

CHAPTER 9

The Planetary Week in the Third Century A. D.

IN the study of the planetary week in the third century, we shall see considerable light thrown on the subject by the records of that time. In this period the Romans looked upon the use of a week of days devoted to the planetary deities as a venerable custom handed down to them from their ancestors.

Mistaken for Sun Worshipers

Tertullian, the lawyer-apologist for Sunday-keeping Christianity, died about 222 A. D. Although born in Carthage, in North Africa, he became a Christian at Rome between the years 190 and 195, and returned to his native city about 197 A. D. One of his most notable works was an apology which he addressed in Latin to the heathen in defense of his faith. The pagans were reproaching the Sunday-keeping Christians as being worshipers of the Sun-god. In reply to this, Tertullian said:

“Others, indeed, with more culture and truthfulness, believe that the Sun is our god. We shall be taken for Persians, perhaps, although it is not permitted that we worship the Sun depicted on the linen, having him everywhere in his disk. The reason for this, I suppose, is that it is known that we pray towards the east. But also most of you at times, in affectation of worshiping the heavenly bodies, move your lips toward the sunrising. Likewise, if we devote the day of the Sun to festivity (from a far different reason from Sun worship), we are in a second place from those who devote the day of Saturn to rest and eating, themselves also deviating by way of a Jewish custom of which they are ignorant.”¹

¹ Tertullian, *Apology*, chap. 16, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 1, cols. 369-372, author's translation; standard English translation in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, p. 31.

Sunday in the Pagan Calendar

In another apology Tertullian makes a similar defense of Sunday keeping, and in it he charges the pagans with being the ones who put the day of the Sun into the calendar week of the seven days. He said:

“Others, certainly more cultured, think that the Sun is the god of the Christians, because it is known that we pray toward the east and make a festivity on the day of the Sun. Do you do less? Do not most of you, in affectation of worshiping the heavenly bodies, at times move your lips toward the sunrising? You certainly are the ones who also received the Sun into the register of the seven days, and from among the days preferred it, on which day you leave off the bath, or you may defer it until the evening, or you may devote it [the day] to idleness and eating [*Vos certe estis, qui etiam in laterculum septem dierum Solem recipistis, et ex diebus ipsum*

praelegistis, quo die lavacrum sub trahatis, aut in vesperam, differatis, aut otium et prandium curetis]. And you certainly make a deviation from your own to other religions. For the feasts of the Jews, the Sabbaths, and clean foods, and the Jewish rite of lighting lamps, and fasts with unleavened bread, and seaside (or riverside) prayers, are certainly foreign to your gods. Wherefore, as I turn by digression, ye who make the Sun and his day a reproach to us, know ye that we are in a neighborhood not far from Saturn and your Sabbaths.”²

² Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, book 1, chap. 13, in J. P. Milne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 1. col. 579, author’s translation; standard English translation in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, p. 123.

The word *laterculum*, which is translated above as “register” (which is its usual meaning), is rendered “calendar” in the standard English translations of this work.³ Indeed, it is employed by Mommsen and others to mean “calendar” in their memorable collection of Roman calendar inscriptions.⁴ Here Tertullian points out not only that the pagans of his day were worshipers of the heavenly bodies, and that they prayed toward the sunrising, but also that they had a calendar by which the seven days devoted to the planetary gods were registered in their proper septenary order.

³ “It is you, at all events, who have even admitted the Sun into the calendar of the week.”—*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, p. 123.

⁴ *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 1893 ed., Vol. 1, part 1, pp. 218, 293.

