equally against Chrysostom and Asterios, who vainly thundered against the habits of their flocks. Chrysostom had objected to the festival's pagan nature and to its immorality, which in his mind were linked. But his moralizing strictures were, as usual, so extreme that they reflected the views of few Christians, even of his own congregation. The conclusion can easily be drawn from his many other sermons that in general he failed to persuade his audience to accept his strict interpretation of the Christian

life.<sup>12</sup> The majority of Christians apparently had no trouble participating in the festival even when they were being told by orators on both sides of the religious divide that it was essentially pagan, and they were probably more likely to participate in this quasi-pagan festival than go to church on those days or try to be pious. It is unlikely that in the year 400 many people, whether pagans or Christians, viewed the kalends as a particularly religious celebration. There is reason to believe, we will see, that Christian priests also willingly took part in them.

This is where Asterios' approach becomes interesting, because it reflects a different strategy for responding to the challenge posed by the kalends. Unlike preachers in the West, who fulminated against the pagan nature of the festival, thereby distorting what Christians were actually doing (having fun),<sup>13</sup> Asterios plays down the religious aspect and highlights the moral damage done by the festival. He avoids branding it as pagan. He does admit at the beginning of the sermon that the festivities originated "outside" (a code word for pagan) and so did not belong in the life of the Church but, on the other hand, unlike John, he does not brand it or its celebrants as pagan. Asterios was here engaging in moral rather than religious polemic. The kalends were no longer an aspect of the struggle against paganism but a problem internal to the Christian city, part of the background immorality of civic and social life. The festival was non-Christian in the abstract sense that it promoted greed, vanity, and licentiousness. By renouncing John's polemical albeit theological clarity, Asterios subtly shifted the terms of the debate, probably because he did not want to deploy the rhetorical trope of paganism in addressing a city that was more self-confidently Christian. Chrysostom, in a city that was still about half-and-half, could blast away at the temptations posed by paganism because the Other was just outside the doors and ready to corrupt. But this position became more and more difficult to maintain. What Asterios lost in the process, on the other hand, was clarity regarding the nature of the festival. That is why he even goes so far as to admit that "it is not clear what exactly is being celebrated these days. There are many myths about the matter, but each refutes the other and probably none are true." In this sense, Libanios and John were closer to each other than to Asterios; they, at least, agreed on the pagan nature of the kalends (except that Libanios championed their demotic and worldly pleasures). With Asterios the kalends had in effect become an internal Christian problem, only its exact terms had still to be worked out. In sum, the ongoing debate among these three

8 Datema, *Asterius of Amasea*, 229; Graf, previous paper in this volume.

9 Libanios, *Ekphrasis* 5.8; text and trans. C. A. Gibson, *Libanios's Progymnasmata: Model Exercises in Greek Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta, Society for Biblical Literature, 2008), 438–439.

10 E.g., Libanios, *Or.* 62.8.

11 For the kalends in the late antique Christian calendar, see R. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 103–106; M. R. Salzman, *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 79–83.

12 J. Maxwell, "Lay Piety in the Sermons of John Chrysostom," in D. Krueger, ed., *Byzantine Christianity: A People's History of Christianity* 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 19–38.

13 A. Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 787–788.

contemporary orators, who seem to be responding directly to each other's works, indicates that in the years leading up to 400 the kalends had become a flash point of controversy for both religious conflict between pagans and Christians and also moral censure within the Church.

The Church, then, or least some of its representatives, objected to the continued celebration of these festivals. The history of the kalends and of other Roman festivals in Byzantium has in fact usually been seen against the background of the Church's attempts to suppress pagan survivals. Homilists such as Chrysostom and Asterios are supposed to have provided the "theoretical" justification that the Councils then enacted in the form of canonical decisions, in this case the Quinisext Council in Trullo (of 691–692 AD). But I will argue that we should not give the hard-liners of the Council such prominence in our reconstruction of the festival's history, as no one later in Byzantium seems to have done so either. That Council does indeed attempt to ban in one of its canons (62) the "so-called kalends, the so-called vota, and the so-called brumalia," the May Day celebrations, and a range of other pagan or paganizing practices (see below).<sup>14</sup> "Once and for all we desire that they be removed from the life (*politeia*) of the faithful." The canon does not give any specific justification to explain the prohibition of the festivals. It then goes on to ban the public dancing of women as being indecent along with all dancing, whether performed by men or women, that was in honor of the entities falsely called gods by the Greeks as well as any ancient ritual that was alien to the life of the Christian community. Here at least reasons are offered, namely indecency and pagan associations. But for the festivals listed at the canon's outset no explanation is offered. We recall that Asterios does not attack the kalends primarily as a "pagan" problem. Are the dances and all that follows in the canon (introduced by *ἐν μὴν καὶ*) an addendum or a clarification of the ban on the festivals? Be that as it may, the canon concludes by decreeing that men must not wear female clothing or vice versa. Tragic, satyric, and comic acting must be banned along with calling on the name of Dionysos in the making and pouring

of wine, all on pain of excommunication for the laity and of deposition for the clergy.<sup>15</sup> This again indicates that priests were commonly participating in these events, probably because they saw nothing in them that was incompatible with Christianity.

