

John Lydus, *De Mensibus* (Book 4)

[149]

AUGUST

111. Following this is the sixth [month] from the spring, the eighth from the festival known as the "Waxing of the Light."¹ The fact that it is the sixth from March can be grasped even from the [150] ancient appellation of this month—<for> it was named *Sextilis*, after *Quintilis*;² and thus, those after it, as far as the tenth [month] do not [have] a proper designation, but derive their names from the numbers.³ But it was re-named August later—as some say, by Augustus Caesar because he had put an end in this month to the civil wars Rome was involved in at that time, and had now brought the Romans to a state of *concord*.⁴ And because it is the eighth from January, they applied to this eighth [month] the name of the one who was the cause of their concord. (For according to the Pythagoreans, eight is called "agreement" and "persuasion"—for it is the first *cube*, encompassing the form of the perceptible universe, having length and breadth and depth, and could rightly be called "agreement," because in it even and odd come to agreement.)⁵ Others say that when Augustus Caesar died, the Romans named the month August in honor of him. And this Augustus Caesar, the son of Octavius, was previously called Octavianus, being a relation by marriage⁶ of Gaius Julius Caesar through [the latter's] sister. <And> after his many great victories, he was honored with many names. Some named him Quirinus (that is, Romulus); others, Caesar; and by a common vote of the chief priests and the Senate he was designated Augustus. "Augustus" [151] is what the Romans, by their ancestral signification,⁷ call one who is advanced to royal power in accord with augury and the testimony of the gods. After so many most excellent deeds, Augustus introduced the 15-year cycle [beginning] at the autumnal equinox;⁸ in this he was following the philosophers, who say that the standard hour is composed of 15 parts.⁹

The Romans named the month August in honor of Augustus Caesar, who died (they say) on the 16th of this month.

112. Augustus adapted Sophocles' *Ajax* into his ancestral language. Then, since his literary excellence was flourishing to a lesser degree than his [excellence] in action, he discerned that his own tragedy was unworthy, compared to Sophocles', and erased it. Then, when he was asked by Cicero (with whom he was being educated with enthusiasm¹⁰), "Where is the *Ajax* you are writing?"—he answered with wit as well as good sense that his *Ajax* had fallen on his sponge (as Sophocles' [*Ajax* had fallen on his] sword).¹¹

¹ Gk. *Auxiphôtia*. Cf. 4.121, 135, 158.

² Gk. *Sextilios* and *Kyntilios*.

³ I.e., September through December.

⁴ The decree of the Senate preserved by Macrobius (*Saturnalia* 1.12.35) confirms this view.

⁵ Cf. Ps.-Iamblichus, *Theology of Arithmetic* (tr. Waterfield), pp. 102-3.

⁶ Gk. *gambros*.

⁷ I.e., in Latin.

⁸ I.e., the *indiction*.

⁹ The "standard hour"—literally, the "equinoctial hour"—as opposed to hours that vary depending on the season.

¹⁰ Or possibly, "haste"? Gk. *spoudê*.

¹¹ Cf. Suetonius, *Augustus* 85. Cicero, however, does not come into Suetonius' account.

And he did indeed have concern for language,¹² to the extent that when a certain uneducated magistrate had the audacity to write a public letter to him, he was so angry that he removed [152] the uneducated man from his office.¹³

And he also imposed moderation and limit on festivities and dowries—and did so first in the case of his own daughter.

And he was so concerned about the freedom of his subjects that when one of the sycophants called him "Master" in the Senate, as it were by *hyperbole*, he got up to leave and said, "I learned to converse with free men, not with slaves."¹⁴

113. Chares says:

Never allow unseasonable extravagance,
but strive to control all the stomach's reins.¹⁵

114. The Gauls occupied the Capitol by coming to Rome through the sewers at night—for King Servius Tullius had built the sewers to be large enough that a wagon full of fodder could be driven through them.¹⁶ But when the geese in the temple saw the enemies and cried out (for they have a wakeful nature), the general awoke and pushed the barbarians out of the temple; then, once a force had assembled, he routed them. For this reason [they celebrate] a festival and honors for the geese, because they guarded the city—but destruction for the dogs. <For> on the third day before the Nones of August,¹⁷ they would destroy the dogs in Rome without restraint, in honor of the geese, because the dogs had betrayed [153] the Capitol by falling asleep, while the geese had saved it by being awake. But others say that they used to do this so that [the dogs] would not be troublesome to those who were ill at night. And others [say they did this] so that rabid [dogs] would not harm people. For at that time [of year] rises Sirius, which appears to cause rabies in them.¹⁸

115. There is a great deal of underground fire—it returns¹⁹ into the depth of the earth and feeds on the greasy material [there]—and this is *alum* or *sulfur*.²⁰ For *bitumen* is sulfur that is burned and extinguished in the earth. Of this, that which is burned a little, in so far as it is

¹² Gk. *logoi*—i.e., speeches, talk, literary matters, etc.