Another Septizonium

In our study of the planetary week in the first century A. D., mention was made of the fact that the emperor Titus was born (about 40 A. D.) near the Septizonium, “The House of the Seven Planets,” which is said to have contained a public calendar in which the seven days devoted to the planetary gods were registered. According to Aelius Spartianus,⁵ a Latin writer of the reign of Diocletian (284-305 A. D.), the emperor Septimius Severus (193-211 A. D.) erected another building of this type in the year 203. He is said to have made his tomb after the pattern of it also. H. S. Jones, who presents an excellent drawing of the ruins of this monument, says:

“As the traveler from Africa approached it [the palace of Severus] by the Appian Way, he beheld at its entrance the most striking monument of the superstition and vanity of his fellow countrymen—the Septizodium, or ‘House of the Seven Planets.’ We know that Severus was a firm believer in astrology—it was said that he had married his Syrian wife because she possessed a ‘royal horoscope’—and this fact must in some way account for the building of the Septizodium, whose form, it has been said, was that of a ‘triple Trevi fountain.’ The last of its stately remains were destroyed by Sixtus V in 1586.”⁶

⁵ Aelius Spartianus, *Antoninus Geta*, chap. 7; and Severus, chaps. 19, 24, in Loeb Classical Library, *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* Vol. 2, p. 45; Vol. 1, pp. 417, 429.

⁶ H. S. Jones, *The Roman Empire*, pp. 256, 252.

The following comment about the building erected by this Roman emperor is very interesting: “The Septizonium was in reality a fountain or nymphaeum, rising in three tiers each with its screen of columns, behind which were niches adorned with statuary. The name comes, it is said, from the statues of the seven planetary divinities of the week disposed in these niches.”⁷

⁷ Eugénie Strong, *Art in Ancient Rome*, Vol. 2, p. 140.

It is possible that the Septizonium of the time of Titus’ birth was destroyed either by the fire of the reign of Nero or by some other calamity. Pope Sixtus V used the remains of the Septizonium of Septimius Severus to build the church of St. Peter in Rome.⁸

Ammianus Marcellinus says that in the reign of Alexander Severus (222-235 A. D.) the place of the Septizonium was “a much frequented spot.”⁹

⁸ See Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 6, chap. 71, p. 528.

⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, book 15, chap. 7, sec. 3, in Loeb Classical Library, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, Vol. 1, p. 161.

“On the Day of Jupiter”

In Apulum of Dacia, now the modern Karlsburg in Rumania, there has been found an old Roman inscription in Latin which is dated as composed “in the consulate of Antoninus and Geta, on the 10th day before the Kalends of June, on the 18th day of the lunar month, and on the day of Jupiter.”¹⁰ The date in the modern style of calendar reckoning was Thursday, May 23, 205 A. D.

¹⁰ *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 1863 ed., Vol. 3, part 1 p. 191, No. 1051. See also J. B. de Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*, Vol. 1, Prolegomena, p. lxxiv.

In a Greek and Latin Grammar

In 207 A. D. there was composed a bilingual grammar—in the Greek and Latin tongues—which has been ascribed to the grammarian Dositheus. The preamble of the work says that it was composed when Maximus and Aper were consuls, which reveals the date given. In this grammar is given a list of the names of the days of the planetary week in each of the languages mentioned, as follows:

HEPTAZODION HEMERAI

(Days of the Septizodium)

Kronou (of Kronos)

Heluou (of Helios)

Selenes (of Sciene)

Areos (of Ares)

Hermou (of Hermes)

Dios (of Dis or Zeus)

Aphrodites (of Aphrodite)

SEPTE ZODIDIES

(Days of the Septizodium)

Saturni (of Saturn)

Solis (of the Sun)

Lun(a)e (of the Moon)

Martis (of Mars)

Mercuris (of Mercury)

Iovis (of Jupiter)

Veneris (of Venus)

This passage from Dositheus' grammar is one of the arguments supporting the opinion that the Septizonium, or "House of the Seven Planets," contained a public calendar in which the days of the pagan week were shown in their planetary order.¹¹

¹¹ G. Goetz, *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*, Vol. 3, p. 58.