The canon takes aim at a hodge-podge of practices of which its framers, who were hard-liners and reactionaries, disapproved. They named four offending festivals and then listed a number of other customs that may (or may not) have been practiced at the time of those festivals. Dancing and cross-dressing may have been part of the kalends (or of the other festivals), but vintage customs cannot have had anything to do with them. This means that the canon lacks an underlying and coordinating logic. Like buck-shot, it targets popular celebrations, in which thousands if not millions of people participated and engaged in a wide variety of otherwise socially accepted activities (with the sanction of the secular authorities), along with other more or less specific activities that may or may not have been associated with those celebrations. One can see what troubled the Fathers about the female dancing, the dances in honor of the gods, the cross-dressing, and the calling on the name of Dionysos, but they give no specific explanation for their attempt to ban the festivals mentioned in the first line of the canon, and one suspects they would have been hard pressed to offer any such explanation. Their vagueness must have made that part of the canon difficult to enforce, assuming that anyone was minded to do so in the first place. In fact, it seems never to have been enforced, as is borne out by the evidence for the later centuries. Besides, canon law was for the purpose of Church administration and legally binding only on what canon 62 calls the *politeia* (community) of the faithful, not on Roman society at large unless the secular authorities (basically, the emperor) decided to validate and enforce them. Canon 62 was not made into law by any subsequent emperor, especially not by Leon VI, who gave legal force to many Council canons that had not previously received it – or modified them as he saw fit as supreme legislator.<sup>16</sup> No emperor ever gave legal power to the extreme propositions that begin canon 62, in part because the emperors were implicated in the celebrations themselves. In

14 F. Lauchert, *Die Kanones der wichtigsten altkirchlichen Concilien nebst den apostolischen Kanones* (Freiburg and Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr, 1896), 97–139 for the Quinisext, 126 for canon 62; for the text, trans., and commentaries, see also G. Nedungatt and M. Featherstone, *The Council in Trullo Revisited* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1995). For various aspects of the council, see H. Ohme, *Das Concilium Quinisextum und seine Bischofsliste: Studien zum Konstantinopeler Konzil von 692* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1999); S. Troianos, *Ἡ Πενθέκτη Οἰκουμένη Σύνοδος καὶ τὸ νομοθετικὸ τῆς ἔργου* (Athens: Ekklesiastikon Epistemonikon kai Morphotikon Hidryma Ioannou kai Eriettes Gregoriadou, 1992); J. Herrin, "Femina Byzantina": The Council in Trullo on Women," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992): 97–102; G. Dagron, "L'Église et la chrétienté byzantines entre les invasions et l'iconoclasme (VII<sup>e</sup>–début VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)," in J.-M. Mayeur et al., eds., *Histoire du Christianisme des origines à nos jours*, vol. 4: *Evêques, moines et empereurs (610–1054)* (Paris: Desclée, 1993), 9–91, here 60–69.

15 For canon 62, see I. Rochow, "Zu 'heidnische' Bräuchen bei der Bevölkerung des byzantinischen Reiches im 7. Jahrhunderts, vor allem auf Grund der Bestimmungen des Trullanum," *Klio* 60 (1978), 483–497; F. R. Trombley, "The Council in Trullo (691–692): A Study of the Canons Relating to Paganism, Heresy, and the Invasions," *Comitatus* 9 (1978), 1–18.

16 S. N. Troianos, *Οἱ Νεαρές Λέοντος ε' τοῦ Σοφοῦ* (Athens: Ekdoseis Herodotos, 2007), 28, 464–466, 469–483, citing previous bibliography; also idem, *Οἱ πηγές του βυζαντινοῦ δικαίου* (Athens and Komitini: Ekdoseis A. N. Sakdoula, 1999), 148–151; and R. Macrides, "Nomos and Kanon on Paper and in Court," in R. Morris, ed., *Church and People in Byzantium* (Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies, University of Birmingham, 1990), 61–85, esp. 64–65.

practice, most of canon 62 had little authority to regulate Byzantine society, and so did not do so. We note again that the only penalties associated with breaking the canon were ecclesiastical (excommunication); the secular authorities had no right to impose any penalty on "violators."

