**Anno Domini** (sometimes found in the irregular form *Anno Domine*), abbreviated as **AD** or **A.D.**, and **Before Christ**, abbreviated as **BC** or **B.C.**, are designations used to number years in the Julian and Gregorian calendars. The calendar era that they refer to is based on the traditionally reckoned year of the conception or birth of Jesus Christ, with **AD** denoting years after the start of this epoch, and **BC** denoting years before the start of this epoch. There is no year zero in this scheme, so the year AD 1 immediately follows the year 1 BC.

The Gregorian calendar, and the year numbering system associated with it, is the calendar system with the most widespread usage in the world today. For decades, it has been the unofficial global standard, recognized by international institutions such as the United Nations and the Universal Postal Union. It is also the basis of scholarly dating, though some people adopt the Common Era labels, retaining the same numeric values but using the label "CE" (Common Era) instead of "AD", and "BCE" (Before the Common Era) instead of "BC".

The term *Anno Domini* is Medieval Latin, translated as *In the year of *(the/Our) Lord*. It is sometimes specified more fully as *Anno Domini Nostri Iesu Christi* (*"In the Year of Our Lord Jesus Christ")

Traditionally, English copied Latin usage by placing the abbreviation before the year number for AD, but after the year number for BC. For example: 64 BC, but AD 2009. However, placing the AD after the year number (as in "2009 AD") is now also common. The abbreviation is also widely used after the number of a century or millennium, as in "4th century AD" or "2nd millennium AD". In these cases it should be read as, e.g., "in the 4th century of the AD scale".

Because BC is the English abbreviation for *Before Christ*, some people incorrectly conclude that AD must mean *After Death*, i.e., after the death of Jesus. If that were true, the thirty-three or so years of his life would not be in any era.[3]

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## History

The *Anno Domini* dating system was devised in 525 by Dionysius Exiguus, who used it to compute the date of the Christian Easter festival, and to identify the several Easters in his *Easter table*, but did not use it to date any historical event. His system was to replace the Diocletian era that had been used in an old Easter table because he did not wish to continue the memory of a tyrant who persecuted Christians. The last year of the old table, Diocletian 247, was immediately followed by the first year of his table, AD 532. When he devised his table, *Julian calendar* years were identified by naming the *consulate* he held who held office that year — he himself stated that the "present year" was "the consulship of Probus Junior", which was 532 years "since the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ". Thus Dionysius implied that Jesus’ Incarnation occurred 525 years earlier, without stating the specific year during which his birth or conception occurred.

"However, nowhere in his exposition of his table does Dionysius relate his epoch to any other dating system, whether consular, Olympiad, year of the world, or regnal year of Augustus; much less does he explain or justify the underlying date."[5][776]

Blackburn & Holford-Strevens briefly present arguments for 2 BC, 1 BC, or AD 1 as the year Dionysius intended for the *Incar* date. Among the sources of confusion are:[3][778–9]

- In modern times Incarnation is synonymous with the conception, but some ancient writers, such as Bede, considered Incarnation to be synonymous with the Nativity
- The civil or consular year began on 1 January but the Diocletian year began on 29 August
- There were inaccuracies in the list of consuls
- There were confused summations of emperors’ regnal years

### Accuracy

According to Doggett, "Although scholars generally believe that Christ was born some years before A.D. 1, the historical evidence is too sketchy to allow a definitive dating".[3][770] According to the *Matthew 2:1* and *Matthew 2:16*, King Herod the Great was alive when Jesus was born, and ordered the Massacre of the Innocents in response to his birth. Blackburn & Holford-Strevens fix King Herod's death shortly before Passover in 4 BC,[3][779] and say that those who accept the story of the Massacre of the Innocents sometimes associate the star that led the Biblical Magi with the planetary conjunction of 15 September 7 BC or Halley's comet of 12 BC; even historians who do not accept the Massacre accept the birth under Herod as a tradition older than the written gospels.[3][776]

The *Gospel of St. Luke* states that Jesus was born during the reign of the Emperor *Augustus* and while *Cyrenius* (or *Quirinius*) was the governor of *Syria* (2:1–2). Blackburn and Holford-Strevens indicate Cyrenius/Quirinius’ governorship of Syria began in AD 6, which is incompatible with conception in 4 BC, and say that "St. Luke raises greater difficulty....Most critics therefore discard Luke."[3][778] Some scholars rely on *John 8:57*, "thou art not yet fifty years old", to place Christ's birth in c. 18 BC.[3][776]
Notes

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with a negative sign (unless the result is zero). For years AD, omit the AD and prefix the number with a plus sign (plus sign is optional if it is year 0, 2 BC = year −1. To convert from a year BC to

In the 19th and 20th centuries. Even though Anno Domini was in widespread use by the 9th century, Before Christ (or its equivalent) did not become widespread until the late 15th century.

