

John Lydus, *De Mensibus* (Book 4)

[136]

JUNE

88. So then, the fifth month having been arranged in this way by King Numa, it only remained then for the sixth to be set apart in honor of the youth—for they call the younger people *iuniores*. It is fitting, you see, as Plato says, for the state to be administered by the counsel of the old men and by the courage of the younger men.¹ And it is not without reason, clearly, that he allotted the number six to this.² For this [number] is life-generating, being constituted out of itself, from the *monad* in sequence up to the *triad*,³ and being self-sufficient. And for this reason Pythagoras dedicated this [number] to the first of the Fates.

89. On the Kalends of June⁴ [there is] a festival of Hera and prayers on [137] the Capitol.⁵ All the Romans together take a taste of cold water at dawn, to ward off all manner of sickness, and especially gout—as the oracle desired—and so that there be no twin or monstrous births. This sort of custom was introduced under Hadrian, when there had been sent to him an Egyptian woman who related that on four days at irregular intervals she had given birth to four [children], then a fifth after 40 days,⁶ in accordance with Aristotle who says that [once] 20 offspring were conceived, in four pregnancies.⁷ And Heraclides⁸ says that this happens whenever ejaculation hits the mark in the opening twice or three times, from self-control,⁹ or even when the womb has been opened after the prior formation [of an embryo], as many times as the offspring is numbered.¹⁰

¹ Wuensch cites ("cf.") *Republic* 412c—but this passage simply indicates that the old should rule over the young. The thought regarding the characters of old and young is proverbial; note, e.g., Pindar fr. 199 (tr. W. H. Race, LCL) on Sparta: "...there the counsels of elders and the young men's spears prevail..."; cf. Hesiod, fr. 321: "Deeds belong to the young, counsels to the middle-aged, and prayers to the old." Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1390b; Bion fr. 64 (Diogenes Laertius 4.50).

² It is not clear what the reference of "this" (fem. sg.) is. Simply supplying "month" is impossible because it would be masculine. The most recent fem. sg. noun is "courage"; presumably, then, the idea is that the number six symbolizes the courage of the youth (or simply the youth itself, also a fem. abstract noun in Gk. here)—and the *month* was dedicated to the youth.

³ I.e., $6 = 1 + 2 + 3$.

⁴ 1 June.

⁵ This would be the celebration of Juno Moneta.

⁶ The story is also found in some legal texts (*Digest* 5.4.3 and 34.5.7).

⁷ Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* 7.4 [584b31].

⁸ Maas, *John Lydus and the Roman Past*, p. 128, understands this as a reference to Heraclides Ponticus, but Wehrli's edition (*Die Schule des Aristoteles*, vol. 7: *Herakleides Pontikos*) does not include it. The explanation cited shares some common features, however, with Democritus' views; cf. [Hippocrates], *On the Nature of the Child* 31 and the commentary in I. M. Lonie, *The Hippocratic Treatises "On Generation" "On the Nature of the Child" "Diseases IV,"* (Berlin, 1981), pp. 252-4.

⁹ Or, "after a [period] of abstinence." Gk. *apo egkrateias*. It seems likely, however, that this is a corrupt reflection of the Greek term *epikrateia* ("predominance"), which was important for Democritus' theory of how an embryo's sex was determined; cf. Democritus fr. 138d in C. C. W. Taylor, *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus. Fragments* (Toronto, 1999).

¹⁰ The language here is not clear, but two scenarios are envisioned: first, multiple conceptions in one act of intercourse; second, "superfetation"—fertilization after an embryo is already developing in the womb. For discussion of ancient views of multiple births see V. Dasen, "Becoming Human: From the Embryo to the Newborn

June is unsuitable for weddings, as the books of the Roman priests say. The account is true, and there is every necessity that a marriage occurring at this time loses [the] younger [one]—and I have experienced this outcome myself, having lost my dearest wife most suddenly.¹¹ And for three days, it was not permitted for women to have their hair or their nails cut. [138]

90. The [word] *Sancus* signifies "sky" in the Sabine language.¹²

91. Not for no reason do the Hebrews abstain from the hare and the "Libyan sparrow" [i.e., the ostrich] and the "thick-knee" [bird].¹³ For—amazingly—the male hare is able by nature to give birth; and the Libyan sparrow is neither a sparrow nor a quadruped—nor even a complete bird; and no one who eats a "thick-knee" does not regret [it].

92. For "oily" [*liparos*] [some say] "fatty" [*larinos*], from which [term] also [comes] *lardos* ["pork-fat"]. But different people [explain this] differently / [make] different [assertions].¹⁴

93. They say that the Fates, Lachesis and Clotho <and Atropos>, are the daughters of Necessity, <and that Lachesis administers the past, Clotho> the present, and Atropos the future.

94. On the fifth day before the Ides of June,¹⁵ [there was] a festival of Hestia. On this day the bread-makers would keep festival, on account of the fact that the ancient [bread-makers] prepared bread in the shrines of Hestia. Garlanded donkeys were at the head of the procession, because the grain is ground by them.

The natural [philosophers] assert that Hestia is the earth, [so called] from its *standing* [*hestanai*]; but the theologians assert that she is so-called "being-ness."¹⁶ As witness, Socrates in the *Cratylus* says that Hestia is "primal-source-being" [*pêgaia ousia*], being situated in the Father.¹⁷ But Porphyry claims that *after* the intelligible Hestia—that is, "being-ness"—[there is] also the overseer of the earth (and they call it *chthôn*) [139]: a Hestia with the same name as the former. He speaks as follows: "And on the one hand, the ruling principle of the divine potentiality has been called Hestia—whose maidenly image is placed at the hearth [*hestia*]; and

Child," in Evans Grubbs et al. (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (2013), pp. 20-23.