The festivals were popular and no longer had anything to do with paganism, at least not overtly. They expressed a ritual affirmation of social relationships, reciprocities, and hierarchies, and secular officials, most prominently the emperor, participated in them. This is shown by texts that both precede and follow the Council in Trullo. In the sixth century, for example, the pagan antiquarian Ioannes Lydos stated that the Church "shrinks away from" the brumalia, calling them Kronia (i.e., associating them with Kronos), but we know that the festival was nonetheless celebrated by the entire populace and lavishly sponsored by an emperor no less Christian than Justinian.<sup>17</sup> The early ninth-century *Life of Saint Stephanos the Younger* repeatedly notes that Konstantinos V celebrated the "pagan" brumalia (the emperor reigned in the mid-eighth century).<sup>18</sup> Of course, most or even all emperors, including those whom the author of this text would have approved, celebrated the brumalia, so this attack was being deployed here *ad hominem* against an iconoclast emperor. In short, for all that the emperors liked to posture as defenders of the faith and enforcers of the canons, there was in this case a clear disconnect between the episcopal hard-liners who condemned the festivals and what imperial officials were willing to do. The same was true in general for the games, the theater, and the mimes. It is likely, then, that the bishops in Trullo were simply never authorized to impose such sweeping and unpopular bans. They were free to express their displeasure, as homilists had done for centuries. They may have even attempted to ban some of the specific activities that took place during these festivals (along with others that were not), but this could really only have been done through the preaching that they did in church, usually an ineffective means of either persuasion or enforcement. In other words, these ecclesiastical

17 M. Maas, *John Lydos and the Roman Past: Antiquarianism and Politics in the Age of Justinian* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 64–66. The text is Ioannes Lydos, *On the Months* 4.148; R. Wuensch, ed., *Ioannis Laurentii Lydi Liber de mensibus* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898), 174. See A.-M. Bernardi, "Regards croisés sur les origines de Rome: La fête des Brumalia chez Jean Malalas et Jean Lydos," in S. Augusta-Boularot et al., eds., *Recherches sur la Chronique de Jean Malalas*, vol. 2 (Paris: Collège de France, 2006), 53–67, here 61 n. 58. For Lydos, see more below.

18 Stephanos the Deacon, *The Life of Saint Stephanos the Younger* 63, 65, 73; M.-F. Auzépy, ed. and trans., *La vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le diacre*. Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 165, 167, 172, with commentary on 262–263; also E. Bolognesi Recchi Franceschini, "Winter in the Great Palace: The Persistence of Pagan Festivals in Christian Byzantium," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995), 117–132, here 127–130.

sources for the kalends were written by minorities powerless to change what the majority of the people, including the emperors, were doing and enjoying.

We may now turn from one fringe element to its opposite, which contributed a different way of thinking about the Roman festivals. Our chief ancient sources for the kalends are Ovid and Macrobius (early fifth-century West),<sup>19</sup> but both wrote in Latin and so were not directly accessible to the later Byzantine tradition. Still, interpretations of the festivals (or their names) that drew upon ancient traditions were reflected in two early Byzantine antiquarians, Hesychios of Miletos (early sixth century) and Ioannes Lydos (490–ca. 565). As the antiquarian movements of the sixth-century East have not yet been analyzed in terms of the cultural and literary dynamics of their times, we do not yet know why so much of our information on the festival should come from so late, when it was effectively losing or had already lost its pagan character (Lydos can in some ways be considered the Macrobius of the eastern empire). The answer may lie partly within that transformation, especially given the nostalgic outlook and Roman traditionalism of the two antiquarians in question. By the twelfth century, some of the etiologies found in their scholarship had been taken up by learned bishops and had thereby become more mainstream, at least among educated circles. In other words, we are dealing with two distinct intellectual traditions, one so far on the Christian right that even Justinian did not enforce it, and another that was pagan in outlook; the two had completely separate social and textual histories for many centuries before they came together in the writings of the Christian scholars of the twelfth century.