¹³ Cf. Suetonius, *Augustus* 88—the infraction there is orthographic: spelling *ixi* instead of *ipsi*.

¹⁴ Cf. *De magistratibus* 1.6; for the attitude, compare Suetonius, *Augustus* 53. C. Pazdernik, "Paying Attention to the Man Behind the Curtain," in Fögen and Lee (eds.), *Bodies and Boundaries in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Berlin, 2009), pp. 72-76, discusses Lydus' statements in the context of the Justinianic era.

¹⁵ Fr. 2.1-2 Jäkel [in *Menandri Sententiae* (1964)].

¹⁶ Servius Tullius' predecessor, Tarquinius Priscus, is most often associated with building Rome's sewer.

¹⁷ 3 August. Cf. especially Servius on *Aen.* 8.652, and for analysis of the story in general see Horsfall, "From History to Legend: M. Manlius and the Geese," *Classical Journal* 76.4 (1981), pp. 298-311. Horsfall, p. 308, notes the oddity of John's date, unattested elsewhere.

¹⁸ Cf. Pliny, *NH* 2.107. John mentions this also at *De Ostentis* 7.

¹⁹ Or, better, with Wuensch's suggestion (ὕπνοστροφῶν), "descends."

²⁰ Gk. *stypṑria* and *theion*. The former does not necessarily have the modern meaning of "alum," but may instead refer to a substance containing ferrous sulfate; cf. Pliny, *NH* 35.183 for the various kinds of *alumen*, and Rapp, *Archaeomineralogy* (2009), pp. 230-31, for a modern discussion. John's account of volcanism here interestingly does *not* seem to depend much on the popular Aristotelian theory which made winds the cause of seismic activity, but rather on the idea of subterranean fire fed by specific combustible materials; cf. (albeit still using the wind-theory to some degree) Seneca, *Quaestiones Naturales* 5.14.4; *Aetna* 388-93 etc.

quickly extinguished, renders the bitumen moister and oilier, such as that which flows over the [area] of Aetna and the lake in Judaea.²¹ But if it is burned more violently it petrifies—such is the *lignite* rock near Babylon. At any rate, when the [fire] as it descends feeds on the regions underneath, it does not display to us any effect in the earth. But whenever, by its activity, it makes an extensive area porous, then, being squeezed in the cavities and pipe-shaped areas, if it should succeed in spurting out, it causes nothing less than an agitation of the earth and a roaring sound as a sign. If, on the other hand, it endures when it is formed into a mass, or ... a mountain lying above [it], or land, or sea: a mountain, like Vesvion²² in Italy and <the one in> the Liparian Islands and the one lying above the city of Catana in Sicily;²³ sea, [as that] which Panaetius reports on between Lipara and Italy;²⁴ land, such as there is by Corycus in Lycia.²⁵ Not only does it break out through mountains and land, but it also produces eruptions <from the sea>, as occurred [154] at Thera and Therasia.²⁶ And if the perforated [area] constantly breathes out fire, they are called "springs of fire" and "craters," such as are those around the same Lipara and Strongyle²⁷ and Vesvion. But if they are closed, ... such as the plain at Philadelphia in Lydia and the mountain-spurs at Mazaca (that is, the "Cappadocian [spurs]"), and the plain of Dicaearchia, once called "Hephaestus' [plain]."²⁸

116. According to Aristotle,²⁹ there are nine types of comets—but according to the Roman Apuleius,³⁰ ten: horse-like; sword-like; beard-like; beam-like; jug; torch-like; long-haired;³¹ discus-like; whirlwind; horned. The "horse-like" [comet] was so named from its course and speed, and it disperses its rays sideways and dimly. The "sword-like" [comet] visibly

²¹ I.e., the Dead Sea.

²² I.e., Vesuvius.

²³ I.e., Aetna.

²⁴ This is Panaetius fr. 136a Van Straaten. Posidonius is also attested as having dealt with this sort of thing: He reported on a volcanic eruption in the area of the Aeolian islands "within his memory" (Strabo 6.2.11 = Posidonius fr. 227 Kidd), and also described the volcanic emergence of an island in the Aegean (Seneca *QN* 2.26.4 = Posidonius fr. 228 Kidd).

