

THE DATE OF THE FOUNDATION OF ALEXANDRIA

Pierre Jouguet, four decades ago, pointed out that the date of Tybi 25 given by Pseudo-Callisthenes (I 32.10) for the foundation of Alexandria pointed to the julian date of 7 April.¹ He found reasons to regard this date as uncomfortable from the point of view of the chronology of Alexander's whereabouts in 331, but he had no doubt that the date was one transmitted in Alexandrian tradition from the earliest times. This date, 7 April, was advanced by C. Bradford Welles as being the correct date of the founding of the city; Welles used the date as a powerful argument for his thesis that Alexander founded his name-city after the visit to the oracle of Ammon at Siwah, and not before that trip.² Welles remarked that Ulrich Wilcken had "oddly enough" arrived at a date of 20 January by using the equation between the Egyptian and julian calendars current in Egypt after the reform of the calendar by Augustus, which halted the loss of one day in every four years by adding a sixth epagomenal day in the julian year preceding the julian leap year (i.e., bissextile year).³

Jouguet's (and Welles') calculation of the date has been accepted more recently by those who have followed Welles' reconstruction of the founding of Alexandria,⁴ but rejected without serious thought by those who are not convinced of Welles' views on the foundation. P.M. Fraser writes as follows:⁵

... the explanation is surely that Wilcken, more cautious in this respect than his critic, assumed the precise date given by Ps.-Call. to be of Roman origin.

A similar view is expressed by F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, who write: "dass das Datum erst nach dem unter Augustus eingeführten Kalender zu berechnen ist, demnach auf den 20 Januar fiel."⁶ A more belligerent version of this view is also expressed in Robin Lane Fox's book on Alexander:⁷ "[Welles'] argument that the foundation date of 25 Tybi means an April date is easily refuted by the likelihood that Ps.-Call. used the Roman calendar, mistakenly, rather than the Ptolemaic calendar, as Welles assumes."

This is not a trivial matter of arithmetical calculation. It involves, rather, some basic assumptions about chronological reckoning in antiquity which cannot be right. It does not seem that these scholars have examined closely what procedure they suppose the author of the Alexandrian Romance to have followed. The Romance tells us that the date of the foundation was Tybi 25; the view of Jouguet and Welles is that this date on the Egyptian calendar was known and remembered as the actual date of the foundation in 331. It is, indeed, evident that the citizens of Alexandria celebrated on that date a festival which in the writer's time was still regarded as being connected to the foundation of the city and that of the Heroon of Agathos Daimon (Ps.-Call. I 32.10-13).⁸ This date, Tybi 25, fell on 7 April in 331 BC, but because the Egyptian year lacked a leap year in this period, it had moved back to 20 January by the time of Augustus' calendar reform in 26/5.⁹

The other view, that of Wilcken, Fraser et al., assumes that the date was calculated (as Altheim and Stiehl say explicitly) rather than remembered. This view necessitates the assumption that the date was figured in the Roman period. But what can this mean? Calculation makes sense *only* if the date was known in another calendar which provided an objective point of reference—the Julian, in other words—and was converted from this into the Egyptian calendar after Augustus' calendar reform. But this is manifestly impossible. It is precisely in the Egyptian calendar that any date must have been transmitted; no one in Alexandria in 331 can have known the fixed Julian calendar, as it was not created until almost three centuries later.

It is clear that in later Roman times, when recensions B and Γ of the Alexander Romance were composed, their authors proceeded in the reverse direction and arrived—like their modern followers—at January. Jouguet quotes from Γ as follows:¹⁰ τὴν πόλιν γὰρ ἔτι παρῶν ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος καθίδρυσεν Τῦβι ἥτοι Ἰαννουαρίῳ νουμηνίᾳ. Clearly the writer knew that the date was in Tybi (though recension A's date of the 25th has by now been lost), and he equated this to January; such was common practice in Egypt, for the Egyptian month to be equated to the most nearly coinciding Roman one.¹¹ But it would defy all logic to suppose that an Alexandrian writer received the tradition in the reverse form, a foundation in January, which he managed to equate to Tybi.

The only other way of saving January would be to imagine that the writer calculated the number of days (77, actually) by which the Egyptian calendar had slipped against the solar year since the time of Alexander, and then changed the date to suit; in other words, that the author of the Romance knew that the true date in 331 was Hathyr 8 and calculated 77 days back to reach his Tybi 25; but the information about the festival makes this impossible. We know from the Canopus Decree (*OGIS* 56) that the Egyptians were only too aware of the problem caused by the regression of their calendar, and that in particular it caused the principal festivals to

fall at the wrong times of year. But even though an effort (abortive, it seems) was made in Euergetes' reign to correct this problem, no attempt is recorded to compensate for the shifts by altering dates to take account of past regression.¹² Indeed, as Jouguet says, we have no reason to think that ancient writers were capable of the complicated analysis necessary for making such changes,¹³ nor that a writer like the author of the Romance would have cared about such a technical detail. I am not aware of any instance in all of antiquity of the later recalculation of the date of an historical event because of calendaric problems.