In the early sixth century, Hesychios of Miletos wrote a chronicle of world and Roman history beginning with Belos, king of the Assyrians, and ending with the death of the emperor Anastasios (518), whom Hesychios praised. This work survives only in brief fragments (except for one long section on the early history of the city of Byzantium before it became Constantinople). From what survives it seems not to have been a work that can be relied on by historians: it blurs history and pagan legend, focuses on etiologies, and tends to ascribe customs, terms, and institutions to named individuals. One of the fragments is this:

I let pass the story of Kalandos, Nonnos, and Eidos too,  
whose benefaction has been inscribed upon the days.  
When the Romans were defeated in the days of Antoninos  
and pressed tightly in Elder Rome itself;  
and all were about to die by the ravages of famine,  
at their own expense these men fed the Roman people,  
eighteen days, Kalandos did, of the month,  
eight days Nonnos and Eidos the other four.

19 Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.12, 1.15.

The fragment is in verse because it is reported in the *Histories* of Tzetzes, whom we have already encountered in relation to the kalends in the twelfth century (the first-person narrator here, then, is Tzetzes). Hesychios ascribed the names of the kalends, nones, and ides to great men who had fed the city during a siege, each for the same number of days as their names claimed in the later calendar. In the original narrative the event was almost certainly the siege of Rome by the Gauls. Tzetzes (more likely he than Hesychios) evidently made a mistake in dating it under "Antoninos"; he often quoted his sources from memory (in a marginal comment he added that perhaps this happened under Hadrian).<sup>20</sup>

Hesychios attempts a historical rather than a religious explanation for the Roman calendar system, though we cannot know what significance this strategy might have had in the early sixth century, especially as his fragments do not discuss the festivals themselves. Needless to say, his explanation for the names is not attested in the tradition before him, but it was quite consonant with Roman ways of thinking – we need not talk about the onset of medieval ignorance and fable-making at this point. One version of the festival of Anna Perenna that Ovid recounts in the *Fasti* had Anna as a poor old woman from Bovillae who fed the plebs during one of their secessions from Rome (in 494 BC).<sup>21</sup>

Ioannes Lydos, originally from Philadelphia in Asia Minor, served in the office of the praetorian prefecture in Constantinople under Justinian and was also appointed a professor of Latin. His antiquarian scholarship is all in Greek, albeit one that relies heavily on Latin terminology and sources. Like Hesychios, Lydos was almost certainly not a Christian, and was immersed in Neoplatonic symbolism and lore. His work *On the Months* is an attempt to explain the Roman system and reveal (or invent) its philosophical symbolisms. In quoting source after source and compiling varied information, the work is like an anthology, but the direction is given by Lydos. Unfortunately, *On the Months* survives only in later Byzantine excerpts and fragments, though some are long.<sup>22</sup> Book 1 is a general introduction (and is in bad shape); Book 2 is on days; Book 3, the one that interests us, is on the month as such; and Book 4 is on the months individually.

According to Lydos, it was Numa who divided the month into three parts, both because he liked odd numbers (as a Pythagorean) and because that division mirrored the courses of the Moon (3.10). Lydos summarizes all the antiquarian

lore that he had access to about the kalends, far more than we have today. He tends to favor lunar-astrological and mathematical accounts. He endorses the view that the name was Greek, being spelled with a k even in Latin. The ancients used to celebrate it, he says, both the Greeks and the Romans (3.11). But, he adds interestingly, the Jews did not neglect it either. He cites Psalm 80.3: "blow the trumpet for the new month." This is the first Scriptural justification for an ancient festival that, Lydos knew, was still being celebrated in the Christian empire despite its pagan origins and lunar significance. Was this an attempt to placate the hard-liners? Lydos offers a "big-tent" interpretation: Greeks, Romans, Jews, and, by implication, Christians may all take part. Even ants were observed by ancient scientists to rest on the new day of the month, so they too testify to its universal importance (and he adds stories about other animals). All this was part of what he calls "the nature of things." It is unclear how this fusion of traditions and science works theologically. In the age of encyclopedism, antiquarianism, and intellectual consolidation that was the sixth century, Lydos tried to tie things together in a way that would preserve the ancient traditions he treasured, which were in this case both Roman and pagan (he discusses the civic and pagan rituals of the ancient kalends at 4.3–4, 4.8, 4.10, digressing on the significance and history of many terms and symbolic objects).

It seems that Lydos had read Hesychios' *History* but did not include his etiology about the names of the kalends, nones, and ides, at least as far as we know from the mutilated text of *On the Months*. The complete texts of both works were available in the ninth century to Photios, who wrote about Lydos that "in matters of religion he seems to me to have been an unbeliever. He respects and venerates Hellenic [i.e., pagan] beliefs; he also venerates our beliefs, without giving the reader any easy way of deciding whether such veneration is genuine and hypocritical."<sup>23</sup> Lydos, I believe, was on the pagan side but making the concessions that Libanios had refused to consider. Most Byzantines, at least so claimed some of their bishops, were likewise in an intermediate position, being Christians who liked to celebrate the kalends and the brumalia. Opposites met somewhere in the middle. But even so, we must recognize that all our sources were "out of touch" with what the revelers themselves thought they were doing when they went straight from Christmas mass to celebrate the kalends. They had neither lunar mathematics in mind nor cared much for the hard-line piety of the likes of Asterios.