A Jewish Astrological Calendar

This particular item refers to a calendar which is supposed to have been composed by the Jewish rabbi Samuel Yarhina'ah, who is said to have died about 257 A. D. The well-known *Jewish Encyclopedia*, under the article "Sun, Blessing of the," says this:

"Formula of benediction recited on the day when the Sun enters upon a new cycle, which occurs on the first Wednesday of Nisan every 28 years. The present cycle commenced on the 5th of Nisan, 5657=April 7, 1897. According to Abaye, the cycle commences with the vernal equinox at the expiration of Tuesday (sunset) and the beginning of Wednesday eve when the planet Saturn is in the ascendancy (Berakot 59b). This is calculated by the calendar of Samuel Yarhina'ah, which allots to the solar year 365¼ days, and asserts that each of the seven planets rules over one hour of the day in the following sequence: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon.

"Consequently the first planet, Saturn, is 7½ hours advanced at the beginning of the summer solstice, and 30 hours (1¼ days) at the turn of the year, or 5 days in 4 years, at the end of which this planet again takes its place at the beginning of the eve of the vernal (Nisan) equinox. This period is called 'mahzor katan' (short cycle). A space of five days follows every such cycle, so that the second cycle begins on Monday, the third on Saturday, the fourth on Thursday, the fifth on Tuesday, the sixth on Sunday, and the seventh on Friday. Seven short cycles complete a 'mahzor gadol,' or long cycle, of 28 years; then Saturn returns to its original position at the first hour of Wednesday eve, and a new cycle begins (ib. Rashi *ad loc.*).

"The ceremony of blessing the Sun is held to commemorate the birth of that luminary on Wednesday eve of the creation, which it is claimed was the exact time when the planets, including the Sun and the Moon and beginning with Saturn, were for the first time set in motion in the firmament by the Almighty."¹²

¹² *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11, pp. 590, 591, art. "Sun, Blessing of the."

The notion about the planets ruling over the hours of the day in the astrological order—Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon—clearly shows that the calendar of Samuel Yarhina'ah was an adaptation of pagan astrology and its planetary week to Jewish religious thought.

More Jewish and Pagan Astrology

In reference to the infiltration of the heathen influence of astrology into Jewish thought in the third century A. D., the Jewish Encyclopedia, says:

“In consequence of religious anti-Biblical influences, some of these pagan views gradually acquired a Hebraic tinge. Of two horoscopes which have been preserved, however, only the earlier bears a Jewish stamp. On Joshua b. Levi’s ‘tablets’ (third century) it is stated that men born on Sunday will be distinguished, on Monday wrathful, on Tuesday wealthy and sensual, on Wednesday intelligent and enlightened, on Thursday benevolent, and on Friday pious; while those born on Saturday are destined to die on that day.”¹³

¹³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 243, art. “Astrology.”

Mention is made of this in the Babylonian Talmud, in reference to the diary of Rabbi Jehoshua ben Levi, as follows:

“Said R. Hanina to the men who related what was written in the diary above: ‘Go and tell the son of Levi, that the fortune of a man does not depend upon the day, but upon the hour he was born in. One who is born in the hour of sunrise will be a bright man; he will eat and drink of his own, but, he will not be able to keep secrets and will not be successful in stealing. One who is born under Venus will be a rich man, but he will be lascivious, because fire is generated under Venus. One who is born under Mercury will be bright and wise, because that star is the scribe of the Sun. One who is born under the Moon will be sickly or troubled. He will build and demolish, will not eat and drink of his own, but will keep secrets, and will be successful in stealing. One who is born under Saturn will have all his thoughts and all his aims come to naught; and others say the contrary, all aims against him will come to naught. One who is born under Jupiter will be a righteous man, and R. Nahman bar Itzhak said he will be very devout. One who is born under Mars will be a man who will shed blood. He will either be a surgeon or a robber, a butcher or a circumciser, said R. Ashi.’”¹⁴

¹⁴ *Babylonian Talmud*, Tract “Sabbath,” chap. 24, gemara on mishnah 3, Vol. 1, p. 373.