²⁵ For this Corycus, see Strabo 14.3.8, but with no reference to volcanic or seismic activity. Pliny, *NH* 2.236, does note two places in Lycia with "burning mountains" (Mount Chimaera and the "Mountains of Hephaestus"); but it seems possible that John means to refer to Corycus or the "Corycian cave" in Cilicia associated with Typhoeus—or is perhaps conflating the two areas. See further discussion of the geography in Şengör, *The Large-Wavelength Deformations of the Lithosphere* (Boulder, 2003), p. 310 n. 147.

²⁶ The present Vulcano (one of the Lipari Islands).

²⁷ The present Stromboli.

²⁸ Also called the "Phlegraean Fields." Dicaearchia is the original Greek name for the later Puteoli.

²⁹ Cf. *Meteorologica* 1.7 [344a]—but there, Aristotle only differentiates a couple of different types (see also 1.4 [341b]); ps.-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 4 [395b] has more, yet still not closely corresponding to John's list.

³⁰ See S. J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford, 2000), p. 29, suggesting Pliny as a source. Pliny, *NH* 2.89-96, gives an extensive list, which mostly find clear parallels in John's here, but in a different order. P. T. Keyser, "On Cometary Theory and Typology from Nechepso-Petosiris through Apuleius to Servius," *Mnemosyne* 47 (1994), pp. 625-51, points to parallels with a list given by Servius Auctus (on *Aen.* 10.272) to argue for a different line of transmission going back to "Nechepso and Petosiris." John's account at *De Ostentis* 10, by contrast, is closely parallel to that found in Pliny—and there he cites "Varro, Nigidius and Apuleius" as sources, before going on in sections 11-15 to transmit the views of "Campestris" on comets *in extenso*. Previously, in section 9c, John associates Campestris' account of the sun and moon with Petosiris; Servius Auctus also associates the two names, in connection with comets. Cf. also E. Riess, "Nechepsonis et Petosiridis fragmenta magica," *Philologus Suppl.* 6 (1891-3), pp. 342-51 [available online at <http://www.hellenisticastrology.com/editions/Riess-Nechepso-Petosiris.pdf>].

³¹ Gk. *komêtês*, also used as the general designation for this phenomenon.

stretches out like a sword or long spear, and is pale and cloud-like. The "beard-like" [comet] disperses [its rays] not on its head but underneath, like a beard. The "beam-like" [comet] is quite similar to the "sword-like," but has edges that are not sharp, but dull. The "jug" [comet is so called] from its shape. The "torch-like" [comet] is fiery and naturally shines in the manner of a fiery stone or a burning tree. The "long-haired" [comet] is broad in appearance and as it were "cheerful,"³² drawing along certain silvery-looking "tresses." The "discus-like" (in accordance with the name itself) appears in the form of a discus—not bright, nor red, but like [155] *amber*.³³ The "whirlwind" [comet] has the appearance of fire and blood, scattering a sort of thin "tresses." The "horned" [comet] is horn-shaped like the moon—and it is said to have appeared when Xerxes came against Attica.

But Ptolemy in the works written by him to Syrus adds another type of comet as well, called the "trumpet"—and it appears in the northerly direction.

The natural [philosophers] say that comets are formed in the "hollows" under the moon, displaying a sort of star-like nature. For they are *not* stars, but rather certain "clots" produced from the exhalation of the earth; they come into existence from *aer* that is caught up by contact with the *aether*, and hence they are borne around along with it, at an equal speed, until [they] fall. And whenever the *aether's* flow is drawn downwards as it is encircled, "beard-like" and "jug" [comets] are produced, but whenever [it is drawn] sideways, "long-haired" [comets are produced]. The "beard-like" [comets] fall more quickly, but the "jug" and "beam" [comets] much more quickly even than these.

117. They say [there are] two Pans. And some say that Pan was born from Cronus and Rhea, meaning that from *mind* and *moist substance*, that is, material unboundedness, [comes] this whole universe [*pan*].

118.³⁴ When Libanius and many other augurs were attempting to dissuade Julian [156] from the war against the Persians, Julian is said to have spoken the Homeric [verse]:

I have respect for Trojan men and long-robed Trojan women.³⁵

And after passing the Tigris and having brought over to his side many cities and garrisons of the Persians, henceforth he could not be resisted by the barbarians. But nevertheless he and all his army perished by a trick: Two Persians, having cut off their own ears and noses, came and deceived Julian, lamenting that they had suffered such things at the hands of the king of the Persians, but [claiming] that they could put him victoriously in possession of Gorgo itself—the royal [city] of the Persians.³⁶ And he, as fate drove him on, forgot about Zopyrus in Herodotus³⁷

³² Cf. Latin *comis*.

³³ Gk. *ēlektron*; the word could also mean "electrum."