The calendrical context had also changed between late antiquity and the middle period of Byzantium. After Constantine, the civil year, that is the year of

20 Hesychios, *Roman and General History* fragment 4, ed. and trans. A. Kaldellis in I. Worthington, ed., *Brill's New Jacoby*, online at <http://www.brillonline.nl>; see my "The Works and Days of Hesychios the Illustrious of Miletos," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 45 (2005), 381–403.

21 Ovid, *Fasti* 3.661–674. I thank Tom Hawkins for this reference.

22 Ioannes Lydos, *On the Months* (see above for full reference); in general, see Maas, *John Lydos* [above, n.17]; for his religion and interests, A. Kaldellis, "The Religion of Ioannes Lydos," *Phoenix* 57 (2003): 300–316.

23 Photios, *Bibliothèque* 180; R. Henry, ed. and trans., *Photius: Bibliothèque*, vol. 2 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960), 187–188; N. G. Wilson, trans., *Photius: The Bibliotheca* (London: Duckworth, 1994), 170.



the indiction-tax cycles (15 years each), began on 1 September. The consuls continued to take office on 1 January, but the consulship itself effectively lapsed in the sixth century. For most people the year officially began on 1 September (the day from which the Creation itself was retrospectively dated).<sup>24</sup> More important, the calendrical system itself of kalends, nones, and ides also lapsed in the sixth century, replaced by the modern system of the week.<sup>25</sup> These long-term structural changes altered the overall place of the kalends festival in the Byzantine year far more than did the negligible fallout from the condemnation of in Trullo. Later scholars such as Photios (in the ninth century) and Psellos (in the eleventh) had to teach their contemporaries what the system of kalends, nones, and ides had once been all about. Both scholars relied on Lydos for their explanations. Photios provides a brief explanation of the Roman month, noting that there are additional technical matters that would require further study. Interestingly, Psellos notes that while the nones and ides had departed, Constantinople still knew the kalends. In the following lines he then briefly describes the public celebration. Psellos does not inform his emperor (to whom the work is addressed) that the Church had officially banned it (nor does Photios allude to any such ban, even though he knows the kalends' pagan origin).<sup>26</sup> We see here how obsolete canon 62 of in Trullo was (probably since the time that it was written). In his brief poems on the months of the year, Nikolaos Kallikles (early twelfth century) associates the month of January exclusively with the feasts of the kalends.<sup>27</sup>

There is no reason to think that much had changed in the popular celebration of the kalends in Byzantium between Justinian and the twelfth century, especially as there was no attempt to enforce a strict reading of canon 62 of in Trullo. In the twelfth century we have another set of discussions of the kalends, which is partly due to the increased literary and scholarly production of the Komnenian age.<sup>28</sup> We have already seen the two passages of Tzetzes, one on the *agyrtai* and the other that preserves the fragment of the lost *History* of

Hesychios. An antiquarian treatise on the kalends in the form of a letter was written by Eustathios (d. ca. 1194), bishop of Thessalonike (though he may have written the letter before he was bishop).<sup>29</sup> Eustathios begins by noting that all Romans (i.e., Byzantines) celebrate the kalends and find them delightful. All have a good time, Eustathios continues, and those who won't participate in the dancing, jokes, and games are considered grinchers. Gifts are exchanged, but not for profit (which effectively, if not directly, refutes Asterios). Eustathios' own contribution to the festivities, he says, will be this very letter on the kalends. This comes close to the motivation that Libanios claims in writing his praise of the festival, and we should note that Libanios' treatise was the inspiration for Eustathios' own exercise, showing which side of the fourth-century debate had prevailed by the twelfth century. Eustathios proceeds to discuss the terminology of the kalends and of the Roman calendar; why the kalends of January became so much more important; and the two-faced god Janus, drawing on various ancient authorities, including Plutarch and Porphyrios. He sees the Byzantine celebration of his own times as being essentially the same as that of the ancient Romans. Finally, he explains the system of nones and ides. From the hints in his account regarding the nature of the celebrations, it still does not seem as though much had changed from late antiquity and there is, moreover, no sign of ecclesiastical disapproval. If the superscription is correct, Eustathios' addressee was a Komnenos, so a lord of twelfth-century Byzantium.

