

Time lapse

A UVic mathematician's new book discusses the extraordinary idea that our calendars are more than 1,000 years off

by Jessica Gillies

Happy 2006! Wait, not so fast. Should we really be saying "Happy 942?"

The thought that we're ahead of ourselves chronologically seems far-fetched, but it's the subject of a new book by University of Victoria mathematician Dr. Florin Diacu.

Diacu was at a conference in 1994 when he first heard about a Russian scholar's research in historical chronology. Anatoli Fomenko proposed that the Middle Ages were either much shorter than traditionally thought, or nearly non-existent. He also theorized that many ancient and medieval dynasties actually overlapped, instead of being successive.

Diacu's interest in these theories was rekindled years later when he read an article in *Saturday Night* about Russian mathematicians who believed that 2000 AD was actually 936 AD.

"I started to read Fomenko's works and discovered he was not the only one who challenged the existing historical chronology," he says. "I went deeper into the subject and began to realize that the historical chronology of ancient and medieval times is far from ironclad. It's not as well understood as we're taught in school, and I wanted to understand why."

Diacu admits that an interest in history is unusual for a mathematician, but his research in celestial mechanics—the motion of celestial bodies such as planets and stars—ties the two together. "If you look at planets today you can see where they were in the past. We can tell their movements with good accuracy for about 20 million years in the past and the future."

In his new book, *The Lost Millennium*, Diacu looks at how historical chronology came into being. "I examine how people in the past looked at calendars and how they fix some basic events in history. If you have a document that tells you where the planets were at that point in time, you can date almost to the day when that configuration took place."

For example, there's Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta—one of few events in ancient Greek history that can be given a precise date.

"Thucydides describes three eclipses and how much time passed from one to the other," says Diacu. "There are few possible solutions using celestial mechanics."

431 BC is the traditional date for the start of the war, but Fomenko has two other solutions: one in the 11th century AD, and one in the 12th."

Another event is the crucifixion of Christ as described in the Bible. The New Testament describes darkness over the Earth that lasted about three hours. Yet an eclipse that took place on AD April 3, 33, the traditionally accepted date of the crucifixion, lasted only a few minutes.

As with the Peloponnesian War, there is a finite number of possible solutions, says Diacu. Russian mathematician Nicolai Morozov pointed out a lengthy lunar eclipse in 368 AD that matched the one in the Bible. And Fomenko found another eclipse that matched the biblical criteria in all ways but duration. It occurred AD April 3, 1075.

"There's quite a controversy today about whether the Bible is truth or fiction or a combination of both," says Diacu. "Personally, I don't think that Christ is a good chronological figure because his life, whether he existed or not, is so tainted in legend. There are other events that have more chronological significance."

Diacu takes great pains to remain objective and reiterates that he does not necessarily agree with Fomenko.

"While I did my research, I was sometimes more on one side and sometimes more on the other side. In the end, I realized we don't really know. I've had very different reactions from people who have read the book. Some people come out of it thinking that those who challenge traditional chronology are right, and others think the opposite."

Diacu maintains that, given enough research, we could eventually know the truth. "I don't have the final answer. I tried to write the book such that you can decide for yourself what the answer is. But I know that if we do the right research, we could determine chronology to an accuracy of within 100 or 200 years."

The Lost Millennium (Knopf) is available at the UVic Bookstore for \$35.

