

Abstracts of the International Colloquium  
*Good & Bad Days. Hemerology across Cultures: Sources, Methods, Functions,*  
IKGF, February 2020, 4-5.

Yann Berthelet – ‘*Dies Fasti* and *Dies Nefasti* Didn't Mean *Auspicious* and *Inauspicious Days*’

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The hemerological dichotomy *dies fasti/nefasti* was not used by the Romans as an equivalent to the dichotomy *auspicious/inauspicious days* before the imperial era, and only in everyday language. In pontifical law, *dies fasti*, not to be confused with *dies festi*, referred to the days on which a citizen could take legal proceedings before the urban *praetor* and, initially, on which magistrates were authorized to convene the deliberative assemblies of the Roman people. In 287 BC, a new category of *dies* appeared, the *dies comitiales*, the only ones on which magistrates could "act" with the Roman people. As a consequence, the definition of *dies fasti* then became more restrictive.

Jan-Mathieu Carbon – ‘*Is Hemerology Greek? On Counts and Types of Days in the Ancient Greek World*’

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The paradoxical and thereby somewhat provocative title of this paper is intended to introduce a reassessment of how the ancient Greeks itemised and qualified days in their sundry calendars. As a word, hemerology is of course ‘good Greek’, though in pre-Roman times the compound is seldom found and for the most part simply refers to the enumeration of days. In fact, the first *hemerologion* (ἡμερολόγιον) which the sources indicate by this name is Caesar’s calendar (Plu. *Caes.* 39). The extant inscribed calendars normally reveal a different organisation and thematic arrangement than the Roman *fasti*: Greek sacrificial calendars, for instance, are focussed on listing only those days on which ritual activity took place—not on producing a comprehensive or systematic hemerology—and annotations appended to rubrics in these calendars often concern accounting rather than anything of religious significance.

Yet the notion of ‘favourable’ and ‘unfavourable’ days is not foreign to the ancient Greek world. Looking to literary and lexicographical testimonia in addition to epigraphic ones, a new survey and analysis of the character of ‘negative’ days will be offered. Sources from Athens, but also from elsewhere in the Greek world (notably Rhodes and Kyzikos), demonstrate that a limited number of days each month or in the year could be *proclaimed as impure*. Specific political and ritual activities connected with purification were performed on such occasions. Pending further evidence, what remains striking—one might say typically Greek—is the absence of hemerological codification, properly speaking, and the fundamental role that oral tradition played in the process.

Michael Grünbart – ‘*Good and Bad Days in Byzantium - Approaches to a Typology*’

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The selection of a favourable Moment (*kairos*) and the designation of good and bad days is revealed in many sources from Byzantium. In agricultural texts, in hagiography, in military treatises and historiography the assessment of certain days becomes apparent. On the one hand, an overview of the most important phenomena concerning hemerology should be given, on the other hand its relevance for both decision-making processes and actions will be discussed.

Ethan Harkness – ‘*Chinese Hemerology: The Theory and Practice of Harmonizing Actions with Appropriate Days*’

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The practice of selecting appropriate days for important actions has deep roots in Chinese culture, and although the earliest evidence for such behavior is characterized by an unpredictable divinatory quality, by no later than the 3rd century BCE, written works that systematically assigned qualitative characteristics (good for this, bad for that) to each day had begun to proliferate. Twenty-three centuries later the hemerological literature is too vast to summarize in a concise way, and it continues to grow as modern texts are composed and ancient manuscripts are recovered archaeologically. As an approach to this vast corpus, my paper presents a carefully selected range of Chinese hemerological

texts, both excavated and transmitted, and I look at some of the forces that shape them and reflect their perceived function. These include the material constraints of different manuscript types; the ideological tension between regional variants of certain hemerological systems; the impulse to elaborate and give an encyclopedic presentation of hemerology; the various rationales that provide elements of structure to hemerological texts; and a look at connections with related traditions, such as that of “monthly ordinances,” which challenge the limits of the definition of hemerology. Finally, I apply a basic understanding of the available literature on hemerology to look beyond the corpus of hemerological texts themselves and show evidence for hemerology in the realm of early Chinese social practice.