Eustathios is known for having combined contemporary ethnographic observation with scholarly research, especially in his commentaries on Homer.<sup>30</sup> We observe this combination also in his letter on the kalends. While some of its antiquarian arguments are tendentious (as they always had been in Roman tradition, from the beginning), Eustathios is not agitating against the kalends or trying to defend them against their detractors; he is just trying to explain a "pan-Roman" festival through antiquarian research. It is, therefore, unfortunate that scholarship on Byzantine "popular" customs has often taken its bearings on this and other topics not from him (or Tzetzes!) but from the canonist Theodoros Balsamon (late twelfth century), specifically from his commentary on canon 62.<sup>31</sup> I say unfortunate because whereas Psellos, Tzetzes, and Eustathios are

24 G. Declercq, *Anno Domini: The Origins of the Christian Era* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

25 V. Grumel, *La chronologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 176, 192.

26 Photios, *Amphilochia* 242; L. G. Westerink, ed., *Photii patriarchae Constantinopolitani epistulae et Amphilochia*, vol. 6, fasc. 2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1987), 27. Michael Psellos, *Poem 18 To Isaakios Komnenos on the Kalends, Nones, and Ides*; L. G. Westerink, ed., *Michaelis Pselli Poemata* (Stuttgart and Leipzig: Teubner, 1992), 252–254.

27 Nikolaos Kallikles, *Poem 33.61–66*; L. Sternbach, ed., *Nicolai Calliclis carmina* (Cracow: Cracoviae Acad. Litt., 1903), 47.

28 See, in general, A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) ch. 5; idem, "Classical Scholarship in Twelfth-Century Byzantium," in C. Barber and D. Jenkins, eds., *Medieval Greek Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics*. Studien und Texten zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 101 (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2009), 1–43.

29 Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Letter 7* in T. L. F. Tafel, ed., *Eustathii metropolitae Thessalonicensis opuscula* (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1964; reprint of the Frankfurt, 1832, ed.), 314–317; also now in F. Kolovou, ed., *Die Briefe des Eustathios von Thessalonike* (Munich: Saur, 2006), 26–36, with a German paraphrase at 97\*–101\*. Kolovou proposes a *terminus ante quem* of 1173. For Eustathios and Tzetzes in general, see Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* [previous note], 301–316.

30 Ph. Koukoules, *Εὐσταθίου Θεσσαλονίκης τὰ λαογραφικά* (Athens: Hetaireia Make-donikon Spoudon, 1950).

31 G. A. Rallis and M. Potlis, eds., *Σύνταγμα τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ θεῶν κανόνων* etc., vol. 2 (Athens: Ekdoseis Grigori, 1992; reprint of the Athens, 1852–1859 ed.), 449–452. For



offering antiquarian reflections on what they take to be a popular and uncontroversial custom, revealing that there were many and high-placed people in Byzantine society who were curious about its origins and symbolism, Balsamon dons the blinkers of the Fathers in Trullo and pretends that all this is (still!) a pagan disgrace that should be stamped out. It is his commentary, that authorizes the image of a festival prohibited by the Church but still practiced furtively or defiantly by society, especially its lower orders, that is of a popular (as opposed to an elite or imperial) festival. The reality that we see in all other sources is entirely the opposite: the kalends were celebrated by the whole of society, including the emperor and many priests (if not most of them). But Balsamon was an ideologist and did not want reality to interfere with what he took to be a ban that should have been in effect for five centuries. He even took the opportunity to add to the list of practices that should be banned. Let us consider the logic of his exposition.

Take note of this canon, Balsamon begins, and demand that the behavior of the clergy during Christmas and Epiphany change to accord with it, especially the clergy of the Great Church (i.e., Hagia Sophia). With this admonition the canonist may indirectly be revealing that this canon was relatively unknown even within Church circles. He has a contemporary application of the canon in mind, namely some liturgical practices that were introduced in the tenth century by the patriarch Theophylaktos (933–956), and Balsamon cites the *History* of Ioannes Skylitzes (late eleventh century) in support. What Skylitzes says is that Theophylaktos introduced the custom “that prevails to this day” of offending God and the saints in religious celebrations by laughter, unseemly motions, and Satanic dances.<sup>32</sup> It is not clear what this means,<sup>33</sup> but it is certain

