

## CHAPTER 14

### Sylvester and the Days of the Week

**B**ESIDES the Sunday legislation of the emperor Constantine's reign, there are some other items of interest of that period, which throw light on the pagan planetary week and the observance of Sunday among the heathen.

#### "The Day of the Sun"

An old sepulchral inscription in Latin, which is classed as Christian, speaks of "the day of the Sun."<sup>1</sup> The date is believed to be 323 A. D.

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<sup>1</sup> E Diehi, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*, Vol. 1, p. 225, No. 1148.

#### A Roman Calendar

J. P. Migne presents a Roman calendar<sup>2</sup> which is said to have been "compiled in the time of Constantine the Great, in 325 A. D., the same year in which the Council of Nicaea was held." The portion corresponding to the month of December is missing, while the other months appear complete. The month of January begins thus:

A	a	Kal
B	b	iv Non. Jan.
C	c	iii
D	d	Prid.
E	e	Non.
F	f	viii Id. Jan.
G	g	vii
A	h	vi
B	a	v
C	b	iv
	etc.	

The months were arranged after the usual order of the Roman calendars. In this case the days of the week are indicated in the first column by the letters *A* to *G*. In the second column appear the market days of the nundinal period marked from *a* to *h*. In the third column are the days of the month in their usual numerical order.

Writers on this subject seldom refer to this calendar. Migne says it was compiled in 325 A. D. If it was composed then, it doubtless was for use in the following year (326), which began on Saturday. And if this is true, the letter *A* in the weekly cycle of this Roman calendar stood for the day of Saturn, which conforms perfectly to the order of the days in the pagan planetary week.

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† J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 19, cols., 927-934.

### **The Usage of Eusebius of Caesarea**

In connection with Constantine's Sunday legislation, Eusebius of Caesarea, as the church historian of that time, is frequently quoted. It is worthy of note that he employed a peculiar mode of referring to Sunday, one in which he endeavored to syncretize the meaning of the names given that day by both the Christians and the pagans who observed it. Eusebius lived from 260 to 340 A. D., and wrote (in Greek) most of his works in the reign of Constantine.

This writer, for example, refers in one place to Sunday as "the saving and Lord's and first day of light."<sup>3</sup> Again he speaks of it as "the first [day] of light and of the true Sun."<sup>4</sup> In another place he calls it "the salutary day, which also happens to be named in honor of the light and of the Sun."<sup>5</sup> In his praise of the emperor, he mentions Constantine's regard for "the truly first and chief and really Lord's and saving [day], and also that of light, of life, and of immortality, and of every good thing named."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, *Commentary on the Psalms*, Ps. 91 (Ps. 92 in A. V.), in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 23, col. 1169, author's translation.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, book 4, chap. 18 in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 20, col. 1165 author's translation; standard English translation in *Nicene and Pre-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 1, p. 544

<sup>6</sup> Eusebius, *In Praise of Constantine*, chap. 9, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 20, cols. 1365, 1368, author's translation; standard English translation in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 1, p. 593.

He appears to be the first ecclesiastical writer to spiritualize and accommodate to Christian thought the very pagan name of the day, saying that "on it to our souls the Sun of Righteousness rose."<sup>7</sup> And he speaks of seeing "the face of the glory of Christ, and to behold the day of His light."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, he is the first Christian writer to maintain that Christ Himself transferred Sabbath observance from the seventh to the first day of the week. On this point he said: "Wherefore, being rejected of them [the Jews], the Word (Christ) by the new covenant translated and transferred the feast of the Sabbath to the dawn of light, and handed down to us a likeness of the true rest: the saving and Lord's and first day of light."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Eusebius, *Commentary on the Psalms*, Ps. 91 (Ps. 92 in A. V.), in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 23, col. 1172, author's translation.

<sup>8</sup> Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, book 4, chap. 16 (comment on Ps. 84:9, 10), translation by W. J. Ferrar, Vol. 1, p. 207.

<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, *Commentary on the Psalms*, Ps. 91 (Ps. 92 in A. V.), in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 23, col. 1169, author's translation.