Matthias Hayek – *Fluctuating Values: Good and Bad Days in Japanese Manuals of Hemerology (15th-17th century)*<sup>9</sup>

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The designation of good and bad days for different kind of activities have been one of the main purpose of the bureau of divination, *onmyōryō*, and its officials, since its creation, or rather, its adaptation from a Chinese model, at the end of the 7th century. Japanese courtiers were eager to choose the proper date for a special rite, or a construction, or picking up a servant, and also to avoid bad days for getting medical treatment or going on a trip. This day-choosing techniques and there afferent framework, although of Chinese origin, underwent several changes in Japan, especially after the 15th century, at a time internal wars had finished drove court culture out of the capital. Warlords were as interested, if not even more, in matters of day-picking than their noble forerunners, and they could turn to many experts bearing fragments of divinatory knowledge from which they tried to reconstruct a cohesive, if not coherent, system. In these troubled times, we can see new divination manuals with whole sections devoted to good and bad days emerge. Contrary to earlier texts that mostly gave lists of days, some of these manuals address the question of the rationale behind the attribution of values to days, sometimes in competing ways. In this talk, while introducing these materials, I will try to show what kind of days were considered good or bad, and on what ground.

Gregory Kourilsky – *Genealogy, Typology, Practice and Impact of Hemerology in the Tai World*<sup>10</sup>

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Before the appearance of first Gregorian calendars by the middle of the 19th century, Tai Buddhist populations living in present-day Thailand, Laos, Southwest China and the Eastern Shan States of Burma made use of calendars, horoscopes and divinatory methods for determining ‘good and bad days’. These valuations – also applicable to years, months, fortnights, or time of days – were generally performed for specific events, but also regular activities: Marriage, house-building, entering and leaving monastic life and the rice-planting are just a few examples here. Far from being only used by peasants and commoners, hemerology was also of great interest to the ruling elites, as evidence from epigraphic sources and historiography clearly shows. For performing these calculations, the Buddhist Tai used written manuals, diagrams, divinatory tables or specific objects, which, however, only initiated expert and specialists were able to decipher.

In this regard, it might come as a surprise that no pre-modern Tai annual or perpetual calendar has been found. It is as if the time reckoning had not been an end in itself, but a necessary precondition for hemerological practices which, more than the rigorous astronomical science, played a determining role in the organisation of social, economic and religious life of the Tai.

By combining Indic, Chinese and Mon-Khmer inspirations, these hemerologies also highlight the syncretism that characterises Tai systems of thought and their cultural practices. In particular, many Tai populations provided their astrological and astronomical system with a ‘Buddhist veneer’ by using Indic terminology, or referencing the teachings of the Buddha. This conscious ‘Buddhization’ of traditional knowledge can be understood as an expression of the political and ideological features that underlie the mastering of time.

Lionel Marti – ‘*Did Mesopotamia Produce Hemerological Texts?*’

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From the very origins of Assyriology, we see the term “hemerology” appearing to designate the content of certain texts, or even to qualify complete texts. However, as surprising as it may seem, the definition of what is meant by “hemerology” or “hemerological text” is only exceptionally and still evasively addressed. Although research has made progress since then, in particular with the development of new typologies of so-called “hemerological” texts, it must be noted that no study proposes a real definition. We shall therefore examine these questions, based on an analysis of the composition of these texts and the ancient terminology, in an attempt to answer a simple question: are there such texts in Mesopotamia?

Petra Maurer – ‘*When to Wash One’s Face or to Construct a Dam? Aspects of Hemerological Practises in Tibet*’

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In pre-modern Tibetan society, correct timing was understood to be an important factor for many activities. Over the centuries, Tibetan astrology (*skar rtsis*) and divination (*nag rtsis*) adopted and generated manifold methods to determine the right time for all sorts of activities and events, whether they be seasonal, rare or singular. Among these are, to name a few: the timing of sowing or harvesting, of washing the hair or the face, of setting out on a journey, marriages, the construction of a house or dam, river protection endeavours, the preparation of weapons or the taming of a horse. The main sources of these hemerological methods are two traditional sciences: Indian astrology and the Chinese divination. Within these traditions and the Tibetan tradition adapted from them, zodiac signs, the planets, the lunar mansions, the elemental phases, the trigrams, dimensions such as the “nine dots” (*sme ba dgu*), and personal elements (*rus khams*) are decisive for timing. There is an underlying structure to many of the relationships between these specific aspects that depends mainly on the Indian elements and the Chinese elemental phases, which have reciprocal dependencies.

In this paper, I will provide the first analysis of the methods of ascertaining right timing by focusing on how it was determined in relation to some specific activities in daily life.