a summary, see R. Browning, “Theodore Balsamon’s Commentary on the Canons of the Council in Trullo as a Source on Everyday Life in Twelfth-Century Byzantium,” in Ch. G. Angelidi, ed., *Ἡ καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο: Τομές και συνέχειες στην ελληνιστική και ρωμαϊκή παράδοση* (Athens: National Research Institute, 1989), 421–427, here 423–425; C. G. Pitsakis, “Se souvenir des cultes antiques à Byzance au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle: les canonistes byzantins et les survivances de pratiques culturelles païennes,” in B. Anagnostou-Canas, ed., *L’organisation matérielle des cultes dans l’antiquité* (Paris: Cybèle, 2010) 173–184, here 182. Other Byzantine commentators on the canon include Ioannes Zonaras (twelfth century), in Rallis and Potlis, *Σύνταγμα*, v. 2, 448–449, preceding that by Balsamon; also, following Balsamon in the fourteenth century, Matthaios Blastares, *Alphabetical Syntagma* E 3, in PG 144 (1865) 1264–1265; cf. C. G. Pitsakis, “Encore sur l’étymologie “byzantine” de *Calendes*, *Ides* et *Nones*,” *Byzantion* 68 (1998) 519, and the bibliography cited there.

32 Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories: Konstantinos VII (second reign)* 10, in I. Thurn, ed., *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1973), 243–244.

33 Cf. S. Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his Reign: A Study of Tenth-Century Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 77: “He made one brave attempt to reconcile pleasure with piety by brightening up divine service on the

that Skylitzes is not referring to the kalends specifically or to any of the practices mentioned in canon 62. While the unseemly behavior he describes loosely resembles the practices condemned in the canon, there is a crucial difference that Balsamon either did not notice or occluded in his commentary, namely that Theophylaktos’ innovations concerned the Christian liturgy whereas the practices condemned in canon 62 lay outside the festival life of the Church. Balsamon is turning the canon to bear a contemporary polemic, though with dubious justification.

Balsamon’s mode of argumentation is also rhetorical. First, it is unlikely that patriarch Theophylaktos single-handedly introduced these customs, which, after all, were maintained by the clergy of Hagia Sophia and their congregation for over two centuries; to blame one person for the “evil” is, in this context, only a rhetorical trope. Second, he denies the traditional character and antiquity of the evil (οὐδὲ ἀρχαιοπαράδοτόν ἐστι τὸ κακόν) by blaming it on Theophylaktos, but he thereby reveals that many might have been citing tradition precisely in defense of all the other practices banned in canon 62, which Balsamon now goes on to discuss and wants to see expunged. We see here, then, what Byzantines might have been saying when confronted with the (embarrassing?) prescriptions of canon 62: “oh, come on, it’s harmless tradition.” Such a stance would probably have reflected a mainstream view, which we should not confuse with Balsamon’s strict reading of the canon and specious application to the liturgical practices of his day.

Balsamon then explains the kalends, nones, and ides, getting it wrong: he says that they refer to periods of the month, not specific days in relation to the length of each month, and assigns ten days to each. He cites by way of etymology the story in Hesychios (which he had probably via Tzetzes). At least he could have figured out from there that the periods into which the system divided the months were of unequal length, as other Byzantine scholars knew. Be that as it may, the Romans, he continues, instituted a shameless and more pagan festival (ἐλληνικώτερον ... ἄσμενα) in honor of those three men “such as still occurs today among certain peasants on the first days of the month of January; however, they celebrate it not, as the Romans did, in memory of the kalends and all that, but for the new moon ... They believe all will go well in the new year if

lines of pantomime; but it met with disapproval, though some of the turns lasted to shock the righteous more than a century later.” Another possible reference to these practices may be found in the *Apology for Eunuchs* written by Skylitzes’ contemporary Theophylaktos, bishop of Ochrid: the accuser of the eunuchs (whom Theophylaktos then goes on to rebut) mentions the “whorish songs that cause pleasure that they have wrongly introduced into the Church”: P. Gautier, ed., *Theophylacti Achridensis Opera*, vol. 1: *Theophylacte d’Achrida: Discours, Traités, Poésies* (Thessalonike: Association de Recherches Byzantines, 1980), 287–331, here 295. The patriarch Theophylaktos whom Skylitzes refers to was in fact a eunuch, so the identification is likely.

they celebrate its beginning" (the last being an ancient belief regarding the kalends). In this passage, Balsamon effectively admits that the kalends *were* an ancient festival, partly because he wishes to display his antiquarian knowledge and classical learning (a sometimes amusing habit on display in the commentaries).<sup>34</sup> But why tell us about the ancient Romans if what the peasants are doing today has to do with the moon? Note that if Balsamon took his lunar interpretation of the kalends from Lydos, he stripped it of its high-brow Neoplatonic credibility and turned it into a superstitious peasant custom.