It is interesting to note, also, that in the very same discourse he unwittingly reveals who the real authors of the change were, saying: “All things whatsoever it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord’s day, as being more appropriate, and chief, and first, and more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1172, author’s translation.

By the word “we” he meant the bishops of the church, who were aided by Constantine the emperor. This may be seen further in what history has said about the Roman bishop Sylvester I and the pagan week.

### Sylvester I, Bishop of Rome

Have you ever compared the names of the days of the week in the Latin countries with those we use in English-speaking lands? There is a notable difference. In Spanish, for example, the names of the days are thus:

<i>Domingo</i>	(from <i>dominicus</i> , “Lord’s”).
<i>Lunes</i>	(from <i>Lunae dies</i> , “Moon’s day”).
<i>Martes</i>	(from <i>Martis dies</i> , “Mars’ day”).
<i>Miércoles</i>	(from <i>Mercurii dies</i> , “Mercury’s day”).
<i>Jueves</i>	(from <i>Jovis dies</i> , “Jupiter’s day”).
<i>Viernes</i>	(from <i>Veneris dies</i> , “Venus’ day”).
<i>Sábado</i>	(from <i>Sabbatum</i> , “Sabbath”).

All the days of the week, excepting the first and the last, carry the old planetary names of Roman times. A great many writers attribute this exception to an effort of Sylvester, bishop of Rome (314-335 A. D.), to abolish, through the papal clergy, the use of the pagan nomenclature among Roman Catholic people. It was only natural that Constantine’s Sunday legislation, by officially giving to the first day of the Christian week the heathen title of “day of the Sun” as a legal title, tended rather to paganize the day instead of Christianize it. For this reason the legal names of the days of the week are still quite generally the same as they were in pagan Roman usage. Custom is hard to uproot, once it is well established, and Sylvester’s plan succeeded in only one country, that is, Portugal. In other lands it succeeded only in the case of the first and last days of the week.

Rabanus Maurus, an archbishop of Mainz, Germany, who lived from 776 to 856 A. D., is said to have been “probably the most cultured man of his time, and exceptionally learned in patristics.” A perusal of his works will convince anyone that he was a learned man. He says:

“Likewise also *feriae* is derived from *fando*, for which reason Pope Sylvester I ordained among the Romans that [concerning] the names of the days, which they previously called, after the names of their gods, that is, *Solis* [of the Sun], *Lunae* [of the Moon], *Martis* [of Mars], *Mercurii* [of Mercury], [*Iovis* (of Jupiter)], *Veneris* [of Venus], [and] *Saturni* [of Saturn], that they should

therefore call [them] *feriae*, that is, first *feria*, second *feria*, third *feria*, fourth *feria*, fifth *feria*, sixth *feria*, because in the beginning of Genesis it is written that God said on each day; on the first, Let there be light; on the second, Let there be a firmament; on the third, Let the earth bring forth green herbs, etc. But he [Sylvester] commanded to call the Sabbath by the ancient term of the law, and [to call] the first *feria* ‘Lord’s day,’ because that on it the Lord rose [from the dead]. Moreover the same pope decreed that the Sabbath rest should be transferred to the Lord’s day, in order that on that day we should rest from earthly works to the praising of God.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Rabanus Maurus, *De Clericorum Institutione*, book 2, chap. 46, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 107, col. 361, author’s translation. See also Rabanus Maurus, *Liber de Computo*, chap. 27, “De Feriis,” in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 107, col. 682

The same writer repeats this concerning Sylvester in another of his works.

### **Bede’s Testimony About Sylvester**

Bede, the noted English monk and ecclesiastical writer (672-735 A. D.), repeatedly declares that Sylvester attempted to change the pagan names of the days of the week. He says: “But the holy Sylvester ordered them to be called *feriae*, calling the first day the ‘Lord’s [day]’; imitating the Hebrews, who named [them] the first of the week, the second of the week, and so on the others.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bede, *De Temporibus*, chap. 4, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 90, col. 281, author’s translation. See also Bede, *De Divisionibus Temporum*, chap. 10.; *De Temporum Ratione*, chap. 8, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 90, cols. 657, 658, 326-332.