Alexander von Humboldt, in the notes of his *Cosmos* (Vol. 4, p. 413), quotes an interesting letter from L. F. K. von Tischendorf, written in answer to a query about the planets in the Talmud, as saying: “The Talmud, which certainly extends from the second to the third century, has descriptive Hebrew names for a few planets, for the brilliant Venus and the red-colored Mars. Among these the name of Sabbatai (literally Sabbath-star), for Saturn, is especially remarkable; as among the Pharisaic names of the stars which Epiphanius enumerates, the name Hochab Sabbath is employed for Saturn.”

A note from Dr. Alexander Cuttmann, professor of Talmud at the Hebrew Union College, which has been passed on to me with a letter from Dr. Abraham Cronbach, secretary of the board of editors of *The Hebrew Union College Annual*, under the date of September 7, 1943, says: “The Talmudic word for ‘Saturn’ is Shabbathai. See for instance, *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate ‘Sabbath’ p. 156a. Scholars have accepted the view that the true meaning of Sabbathin was ‘star of the Sabbath.’ (Cf. Strack Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, II, p. 404; Hamburger, *Real-Encyclopädie des Judentums*, II, p. 77. The Talmud itself (*ibid.*) indicates another etymology, but this is certainly a later interpretation.”

Die Cassius Explains the Planetary Week

Dio Cassius (c. 155-238 A. D.), a man who held several high government offices under four different emperors, was well informed about Roman customs. He wrote a history of Rome in the Greek language, and it is to him and this work that the world is chiefly indebted for its most authoritative classical explanation of the planetary week in use among the heathen.

First we have, as was pointed out in the study of the pagan week in the first century before Christ, his statement about the capture of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63 B. C. Of this he said:

“If they [the Jews] had continued defending it [the temple] on all days alike, he could not have gotten possession of it. As it was, they made an exception of what are called the days of Saturn, and by doing no work at all on those days afforded the Romans an opportunity in this interval to batter down the wall. The latter, on learning of this superstitious awe of theirs, made no serious attempts the rest of the time, but on those days, when they came round in succession, assaulted most vigorously. Thus the defenders were captured on the day of Saturn without making any defense, and all the wealth was plundered.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, book 37, chap. 16, in Loeb Classical Library, *Dio's Roman History*, Vol. 3, pp. 125, 127.

In reference to the worship which the Jews rendered to their God, Dio Cassius said: “They...dedicated to him the day called the day of Saturn, on which, among many other most peculiar observances, they undertake no serious occupation.”¹⁶

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 17, in Loeb Classical Library, *Dio's Roman History*, Vol. 3, pp. 127, 129.

The same Roman historian narrates the story of the capture of Jerusalem by Gaius Sosius and Herod the Great in 37 B. C. Of this victory over the Jews, he said:

“The first of them to be captured were those who were fighting for the precinct of their god, and then the rest on the day even then called the day of Saturn. And so excessive were they in their devotion to religion that the first set of prisoners, those who had been captured along with the temple, obtained leave from Sosius, when the day of Saturn came round again, and went up into the temple and there performed all the customary rites, together with the rest of the people.”¹⁷

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, book 49, chap. 22, in Loeb Classical Library, *Dio's Roman History*, Vol. 5, p. 387.

In view of what will follow now, it should especially be noted that in speaking of the capture of Jerusalem by Sosius in 37 B. C., the historian refers to “the day *even then* called the day of Saturn.” Here we see that the practice of calling the days after the names of the planetary deities was already an established custom among the Romans *before* the birth of Christ. And having made such a statement, Dio Cassius proceeded to explain the pagan week as follows:

“The dedication of the days to the seven stars which are called planets was established by Egyptians,¹⁸ and it spread also to all men not so very long ago,¹⁹ to state briefly how it began. At any rate the ancient Greeks knew it in no way, as it appears to me at least. But since it also prevails everywhere among all the others and the Romans themselves, and now this is also already to them an ancestral custom,²⁰ I wish to say a little concerning it, both how and in what manner it has been thus established. I have heard two explanations, which are not difficult to understand, and [are] theories held of some.

