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A FORGOTTEN FACTOR IN THE DEBATE ON THE CALENDAR IN AUGUSTAN
EGYPT

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In ZPE 129, 2000, pp. 159–166, Alexander Jones reaches the astonishing conclusion that there appears to have existed in Egypt, during the reign of Augustus and possibly even earlier, under Cleopatra, a form of the Julian calendar different from that in use in Rome.

I have no qualifications to discuss the astronomical data on which this conclusion is based, but would like to mention something which has attracted little attention although it is mentioned briefly in the Preface to my small book *The Reign of Augustus in Egypt: Conversion Tables for the Egyptian and Julian Calendars*, 30 B.C. – 14 A.D., München 1993. This is the statement of Cassius Dio (51.19.6) that among the honours lavished on Augustus after his capture of Alexandria on 1 August = 8 Mesore 30 B.C., the Roman Senate (no doubt at the prompting of Augustus) (ἐψηφίσαντο) τήν τε ἡμέραν ἐν ἧ ἡ Ἀλεξάνδρεια ἐάλω, ἀγαθὴν τε εἶναι καὶ ἐς τὰ ἔπειτα ἔτη ἀρχὴν τῆς ἀπαριθμήσεως αὐτῶν (sc. τῶν ἐτῶν) νομίζεσθαι.

This means that (a) the date 1 August = 8 Mesore was to be a festival, *i.e.* celebrated annually throughout the Roman dominions,¹ and (b) that it was to mark the beginning of an era in Egypt, like the Actian Eras which were introduced into other Roman possessions in the East in celebration of the victory of Augustus at the battle of Actium in 31 B.C. There were thus *two* very good reasons why the Egyptian calendar should be reformed in such a way that the synchronism 1 August = 8 Mesore was permanently preserved. This was achieved very simply by inserting an additional day, 6 Epagomene, at the end of the Egyptian year *preceding* the Roman intercalary year. By these means the two intercalations cancel each other out, and the synchronism is maintained.

That this Era, denominated the Era of the Καίσαρος κρότησις, was actually introduced is proved by my new reading of the date in P. Oxy. 1453², which shows that the end of the first year is due on 7 Mesore, *i.e.* 7 Mesore 29 B.C. But the change from I Thoth, which from time immemorial had marked the beginning of the Egyptian year, must have caused immense administrative problems, and the date soon reverted to 1 Thoth.³ None of this, however, would have affected the date of the festival, and as readers can verify for themselves in my Table B, despite all the calendrical changes which took place - from triennial intercalation to no intercalation to quadrennial intercalation, in *every* year of the reign of Augustus, from 30 B.C. to 14 A.D., and, of course, ever *thereafter*, 1 Mesore is found equated with 25 July, and consequently 8 Mesore = 1 August. I leave this fact to speak for itself.

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¹ References to the Festival are collected by W. F. Snyder, *Public Anniversaries in the Roman Empire*, Yale Classical Studies 7, 1940, pp. 225–317 (p. 231 for Alexandria).

² ZPE 53, 1983, pp. 241–244.

³ *Chronique d'Égypte* 69, 1994, pp. 308–312.