Bede says also in another work: “Question: Who first taught to observe *feriae*? Answer: Pope Sylvester instructed the clergy to observe *feriae*, to whom, resting only to God, it was allowed to engage in no military service or worldly business....And indeed because light in the beginning was made on the first day, and the resurrection of Christ [being] celebrated [on it], he called [it] the ‘Lord’s [day].’”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bede, *De Ratione Computi*, chap. 5, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 90, col. 584, author’s translation.

Sicard, bishop of Cremona, Italy, about 1221 A. D., also says: “Besides, he [Sylvester] changed the names of the days into *feriae*, and he decreed [that] the fast [be observed] on the fourth [Wednesday], on the sixth [Friday], and on the Sabbath on account of the Lord’s burial; but on the Lord’s day [he decreed that there be observed] a solemnity on account of the resurrection, and on the fifth *feria* [Thursday] on account of [His] ascension.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sicard, *Chronicon* ad anno 310, “De Constantio et Galerio,” in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 13, col. 467, author’s translation.

In an ecclesiastical manual written in Anglo-Saxon in 1011 A. D., Byrhtferth said: “The reverend Bishop Sylvester altered the names of these days into *feria* (holiday); and said that Sunday was God’s day and called it *feria prima*; and Monday (he called) *feria secunda*, that is the second holiday; and all the others he named as we call them in Latin.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Byrhtferth’s Manual*, p. 131.

In the ecclesiastical terminology of the Roman Catholic Church, the nomenclature recommended by Sylvester is still in use. “The ecclesiastical style of naming the week days was adopted by no nation except the Portuguese, who alone use the terms *segunda Feira*, etc.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6, p. 43, art. “Feria.”

Sylvester did not institute Sunday observance among Christians. Rabanus Maurus, already quoted in this chapter, says that “Pope Sylvester instructed the clergy to observe *feriae*. And indeed from an old custom he called the first day ‘the Lord’s [day],’ on which light was made in the beginning, and [on which] the resurrection of Christ has been celebrated.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Rabanus Maurus, *Liber de Computo*, chap. 27 “De Feriis,” in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 107, col. 682, author’s translation.

The Roman Breviary (*lect. 6 in festis S. Sylvestri*) remarks: “Retaining the names Sabbath and the Lord’s day, and distinguishing the remaining days of the week by the term *feriae*, he [Sylvester] wished them to be called what the [Roman] Church had already previously commenced to name them.”<sup>18</sup>

### **The Sabbath Kept by Many Churches**

Since about the latter half of the second century A. D., the Roman and Alexandrian Christians had been observing Sunday as a merry religious festival in honor of the Lord’s resurrection. Nevertheless, the majority of Christians still observed also the Sabbath, the seventh day, as the sacred rest ordained by God. This fact is attested by two church historians.

Socrates, a Greek writer (died not long after 440 A. D.) wrote a continuation of Eusebius’ ecclesiastical history, covering the period from 306 to 439 A. D. He says: “For whereas everywhere in the world the churches on the Sabbath day, throughout every weekly cycle, celebrate the mysteries, those in Alexandria and those in Rome on account of some old tradition have refused to do this.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 5, chap. 22, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 67, col. 636, author’s translation; standard English translation in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 2, p. 132.

Sozomen, also a Greek ecclesiastical historian (died about the middle of the fifth century A. D.), confirms the statement by Socrates, saying: “Of course, they indeed also on the Sabbath, likewise on the first day of the week, assemble at church, as in Constantinople and nearly everywhere; but in Rome and Alexandria [this is done] no longer.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 7, chap. 19, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 67, col. 1477, author’s translation; standard English translation in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, p. 390.