¹⁸ It is believed that the planetary week was introduced into the science of the Greeks of Alexandria, Egypt, in the second century before Christ, and that it was borrowed from the Babylonian school. While Herodotus does not speak particularly century B. C., dedicated the days to the gods, for he says: “They assign each month and each day to some god; they can tell what fortune and what end and what disposition a man shall have according to the day of his birth.”—*History*, book 2, chap. 82, in Loeb Classical Library, *Herodotus*, Vol. 1, pp. 367, 369.

¹⁹ At least as long ago as 37 B. C., because in reference to the capture of Jerusalem by Sosius and Herod the Great at that date Dio Cassius speaks of the Jews as resting “on the day even then called the day of Saturn.”—*Roman History*, book 49, chap. 22, in Loeb Classical Library, *Dio’s Roman History*, Vol. 5, p. 387.

²⁰ Notice that Dio Cassius says that in his day the practice of calling the days of the week by the names of the planetary gods was regarded by the Roman, as “an ancestral custom.” This fact shows that this usage had been in vogue among them for a considerable time, and that it was no longer regarded as a foreign institution. According to the historical data we have studied on this subject, the planetary week had been in use among the Romans at least three hundred years when Dio Cassius wrote.

“For if you start the harmony that is designated ‘by fours,’ wherein it has been believed the supreme power of music to consist,²¹ and over the stars by which the whole cosmos of the heaven has been divided into regular intervals, according to the order by which each of them revolves, and commencing from the outer orbit which has been assigned to Saturn; then skipping two, you name the lord of the fourth; and after him passing over two others, you will come to the seventh; and in this same manner going back, and again you assign the presiding gods of the orbits to the days, you will find all the days musically atune indeed to the cosmical arrangement of the heaven. This is said to be one explanation, and the other is this:

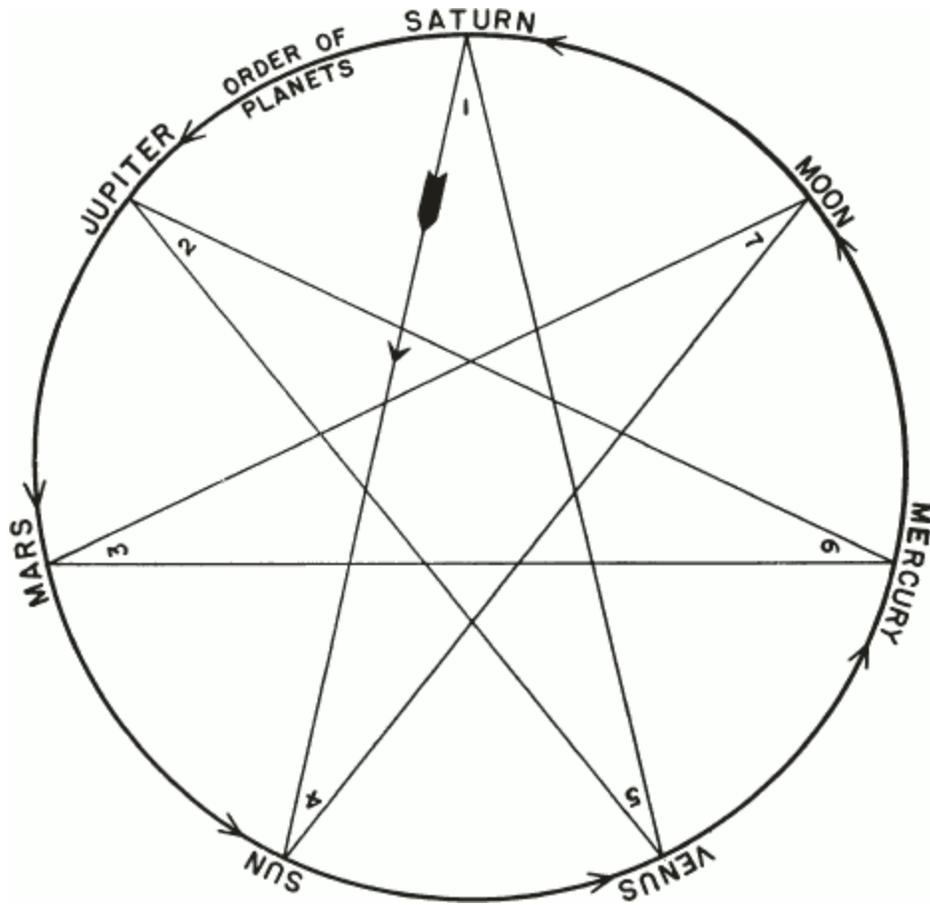
“Having begun to count the hours of the day and of the night from the first [hour] and that [hour] you give to Saturn, and the next to Jupiter, and the third to Mars, and the fourth to the Sun, the fifth to Venus, the sixth to Mercury, and the seventh to the Moon, according to the order of the orbits, by which the Egyptians are wont to do it, and this also in turn doing again, for all the four and twenty hours thus going around, you will find the first hour of the following day comes to the Sun. And going through this procedure over these four and twenty hours in the same manner as with the others, forward, you will find the first hour of the third day comes to the Moon. And if you will go thus also through the rest, the god coming to each selfsame day will be received.”²²

