

Inspector Rex's History Snippet #5

Was 1 January 2020 the start of a new decade?

This will make you think.

Year Zero

It all boils down to the question: was there a year 0? Let's first assume that year BCE 0 existed. This would mean that:

- 1 full year would have passed at the end of year 0 since the beginning of the year count;
- 2 years would have passed at the end of year 1;
- and so on...

This means that 2000 years, two full millennia, would have passed at the end of year 1999. In other words, the 3rd millennium would have started on [New Year's Day](#) 2000.

The only problem with this theory is that year 0 did not exist, as historians, calendar experts, [timeanddate.com](#), and other killjoys kept pointing out in the lead-up to the big party in year 2000.

So, how do we know there was no year zero?

Anno Domini

Anno domini, the year numbering system (calendar era) we use today, was devised by a 6th-century monk named Dionysius Exiguus, who lived in an area now part of [Romania](#) and [Bulgaria](#). Dionysius used Roman numerals to number the years “since the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ”, as he put it in his writings—and there is no Roman numeral for the number zero.

It is worth pointing out that Dionysius did use the Latin number words *nulla* and *nihil*, both meaning “nothing,” in his calculations of the [date of Easter](#). However, he used these words to imply the *absence* of a number, rather than the number zero itself. In fact, it is believed that the concept of the number zero, as it is used today, did not exist in Europe until the 13th century.

Year 1 BCE Was Followed by Year CE 1

Equivalently year AD 1 directly followed year 1 BC, without the ‘year’ count ever reaching zero. In other words, the first year of the *anno domini* era was year 1, not ‘year’ 0. As a consequence,

- 1 full year had passed at the end of year 1;
- 2 years had passed at the end of year 2;
- and so on...

So, at the end of year 1999, as people were celebrating the new millennium, only 1999 full years had passed since the beginning of the calendar era—which is one year short of two full millennia.

It would mean that the first day of the 3rd millennium started on 1 January 2000.

This is WRONG!

Inspector Rex's Comments

There is no 0 (zero) year. There is a 0 'point of time' – it separates BC from AD. Similarly 12 noon is a 'point of time' – it separates AM from PM (it is not an hour long or day long or anything). So also, for example is, say, 7 o'clock – a point of time – it separates all events before 7 o'clock from those after 7 o'clock.

Is 10,000 BC earlier than 100 BC? I think most people would agree that it was. Is 1,000 BC earlier than 100 BC? Yes, and what about 101 BC – is it earlier than 100 BC? Yes again.

When did the year 101 BC end? It ended at midnight on 31 December 101 BC. (It started on 1 January 101 BC, which was **earlier** than 31 December 101 BC.

At the point of time midnight on 31 December 101 BC it was also the point of time 1 January 100 BC.

Similarly, the year 1 BC ended at midnight on 31 December 1 BC – the point 0 - and became the new year of 1 January 1 AD.

The first year 1 AD ended on 31 December 1AD.

The second year 2 AD started on 1 January 2 AD, and ended on 31 December 2 AD.

The tenth year 10 AD ended on 31 December 10 AD.

Ten years having passed since the 0 point (or 1 January 1 AD) the 11th year is the start of the Second decade.

Similarly 1 January 101 AD is the start of the Second Century (100 years having passed).

Similarly 1 January 1001 AD is the start of the Second millennium.

Then too, 1 January 2001 AD is the start of the Third millennium.

QED.