Marcion and some others in the second century had observed the Sabbath by fasting on it out of contempt for the Jews and their God.<sup>21</sup> The Gnostics had affirmed that the Father of Jesus Christ was not the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Now Sylvester and his associates attempted to make Sunday, which hitherto had been a merry ecclesiastical festival, a day of solemn rest superior to the Sabbath. Hence, not only Sunday was decreed to be a day of general rest throughout the Roman Empire, by the laws of Constantine, but also the Sabbath was decreed to be a day of fasting, the bishop of Rome<sup>22</sup> making it one of gloom and unpleasantness, in order that the people might be all the more glad to see the next day arrive.

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<sup>21</sup> See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1; Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3.

<sup>22</sup> See the statement of Cardinal Humbert, legate of Leo IX, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 143, col. 937; also that of Cardinal Peter Damian, *Opusculum LV*, “*De Celebrandis Vigiliis*,” chap. 3, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 145, col. 803.

Constantine’s Sunday laws, by officially conferring on the first day of the Biblical week the legal title of “the day of the Sun,” a purely heathen denomination, undoubtedly enhanced its pagan significance and tended all the more to paganize it as a religious festival among the followers of Sylvester. Were this not so, there would be no reason for this bishop’s measures concerning the names of the days of the week. Hence he instructed the Roman clergy to educate the people to speak of the days as *feriae*, instead of referring to them as the days of the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. He adopted at the same time the name “Lord’s day,” which had been used by ecclesiastical writers since the latter part of the second century A. D., as the *official* Roman Catholic designation of the first day of the week. The Sabbath being still observed as a sacred day, even when kept by fasting, its Biblical name was retained by the Roman bishop.

### **Imperial and Ecclesiastical Objectives**

Ellen G. White has well stated what the objectives of Constantine, Sylvester, and their associates were, saying:

“Constantine, while still a heathen, issued a decree enjoining the general observance of Sunday as a public festival throughout the Roman Empire. After his conversion, he remained a staunch advocate of Sunday, and his pagan edict was then enforced by him in the interests of his new faith. But the honor shown this day was not as yet sufficient to prevent Christians from regarding the true Sabbath as the holy of the Lord. Another step must be taken; the false sabbath must be exalted to an equality with the true. A few years after the issue of Constantine’s decree, the

bishop of Rome conferred on the Sunday the title of Lord's day. Thus the people were gradually led to regard it as possessing a degree of sacredness. Still the original Sabbath was kept."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> E. G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 55.

And the same author also says: "The first public measure enforcing Sunday observance was the law enacted (A. D. 321) by Constantine, two years before his profession of Christianity. This edict required townspeople to rest on the venerable day of the Sun, but permitted countrymen to continue their agricultural pursuits. Though originally a pagan statute, it was enforced by the emperor after his nominal acceptance of the Christian religion.

"The royal mandate not proving a sufficient substitute for divine authority, the bishop of Rome soon after conferred upon the Sunday the title of Lord's day. Another bishop, who also sought the favor of princes, and who was the special friend and flatterer of Constantine, advanced the claim that Christ had transferred the Sabbath to Sunday. Not a single testimony of the Scriptures was produced in proof of the new doctrine. The sacred garments in which the spurious sabbath was arrayed were of man's own manufacture; but they served to embolden men in trampling upon the law of God. All who desired to be honored by the world accepted the popular festival."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 391, 392.

That other bishop who came to the support of Constantine and Sylvester in their effort to make the heathen religious festival of the day of the Sun popular among Christians, was none other than Eusebius of Caesarea. "The royal mandate not proving a sufficient substitute for divine authority, Eusebius, a bishop who sought the favor of princes, and who was the special friend and flatterer of Constantine, advanced the claim that Christ had transferred the Sabbath to Sunday. Not a single testimony of the Scriptures was produced in proof of the new doctrine. Eusebius himself unwittingly acknowledges its falsity, and points to the real authors of the change. 'All things,' he says, 'whatever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's day' (R. Cox, *Sabbath Laws and Sabbath Duties*, p. 538, edition of 1853). But the Sunday argument, groundless as it was, served to embolden men in trampling upon the Sabbath of the Lord. All who desired to be honored by the world accepted the popular festival."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> E. G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, p. 574.