The significance of this explanation by Dio Cassius has already been pointed out in our study, and we need not dwell further upon it here.

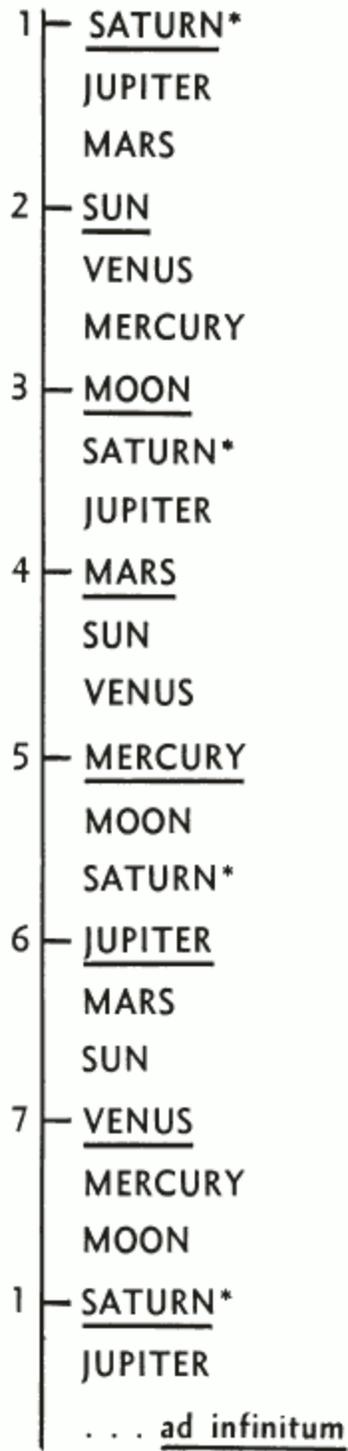
²¹ Dio Cassius refers here to the tetrachord, which was used in ancient Greek music. It is a scale series of half an octave. The term was also used in reference to a lyre of four strings. Two tetrachords were the equivalent of an octave, wherein the first and the eighth tones are the same. Spiritualizing this idea, the Gnostic, in the early church

gave prominence to Sunday as being both the first and the eighth day.

² Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, book 37, chaps. 18, 19, in Loeb Classical Library, *Dio's Roman History*, Vol. 3, pp. 128, 130, author's translation.