Nor is it clear from his exposition what connection we should infer between the pagan festival instituted by the ancient Romans and the peasant beliefs he describes. Is it only one of religious similarity *and* calendrical coincidence? What Balsamon carefully avoids is revealing anything about how the kalends were celebrated by non-peasant Romans of his own time, unless he means to insinuate that it is only some peasants who celebrate this festival, which would be a cheap shot at his fellow Romans, all of whom celebrated the kalends, as we have repeatedly seen, and disregarded canon 62. We should also note that Balsamon insists on the pagan character of the kalends festival, which the text of canon 62 does not. He says openly what the bishops in Trullo did not. But we must remember that his was not an "official" position in any way. He was like fundamentalist Christians in the US who denounce Halloween as a pagan ritual of Satanic worship. Some of them hold government offices but they do not speak for the government in this matter or, certainly, for a significant portion of the population.

Balsamon's commentary goes on to discuss the other festivals mentioned in canon 62 and the cross-dressing, dancing, theatrical, and satirical customs of these Byzantine "peasants." There is useful information here but, as our scrutiny of Balsamon's testimony about the kalends reveals, we must be more cautious in using it. His commentary has too often been taken at face value as a reliable source on Byzantine customs. Despite the fact that there has been little in-depth or global analysis of his commentaries on the canons,<sup>35</sup> modern historians of Byzantium frequently rely on them because they give succinct definitions and express views that are taken as indicative of Byzantine mentalities. I suspect that they were not and that we are dealing with an ideologist who misrepresented or ignored reality when it served his interests. I argue elsewhere that he gave a distorted definition of what it meant to be a Roman in Byzantium in order to

34 E.g., P. Viscuso, "Theodore Balsamon's Canonical Images of Women," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 45 (2005), 317–326, here 323–326.

35 For introductions, see G. P. Stevens, *De Theodoro Balsamone: Analysis operum ac mentis iuridicae*. Corona Lateranensis vol. 16 (Rome: Lib. Università Lateranense, 1969); Macrides, "Nomos and Kanon," 73–85; C. Gallagher, *Church Law and Church Order in Rome and Byzantium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), ch. 5.

assert the authority of the Church of Constantinople over that of Alexandria.<sup>36</sup> A story about Balsamon told by the historian Niketas Choniates (ca. 1140–1217), who knew him personally, shows that contemporaries were also suspicious of this learned but self-serving prelate. In 1189 Isaakios II wished to transfer Dositheos from the see of Jerusalem to that of Constantinople but knew that this was forbidden by the canons, so he summoned Balsamon for consultation, "the man most learned at that time in the law" (he was also the titular bishop of Antioch). Isaakios told Balsamon that he would raise him to the see of Constantinople if he could find a legal precedent that would justify the uncanonical transfer. Balsamon eagerly provided the legal justification, at which point Isaakios transferred Dositheos from Jerusalem. The point of Choniates' anecdote is that we should not trust this man.<sup>37</sup> Certainly, the two men knew each other and may have been rivals at the court of the Angeloi, but a close reading of the commentary on canon 62 of in Trullo offers little defense.

To conclude, when it comes to the *history* of the kalends, canon 62 and the commentary on it by Balsamon – in other words the main sources that have been used by historians so far – are seriously misleading. We should rely instead on the testimony of Psellos, Tzetzes, and Eustathios, who drew on the traditions of Libanios and Lydos. Canon 62 was largely irrelevant. We can safely conclude that the kalends was one of those Roman institutions that displayed a remarkable continuity throughout the Byzantine centuries, along with others that are often overlooked in this connection, such as the races in the hippodrome and the circus factions.<sup>38</sup> The reasons why today's *kalanta* are unlike the *kalandai* that are described by Libanios and Asterios in the late fourth century should probably be sought in the period after 1204.

36 Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* [above, n. 28], 100–104.

37 Niketas Choniates, *History* 406–407; J. L. van Dieten, ed., *Niketae Choniatae Historia*, 2 vols. Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 11, 1–2 (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1975); H. J. Magoulias, trans., *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 223–224. Other Byzantine canonists disagreed with Balsamon on various matters, e.g., A. Fallier, "Une réfutation de Balsamon par Nil Kabasilas," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 32 (1974): 211–223 (fourteenth century). More skepticism in A. Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 17 ff.; and D. Angelov, "The Donation of Constantine and the Church in Late Byzantium," in idem, ed., *Church and Society in Late Byzantium* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), 91–157, here 106.

38 See Cameron, *Circus Factions* [previous note].