¹¹ Standard treatments of John's biography miss this statement—e.g., Maas, p. 31, says that apart from John's references to his wife in the context of their wedding, he "never mentioned her again."

¹² This is a reference to the deity Semo Sancus (Dius Fidius), celebrated on 5 June; for the Sabine connection see Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 5.66; Ovid, *Fasti* 6.213-18. R. D. Woodard, *Indo-European Sacred Space: Vedic and Roman Cult* (Urbana, 2006), pp. 184-5, assembles the evidence for the associations of this god with the open sky.

¹³ Gk. *charadrios*—a bird sometimes identified as a kind of plover; cf. Lev. 11.19 (LXX).

¹⁴ This reference appears to have been part of an explanation that offerings of *lard* were made to Juno (Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.169; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.12.33).

¹⁵ 9 June—the *Vestalia*.

¹⁶ Gk. *ontotês*, the state of (truly) being / existing.

¹⁷ Cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 401c (only giving the connection with *ousia* ["being"]).

in as much as the potentiality is *generative*, they signify it by the form of a large-breasted woman."¹⁸ But they *hierophants* of the Romans claim that she is nothing other than the earth.¹⁹

95. Before the great flood, they say, Sicily was not an island as [it is] today, but was a promontory attached to [what was] later [called] Italy. From the surge of the deluge's currents, however, the island was jarred and moved away from its foundations; and for this reason, the part of Italy from which it broke off was named Rhegium, from the "breaking."²⁰ And formerly, Sicily was called *Sicania*. Italy contained these nine provinces: Campania, Apulia, Thuscia [i.e., Tuscany], Calabria, Umbria, Dalmatia, Lucania, Brettia [i.e., Bruttium], and Sicily.

96. ...to Prusias king of Bithynia.

97. Among the Pythagoreans, the *dyad* (since it provides a sort of position and "ladder" for number) is called *eleusinê*,²¹ in that it supplies the forward movement [*proeleusis*] toward the more numerous and unbounded.

98. Eudemus²² says that at Peltae in Phrygia there was once a four-faced stone, which, when there was no wind, the farmers would lift with wooden [poles] placed underneath it—and they would produce winds. And the more the stone was raised up,²³ the more powerfully they roused the winds. [140] And then again, they would place the stone on the ground, and there would be calm.

99. The poets call minds with understanding "black"—that is, deep; for blackness goes along with depth. For this same reason Pindar calls minds without understanding "white."²⁴

100.²⁵

Alas for mortals! How uneven are their fortunes!
For some do well, but for others harsh
disasters come along from god for the pious.

The Romans call fortune [*tychê*] *Fortuna* on the basis of its *moving* [*phora*]...inspired assistance.²⁶ Aristotle: ... For nothing in fortune's power is safe or decided, as Euripides says. Inferior are those who strive for wealth beyond moderation, says the orator. Plato says that no

¹⁸ Porphyry, *On Images* fr. 6 [= fr. 357 Smith] (cited in Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 3.11.7, which Smith numbers as fr. 357a).

¹⁹ Cf. Ovid, *Fasti* 6.267: *Vesta eadem est et terra*.

²⁰ Gk. *rhêxis* [with verbal root *rhêg*].

²¹ Not attested elsewhere.

²² Wuensch refers to the discussion in Müller, *FHG* 2: 20 (Eudemus of Paros, or Naxos—a historian of the Classical era); however, the identity of John's Eudemus is not certain. Aelian cites a "Eudemus" for a number of strange stories of animal lore, which are often attributed to the Peripatetic philosopher Eudemus of Rhodes; cf. S. A. White, "Eudemus the Naturalist," in Bodnár and Fortenbaugh, *Eudemus of Rhodes* (2002), pp. 207ff..

²³ It appears that the text needs to be emended (ἐξήρθη rather than ἐξηρέθη) to reflect the verb αἶρειν rather than αἶρεῖν [Bandy makes this emendation].

²⁴ *Pyth.* 4.109.

²⁵ This section is a re-worked / truncated version of 4.7. See notes on that section for the quotations.

²⁶ "Assistance" (ὠφέλειαν) is simply a variant reading here (i.e., most likely a scribal error) for 4.7's "simplicity" ἀφέλειαν (or vice versa).

one comes to possess the greatest wealth without having previously suffered damage to his soul.
[141]

101. The oracle says:²⁷

Double are the *daemons* in man—and double are their
tribes: they wander over the ever-flourishing earth
†to stand with† human beings, by Zeus' rule.²⁸
Zeus indeed is the giver of all things, both good and bad—
he defines too the time of life for those being born,
mingling mortal bodies with [things] both foul and fair.²⁹
Those *daemons*—whoever should associate with [them] by his wisdom,
and achieve an understanding of what deeds they take delight in—
he would surpass everyone in intelligence and noble deeds,
winning noble gifts from a noble [giver] and fleeing from the foul.

²⁷ *Chaldaean Oracles*, fr. 215 Des Places (categorized as "dubious").

²⁸ Des Places accepts Kroll's emendations, such that the line reads: "having been appointed by Zeus' rule to stand with human beings."

²⁹ Or "for [people] both foul and fair."