### **Sunday Made Popular**

From that time forward the collaboration of the Roman civil authorities with the Roman ecclesiastics, especially with the bishops of the Roman church, enforced the observance of Sunday upon the peoples of the world. Civil governments as well as church councils continued to legislate in favor of Sunday keeping and to suppress Sabbath observance until they succeeded in instilling in the minds of Christians in general the notion that Sunday, and not the Sabbath, is the day that God has ordained to be kept holy.

And with all this the pagan names of the days of the planetary week have been perpetuated in the calendar in use among the so-called Christian nations. Every time we look at the calendar we have before us a constant reminder of the amalgamation of paganism and Christianity that took place as a result of the great religious apostasy—that “falling away” foretold by the apostle Paul,<sup>26</sup> which occurred in the early centuries of the Christian church and made the modern Babel of conflicting sects and creeds which profess the name of Christ.

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<sup>26</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:1-7.

### Testimonies of Later Ecclesiastics

A few testimonies of leading ecclesiastics of the latter part of the fourth and the early part of the fifth century clearly show that the matter of the pagan names of the days of the week resulted in confusion for Sunday keepers among Christians at that time.

Philaster, bishop of Brescia (who died in the latter part of the fourth century), denounced as heretics “those who say that the names of the days—*Solis* [of the Sun], *Lunae* [of the Moon], *Martis* [of Mars], *Mercurii* [of Mercury], *Iovis* [of Jupiter], *Veneris* [of Venus], *Saturni* [of Saturn]—were thus given at the creation of the world by God, and not by the vain presumption of men bestowed.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Philaster of Brescia, *De Haeresibus*, chap. 113, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 12, col. 1237, author’s translation.

Jerome (340-420 A. D.), who translated the Holy Scriptures into Latin for the Roman Catholic Church, was a widely traveled and very learned man. He refers to the days of the week as those “which the Gentiles call by the names of the idols and of the elements.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Jerome, *Epistle 120*, chap. 4, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 22, col. 987, author’s translation.

Augustine, who was bishop of Hippo in Africa (396-430 A. D.), says: “The Gentiles, of whom the apostle says that they ‘worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator,’ gave the names of their gods to the days of the week.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*, book 18, chap. 5, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 4, p. 238.

Maximus of Turin (380-465 A. n.), speaking of the first day of the week, says that the “same day by the men of the world is called the day of the Sun.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Maximus of Turin, *Homily LXII*, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 57, col. 371, author’s translation.

Ausonius (809-394 A. D.) was a teacher (of grammar and rhetoric) and poet whom the emperor Valentinian I employed to tutor his son Gratian. He was greatly favored by these two rulers, and in 379 was made a consul. Some say he was a Christian; others hold that he was a pagan. The best opinion is that he was a semipagan Christian. “An orthodox Christian in his prayers, he was a pagan in the classroom,”<sup>31</sup> is a Roman Catholic estimation of him. In one of his poems, translated here into prose, he speaks of the planetary week:

“The names which the year has for the seven recurring days are given by the wandering planets, which the universe, revolving giddily, commands to go to and fro and aslant in the station of the signs of the zodiac. Radiant Sun has the first and supreme day [primum supremumque<sup>32</sup> diem]. The Moon next succeeds to her brother’s crown. The third to follow these Titan lights is Mars. Mercury claims the stars of the fourth day. The golden star of Jupiter illumines the fifth zone; and in the sixth place kindly Venus follows the health-bringing father [of the gods]. The seventh day is Saturn’s, and comes last of all. The eighth [day] of the circling orbit restores the Sun once more.”

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<sup>31</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, p. 113, art. “Ausonius.”

<sup>32</sup> Ausonius apparently uses *supremus* here to mean “supreme” rather than “last,” since he definitely calls Saturn’s day last.

<sup>33</sup> Ausonius, *The Eclogues*, chap. 8, “On the Names of the Seven Days,” in Loeb Classical Library, *Ausonius*, Vol. 1, p. 182, author’s translation.