Other eras

Further information: Calendar era

During the first six centuries of what would come to be known as the Christian era, European countries used various systems to count years. Systems in use included consular dating, imperial regnal year dating, and Creation dating.

Although the last non-imperial consul, Basilius, was appointed in 541 by Emperor Justinian I, later emperors through Constans II (641–668) were appointed consuls on the first 1 January after their accession. All of these emperors, except Justinian, used imperial post-consular years for all of the years of their reign alongside their regnal years.[10] Long unused, this practice was not formally abolished until Novell xcv of the law code of Leo VI did so in 888.

Another calculation had been developed by the Alexandrian monk Annianus around the year AD 400, placing the Anno Domini on 25 March AD 9 (Julian)—eight to ten years after the date that Dionysius was to imply. Although this Incarnation was popular during the early centuries of the Byzantine Empire, years numbered from it, an Era of Incarnation, were only used, and are still only used, in Ethiopia, accounting for the eight- or seven-year discrepancy between the Gregorian and the Ethiopian calendars. Byzantine chroniclers like Maximus the Confessor, George Syncellus and Theophanes dated their years from Annianus' Creation of the World. This era, called Anno Mundi, "year of the world" (abbreviated AM), by modern scholars, began its first year on 25 March 5492 BC. Later Byzantine chroniclers used Anno Mundi years from 1 September 5509 BC, the Byzantine Era. No single Anno Mundi epoch was dominant throughout the Christian world. Spain and Portugal continued to date by the Era of the Caesars or Spanish Era, which began counting from 38 BC, well into the Middle Ages. In 1422, Portugal became the last Catholic country to adopt the Anno Domini system.[9]

The Era of Martyrs, which numbered years from the accession of Diocletian in 284, who launched the last yet most severe persecution of Christians, was used by the Church of Alexandria, and is still used officially by the Coptic church. It also used to be used by the Ethiopian church. Another system was to date from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which as early as Hippolytus and Tertullian was believed to have occurred in the consulate of the Gemini (AD 29), which appears in the occasional medieval manuscript.

Synonyms

Common Era

Main article: Common Era

Anno Domini is sometimes referred to as the Common Era, Christian Era or Current Era (abbreviated as C.E. or CE). CE is often preferred by those who desire a term ostensibly unrelated to Christian conceptions of time. For example, Cunningham and Starr (1998) write that "B.C.E./C.E. ... do not presuppose faith in Christ and hence are more appropriate for interfaith dialog than the conventional B.C./A.D." Upon its foundation, the Republic of China adopted the Western calendar in 1912 and the translated term was 公元 (lit. Western Era). Later, in 1949, the People's Republic of China reiterated the use of the Gregorian calendar and accepted the term 公元 (公立, lit. Common Era).

Numbering of years

In the Julian calendar AD 1 is preceded by 1 BC. For computational reasons astronomers use a time scale in which AD 1 = year 1, 1 BC = year 0, 2 BC = year −1. To convert from a year BC to astronomical year numbering, reduce the absolute value of the year by 1, and prefix it with a negative sign (unless the result is zero). For years AD, omit the AD and prefix the number with a plus sign (plus sign is optional if it is clear from the context that the year is after the year 0).[11]

Notes and references

Notes:

6. ^ Bede 731, Book 1, Chapter 2, first sentence.
7. ^ Compare Bede 731, Book 1, Chapter 2, first sentence, with Chapter 3.
8. ^ a b Gerard, 1908
9. ^ Werner Rolevinck in Fasciculus temporum (1474) used Anno ante xpi nativitatem (in the year before the birth of Christ) for all years between Creation.
and Jesus. “xpi” is the Greek χρι in Latin letters, which is a cryptic abbreviation for christi. This phrase appears upside down in the center of recto folios (right hand pages). From Jesus to Pope Sixtus IV he usually used Anno christi or its cryptic form Anno xpi (on verso folios—left hand pages). He used Anno mundi alongside all of these terms for all years.


References:


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- Calendar Converter

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