

# The Emergence of Time in Latin Literature



Patrice F Dassonville\*

Department of physics and chemistry, University of National High School of Niamey, France

Received: 📅 August 15, 2018; Published: 📅 August 24, 2018

\*Corresponding author: Patrice F Dassonville, Department of physics and chemistry, University of National High School of Niamey, France

## Introduction

During the thirteenth century BC, the Lydians, who were Greeks of Asia Minor, were compelled by famine to emigrate to what is now Tuscany, where they established a new civilization with the native population. According to the Greek historian Herodotus (484-425), these were the Etruscans. (*Book I, 94*) [1]. Their alphabet derived from Greek in the eighth century BC and it gave the Roman alphabet in the seventh century BC (Frédéric, *Ch I*) [2]. In order to situate themselves in relation to what they observed, the Romans unknowingly started conceptualizing some current phenomena and some familiar events. In this way and step by step, they enriched their language by introducing new concepts. The Latin literature allows one to observe the emergence of temporality in the Roman civilization, as well as to follow its gradual development.

## The Calends

The Calends was the first day of the lunar month. We find *Calendae* in Cicero (106-43) and *Calendae Martiae* (the Calends of March) in Horace (65-8 AD). It was unknown to the Greeks, hence the famous proverb in Suetonius (c.70-c.122): *ad calendas graecas solvere* (pay at the Greek Calends), which meant never (Gaffiot) [3]. The Consul Ausonius, in *The other prayer to the calends of January* (379 AD), was the first in Rome to associate the regular advent of seasons with *annus* (Quet p. 553) [4]. Indeed, before Ausonius, the year had erratic values. In Valerius Martialis (first century BC) we find *intra septimas calendas for before six months* [3]. The month was the lunar month. The month of January was dedicated to Janus : the very ancient God with two faces opened and closed the year. For the Senufo of the Ivory Coast, the Janus type of sculpture represents time passing ; one face is looking at the past while the other is looking toward the future.

## The Consular Year

In Rome, there was no reference event, so for each year the text began by : *Under the consulate of*.

For example, wines were dated using the names of the two

consuls who held office that year. Their names were inscribed on the amphorae ; it was called the consular year [2]. The Latin annalist Tacit (c.55-c.120) envied these great historians who described such major events. His *Annals* (from *Latin annales*) are an annual narrative of the facts according to the consular chronology : *facts, minor at first view, but which often produce great events* (Book IV, Ch. XXXII, 2) [5]. The narration of the events was drafted by the magistrates and recorded in the *acta senatus*, the Journal of Acts. [2] The Romans engraved their laws on stone tablets and their archives on copper tablets, in order to preserve them inside the Capitol. Tacit explained how the Romans came to draft an infinite number of laws, and he emphasized the diversity of the laws (Book III, Ch. XXV, 2) [5]. The Sicilian Diodorus (c.90-30) confided: *We looked carefully at the records held by the Romans for so long, in order to bring to light the history of this huge empire* [6].

## The Diachrony of Terminology

The diachrony, from Greek *dia* (through) and *khronos* (time), describes changes with time, not changes because of time. The following list, gathered in Latin literature thanks to F. Gaffiot [3], allows dating approximately each word, formalizing its use by the Romans, and observing the gradual enrichment of its meaning. In Plautus (254-184) *duro* means *be patient*. In Varro (116-27) *morax* means *which delays*; *annus* means *year* and *temporalis* means *which designates time*. In Cicero (106-41) we find *anno* for *each year*; *ad annum* for *within a year*; *ad extremum tempus diei* for *until the last moment of the day*; *ad hoc tempus* for *at this moment*; *cras* for *tomorrow*; *ex eo tempore* for *from that moment on*; *in reliquum tempus* means *for the remaining time*; *longiquitas* for *duration and long period*; *longo post tempore* for *long after*; *parva mora* for *short notice*; *per idem tempus* for *at the same time*; *tempestas* for *weather, season, time*; *tempori* for *right on time*; *tempus anni* for *season*; *tempus est* for *it is time*; *temporalis* for *temporary*. In Caesar (101-44) *in singula dieu tempora* means *for each moment of the day*; *nocturna tempora* means *night time*; *annum* for *one year*; *pro tempore* means *depending on time*; *spatium* means *duration*.