It is evident, then, that the date of Tybi 25 is what was handed down and taken by Pseudo-Callisthenes as the date of the founding of Alexandria. The *only* relevant question, then, is on what day Tybi 25 fell in 331 BC. The answer is 7 April, and that is the Alexandrine date for the city's foundation. Whether it is correct is another matter; the partisans of January, confident in their erroneous remarks about the Julian date of Tybi 25, have all seemingly accepted the testimony of the Romance, and indeed I think the Romance's Tybi 25 is correct. Jouguet, taking Arrian's remark (3.6.1) that the expedition left Egypt in early spring as being a precise time, found himself troubled by the April foundation date (as were Altheim and Stiehl). I doubt that Arrian's ἀμα τῷ ἤρῃ ὑποφαίνοντι is to be pushed for precision, and Engels has shown that a departure for Syria in late April from Memphis is perfectly compatible with the remainder of Alexander's march to Mesopotamia.¹⁴ It is of course possible that Alexander visited the site of Alexandria and formulated his plans before visiting the oracle for authorization; but the Tybi 25 date in no way can be used as evidence that this preview took place in January, for Tybi 25 in 331 BC has nothing to do with January.¹⁵ Whatever answer one arrives at in the end, it will not do to misuse the calendaric problem to explain away the 7 April date of Pseudo-Callisthenes.¹⁶

NOTES

1. *REA* 42 (1940) 192-97.
2. "The discovery of Sarapis and the foundation of Alexandria", *Historia* 11 (1962) 271-98 at 284.
3. For Wilcken's views, see *Sitzb Berlin* 1928 (30) 579 n. 3; Welles notes that H. Riemann, *RE* 18 (1949) 1567-69 s.v. Parmenion, followed Wilcken.
4. E.g., Eugene Borza, "Alexander and the return from Siwah", *Historia* 16 (1967) 369 and in his note on p. 355 of the Norton paperback edition (New York 1967) of Wilcken's *Alexander the Great* (transl. G.C. Richards); Donald W. Engels, *Alexander the Great and the logistics of the Macedonian army* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1978) 63 n. 54, who for some reason gives 8 April as the date. J. Seibert,

Alexander der Grosse (Darmstadt 1972) 113 reports Welles' date as 27 April, presumably by a misprint.

5. *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford 1972) II 3 n. 9; cf. *Op. Ath.* 7 (1967) 30 n. 27. Fraser quotes the passage from Ps.-Call. *in extenso*. If I understand Fraser correctly, he is not making the (unlikely) assertion that the Egyptian date itself was invented in Roman times or by the author of the Romance.

6. *Die Araber in der alten Welt* II (Berlin 1965) 13.

7. *Alexander the Great* (New York 1973) 522.

8. Jouguet (*supra* n. 1) 192. Cf. the modern editions: L. Bergson, *Der griechische Alexanderroman. Rezension B* (Acta Univ. Stockholm., Studia Graeca Stockholm. 3, Uppsala 1965) 50; U. von Lauenstein, *Der griechische Alexanderroman, Rezension Γ*, Buch I (Beitr. z. kl. Phil. 4, Meisenheim 1962) 112.

9. See Wilcken, *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde* I I (Berlin 1912) 1v and T.C. Skeat, *The reigns of the Ptolemies* (Münch. Beitr. 39, Munich 1954).

10. Cf. *supra* n. 8.

11. Cf. R.S. Bagnall and K.A. Worp, *Chronological systems of Byzantine Egypt* (Stud. Amst. 8, Zutphen 1978) 22. Jouguet supposes that the text is an error for Tybi 25 = January 1, but that is unlikely, given the nature of such equations, and his attempts to calculate a date (p. 193) on this basis are not useful. The writer of Γ does, however, give Tybi 25 as the date of the festival a few lines later.

12. On this calendar change under Euergetes, cf. A.E. Samuel, *Ptolemaic chronology* (Münch. Beitr. 43, Munich 1962) 138.

13. Jouguet (*supra* n. 1) 193.

14. Engels (*supra* n. 4). Similar vague references to the start of spring are characteristic of Arrian's descriptions of the starts of campaigning seasons and need not have any precise reference. Cf. K.J. Beloch, *Griechische Geschichte*² III (Berlin-Leipzig 1923) 313-19 for details.

15. Arrian (no doubt following Ptolemy) puts the foundation before the visit to Siwah; so far as the formal foundation goes, this is wrong. But if he is referring to the preliminary scouting visit rather than the actual foundation, he may well be right. He gives no date for this first visit.

16. Fraser (*supra* n. 4) cites without comment Skeat's reference to the 'Horoscope of Alexandria' in the *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum* IX 2: *Codices Britannicos* . . . , ed. S. Weinstock (Brussels 1953) 178, where the editor writes: "Alexandria condita erat anno 330 a.Chr.n. . . . atque thema nostrum, ut benevole me docet v.d. Otto Neugebauer, recte ad hunc annum ac diem 16 mensis Aprilis refert. . ." Weinstock is wrong about Alexandria's having been founded in 330, but Professor Neugebauer kindly tells me that he is correctly quoted that the horoscope *does* refer to 330. The month and day thus come close to Pseudo-Callisthenes' date, but the year is wrong by one. One should not press this source too far, because, as Weinstock notes, the dates for several other cities are quite wrong (cf. pp. 176-177).