Philipp Nothaft – ‘*Hemerology and its Critics in Medieval Europe*’

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Manuscript calendars from medieval Europe are notable for their habitual inclusion of two different categories of hemerologically significant dates, the 24 Egyptian days (*dies Aegyptiaci*) and a range of dates during the height of summer known as the Dog Days (*dies caniculares*). It is far from obvious, however, if and in how far the mere presence of such dates in medieval *kalendaria* can document the degree to which the underlying forms of hemerological prognostication were accepted by their owners or acted upon in daily life. Evidence of an indifferent, sceptical, or even hostile attitude towards Egyptian days and Dog Days emerges from a range of different sources, from chronicles to treatises on *computus* (the medieval art of calendrical reckoning). While much of this opposition may be attributed to religious impulses, there are also signs that scholars of the later Middle Ages found it difficult to reconcile hemerological directives with their understanding of the natural world. Two little-known sources that shed light on these concerns are a mid-thirteenth-century letter on astrological topics, written by John of London, and an anonymous anti-astrological treatise from the 1370s, both of which are noteworthy for their detailed attempts to furnish the Dog Days with a natural explanation. By focusing on these and various other sources of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, my talk seeks to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the place of hemerology within the medieval ‘worldview’.

Joachim Friedrich Quack – ‘*Calendrier des jours fastes et néfastes, Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days, Tagewählerei. On Hemerological Texts from Ancient Egypt and How Egyptologists Have Dealt with Them*’

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Hemerological Texts from Ancient Egypt have become known to modern scholars since the mid-nineteenth century. In the first (French-language) study and translation of such a text dating from 1870, it was given the label of ‘Calendrier des jours fastes et néfastes’, and this designation, visibly influenced by Roman customs, has been retained ever since. The German term ‘Tagewählerei’ was first applied to the Egyptian material in a study from 1913 and has also been retained since then in

German-language Egyptology. In English literature, from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the term ‘Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days’ has been used. The terminology in the three main scholarly languages of Egyptology is thus different, although that divergence does not seem to have had any impact on the way questions are actually treated. The term ‘hemerology’ is only rarely used in Egyptology.

Preserved Egyptian manuscripts are attested from ca. 1800 onwards. The best known text is transmitted in two papyri from the Ramesside period (ca. 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and indicates for many of the days also mythological events which took place and serve as an explanation for the evaluation of that day and the behavior recommended. There are also a number of partially unpublished fragments of several manuscripts from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE.

Egyptological studies of this material have been rather limited, due to no small degree on the philological problems inherent in the manuscripts which often seem to give a rather garbled version. It has been discussed if these texts were really applied in everyday life or not. Also, relations of the mythological events to the rhythm of the natural year or even stellar cycles have been sought.

This presentation will give both an evaluation of the scholarly work done so far as well as a presentation of all known material (including unpublished papyrus fragments I am currently studying).

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Enrico Raffaelli – ‘*Religious Calendar and Advice on the Daily Behavior in Zoroastrianism*’

This presentation studies the Zoroastrian hemerological tradition. It first provides the context in which a hemerological tradition developed in Zoroastrianism, by overviewing the history, structure and ritual function of the Zoroastrian month (the Zoroastrian calendar, that was introduced in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, is divided into twelve months of 30 days, that are named after 27 divine entities). The presentation then focuses on the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian hemerological literature. Two hemerological texts, both written in the Pahlavi language, and both originating probably from the Sasanian period (3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century), have come down to us: one is titled *Haqīqat-i rūzhā* (Reality of the days), and the other is titled *Mādayān ī sīh rōz* (Book of the Thirty Days). Both of these works are included in collections of religious texts, and contain advice of both secular and religious nature on the activities to undertake or avoid on each day of the month. The presentation attempts to classify the criteria underlying the advice on the daily behavior contained in these texts. Finally, the presentation attempts to reconstruct the history of the hemerological tradition in Zoroastrianism: it first investigates the possibility that the elaboration of rules on the activities one should perform or avoid during the month was introduced in Iran, possibly long before the Sasanian period, from other cultural contexts where hemerologies were popular (such as the Mesopotamian civilization); subsequently, the presentation investigates the popularity of hemerologies in Zoroastrianism during after the end of the Sasanian period.

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Sacha Stern – ‘*The Visual Presentation of Day Lists in Ancient and Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts*’

This paper will consider the evidence from Qumran, the Cairo Genizah, and European medieval Hebrew manuscripts, as well as from some literary sources. Hemerologies in the sense of lists of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ days are not attested in the Jewish tradition, but liturgical day lists are well attested, and function as the equivalent of calendars. Their presentation in the manuscripts is textual rather than visual: thus, they are rarely laid out in the form of tables (in contrast for example to the Roman *Fasti*, also to some Mesopotamian hemerologies). The visual medium of calendar tables is only first used by Jews from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, but for what are actually Hebrew translations of Christian liturgical calendars; in these calendars, as in their original Latin versions, days are annotated with liturgical, astronomical, as well as medico-astrological features. The long-standing Jewish preference of textual rather than visual layouts for day lists, which persists throughout Antiquity and the Middle Ages, needs to be reflected upon: it may suggest, for example, the prevalence of oral modes of transmission of the day lists, or perhaps more abstractly, a predilection for non-spacial conceptions of time.