Lucretius (c.96-55) mentions the *revolutions of the sun* (*Song V, 931*), *time which rolls out* (*Song V, 1276*) [7], and we find *durabilis* for *lasting*; *duro* for *to last*; *in parvo post tempore* for *shortly afterwards*; *volventibus annis* for *the years roll out*. Virgil (c.70-c.19) refers to *volvenda dies*: *the rolling out of the days*; he uses *ex longo* for *since long ago*; *longaevus* for *old age*; *longo post tempore* for *long after*; and *annus* for *season*. In Horace (65-8 BC) *horae momento* means *a duration of one hour*. Augustus (63 BC-14 AD) uses *super* for *a while*. In Titus Livius (c.59 BC-17 AD) we have *locus* for *moment*; *longiquitas* for *long period*; *momentum* for *duration*, *moment*; *spatium tempus* for *space of time*. For Seneca (c.4 BC- 65) *crastinum* means *the day after*; *ex tempore* means *day by day, out of time*; *temporalis* means *temporary*. Statius (c.45-96) uses *crastinus* for *forthcoming, futur*. Tacitus (c.55-c.120) uses *durabilis* for *lasting*. In Pliny (61-c.114) we find in *crastinum* for *until tomorrow*; *extendo* for *extend* (a duration); *inter moras* for *pending*; *longinquum* for *long time*; *luna* for *month*; *magnitudo* for *duration*; *per tempus* for *on time* ; and *stato tempore* for *at a fixed time*. Tertullianus (c.155-c.222) uses *temporalitas* for *limited duration*.

## Definitions

What the Romans did with these ideas gives us the ability to draft basic definitions. It must be emphasized that using the words time and duration is not allowed as far as these words are not defined. We have to do with the little that is available.

According to Valerius Martialis: The month is a concept which corresponds to what separates two successive calends. Of course, the value of the month is more reliable when referring to the lunar month. The absence of definitions explains why in certain countries

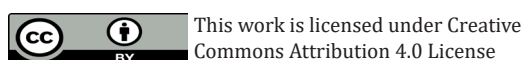
such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, in Rome before Caesar, the year have had erratic values. The definition according to the Consul Ausonius would be: The year is a concept which corresponds to the return of the seasons. (for example, the return of spring).

## Conclusion

The Romans become aware of temporality late compared to many other cultures. For example, the Sumerians invented the lunar month over 4500 years ago. Fortunately, the Latin literature provides a very interesting view of the development of time in Roman culture; like an irrepressible need to situate events and phenomena. However only very few offered the opportunity of defining more concepts of temporality, they show us the way to do it.

## References

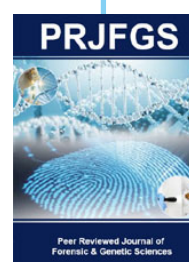
1. Gallimard (1964) Herodotus : The Inquiry L'Enquête - translated from Greek into French by A Barguet.
2. Albin Michel (1969) Frédéric P : Rome, History of the Eternal City Rome, Histoire de la Ville Éternelle.
3. Hachette (2000) Gaffiot F : Dictionnaire Latin-Français.
4. Quet MH (2006) The Crisis of the Roman Empire from Marcus Aurelius to Constantinus La Crise de L'Empire Romain de Marc Aurèle à Constantin. Presse de l'Université Paris Sorbonne.
5. Gallimard (1993) Tacit : Annals (Édn) de Pierre Grimal.
6. Diodorus: preface of The Historical Library. La Bibliothèque Historique. Site of Ph Remacle.
7. Gallimard (2010) Lucretius: The nature of things De rerum naturae. Translated in French by J Pigeaud.
8. Dassonville P (2017) This topic has been developed in detail in: The Invention of Time and Space.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License

To Submit Your Article Click Here: [Submit Article](#)

DOI: [10.32474/PRJFGS.2018.02.000128](https://doi.org/10.32474/PRJFGS.2018.02.000128)



### Peer Reviewed Journal of Forensic & Genetic Sciences

#### Assets of Publishing with us

- Global archiving of articles
- Immediate, unrestricted online access
- Rigorous Peer Review Process
- Authors Retain Copyrights
- Unique DOI for all articles