³⁴ Cf. Dodgeon's translation in M. H. Dodgeon and S. N. C. Lieu (eds.), *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars (AD 226-363): A Documentary History* (Routledge, 1991), pp. 253-4.

³⁵ *Iliad* 6.442.

³⁶ Dodgeon by contrast translates, "...bring him to victory over Gorgo herself, queen of Persia." The words could be interpreted in this way, but the scenario makes little sense, and this name is not attested for a queen of Shapur II. Gorgo is a known place name (albeit in Hyrcania), but I imagine that the deceptive promise was originally supposed to relate instead to *Ctesiphon*, the Persian capital, which Julian was in fact seeking to take when he was killed.

³⁷ 3.154.

as well as Sinon in Vergil:³⁸ he burned the ships by which they had been conveyed across the Euphrates—so as not <to give> the Persians license to use them, I suppose—with the army bringing along a moderate amount of provisions, and followed the deceivers. But once they had led him into dry and waterless rough terrain, they unveiled their trick. They themselves (of course) were killed, but the emperor, finding himself unable either to proceed further or to turn back again, was perishing pitiably. When the majority of his army had fallen, the Persians came upon him in his weakened state, but were [at first] defeated, yet nevertheless attacked again—[and Julian] had not even 20,000 [troops], whereas he had brought with him [157] 170,000 previously. Julian fought most excellently, but someone from the Persian forces—those called "Saracens"—suspecting [that he was] the emperor because of his purple robe, shouted aloud in his native language, "*Malcha!*"—that is, "king!" With a whoosh he threw his so-called "long-sword"³⁹ and transfixes [Julian's] abdomen. When Oribasius conveyed him to the camp and urged him to make his final dispositions, he himself selected Jovian to rule—and died.

119. Those winds that flow from a great cause⁴⁰ are distinguished according to 12 points of the horizon;⁴¹ their names, I know, elsewhere ... and those that flow from the "Bears"⁴² themselves and their pole are called *Aparktiai* ["from-bears"], while those [that flow] from the equinoctial sunset⁴³ [are called] *Zephyroi*; those from the South,⁴⁴ *Notoi*; those from the equinoctial sunrise, *Apêliôtai* ["from-sun"]. As for the [winds] between those [first] mentioned: The one next to the *Aparktias* is the *Kaikias*, which some also call *Thraskias*;⁴⁵ the one [next] to the *Zephyros* is the *Argestês*, which some name *Olympias*, others *Iapyx*. Of those between the *Zephyros* and the *Notos*, the one next to the *Zephyros* is the *Lips*; the one [next] to the *Notos* is the *Libonotos*. Of those between the *Notos* and the *Euros*,⁴⁶ the one that moves nearest to the *Notos* is called the *Euronotos*; the one [that moves nearest] to the *Apêliôtês*, the *Euros*. And similarly, between the *Apêliôtês* and the *Aparktias*, the one next to the *Apêliôtês* is called the *Kaikias*, while [158] the one [next] to the *Aparktias* [is called] *Boreas*.

As for those [winds] that do not [flow] from a "great cause," the one [that flows] from a small movement of a cloud is the *Eknephias* ["from-cloud"]; the one [that flows] from certain gulfs and gaps is the *Kolpias* ["(pertaining-to)-gulf"]; and the one [that flows] from earth and an aggregation of *aer* is the *Gnophias* ["(pertaining-to)-darkness"]. For these breezes are in fact also "flows" of *aer*, and not without reason are they called "winds" [*anemoi*], when they begin their movement at lakes or rivers.⁴⁷ Similar to these are also the *Apogeioi* ["from-earth"], and hence, when the *aer* is still, the conditions are called "calm" [*nênemia*].⁴⁸

³⁸ *Aeneid* 2.57ff.

³⁹ Gk. *rhomphaia*.

⁴⁰ I.e., the greater / universal winds.

⁴¹ For the 12-point categorization of the winds (popularized in the Roman world by Varro), see Williams, *The Cosmic Viewpoint* (2012), pp. 195-99.

⁴² I.e., Ursa Minor and Ursa Major.

⁴³ I.e., due West—cf. the "equinoctial circle" (= the [celestial] equator).

⁴⁴ Lit., "the invisible [pole]."

⁴⁵ John's mention of *Kaikias* here is aberrant, and causes a difficulty when he mentions *Kaikias* later (in its normal position).

⁴⁶ So Wuensch's text—but this seems to be an error for *Apêliôtês* (Bandy thus emends), although *Euros* for plain East is indeed attested.

⁴⁷ Implying an etymology *a-nem-os* = "no pasture / cultivation," it appears.

⁴⁸ I.e., etymologically, "no-wind."

120. In the month of August, the oracle decrees that those who wish to have healthy joints abstain from mallow.