The diagram illustrates Dio Cassius' *first* explanation of the astrological week in use among the Romans, the assignment of the days to the planetary gods according to the musical harmony "by fours" (or the tetrachord). The celestial order of the planets follows the circle: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon. The daily order follows the arrow in the star pattern, and the musical theory works thus by intervals of fours: (1) Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, (2) Sun, Venus, Mercury, (3) Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, (4) Mars, Sun, Venus, (5) Mercury, Moon, Saturn, (6) Jupiter, Mars, Sun, (7) Venus, Mercury, Moon, etc.



This diagram shows the planetary gods of the days of the week in accordance with Dio Cassius' *first* explanation. The planetary deities are listed in their supposedly celestial order. Taking them according to the musical ad infinitum theory of the tetrachord, every fourth god is given his day.

		THE HOURS OF THE DAY																							
THE DAY OF		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
SATURN		SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS
The SUN		SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC
The MOON		MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP
MARS		MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN
MERCURY		MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT
JUPITER		JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN
VENUS		VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON	SAT	JUP	MARS	SUN	VEN	MERC	MOON

This table shows the complete arrangement of the assignment to the planetary deities of the lordship of the hours of the day, and of the days of the planetary week, according to the *second* explanation given by Dio Cassius. Compare this with the illustrations on pages 204, 206, 208, 210, and 212, to see how the testimony of Dio Cassius is confirmed by the Philocalian almanac. The astrological day in Chaldean practice began at sunrise.

The Days of the Seven Planets

In his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Philostratus (c. 170-245 A. D.) tells how that philosopher visited the wise men of Babylon and India. In the latter country, where he spent about four

months, Apollonius became acquainted with Iarchas, the oldest of the Brahman sages. We quote again:

“And Damis says that Iarchas gave seven rings to Apollonius named after the seven stars, and that Apollonius wore each of these in turn on the day of the week which bore its name.”²³

Philostratus probably composed his work before 217 A. D.

²³ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, book 3, chap. 41, in Loeb Classical Library, *Philostratus, Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Vol. 1, pp. 321, 323.

“On the Day of the Moon”

A Latin inscription found in Rhaetia, in what is now known as Keiheim in Bavaria (Germany), is dated as “on the day of the Moon, on the 10th day before the Kalends of June, and on the 5th day of the lunar month.”²⁴ The date given is for Monday, May 23, 231 A. D.

²⁴ *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 1863 ed., Vol. 3, p. 730, No. 5938; Vol. 3, Supplement, p. 1859, No. 11943.

F. H. Colson also says that “representations of the seven [planetary gods] in week-order, some of which at least are ascribed by experts to this period, have been found in the Rhineland.”²⁵

²⁵ F. H. Colson, *The Week*, p. 25.

“On the Day of Venus”

A Christian sepulchral inscription, one of the earliest dated ones to be found in the city of Rome, mentions the day of Venus. The curious thing about this inscription is that the words are Latin, but it is written with the letters of the Greek alphabet.

The text reads as follows:

“In the consulship of Claudius and Paternus, on the Nones of November, on the day of Venus, and on the 24th day of the lunar month, Leuces placed [this memorial] to her very dear daughter Severa, and to Thy Holy Spirit. She died [at the age] of 55 years, and 11 months, [and] 10 days.”²⁶

The date of this inscription is Friday, November 5, 269 A. D.

²⁶ 20 E. Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veleres*, Vol. 2, p. 193, No. 3391; J. B. de Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*, Vol. 1, part 1, p. 18, No. 11.

From an Oracle of Apollo

It appears that spiritism also played a hand in establishing the planetary week among the Greeks and Romans. Eusebius, the church historian of the early part of the fourth century, quotes a passage from Porphyry, the Greek scholar and Neo-platonist (born at Tyre about 233, and died about 304 A. D.), which in turn quotes an oracular message of Apollo. During the period of the Roman Empire, Apollo was identified with the Sun even as early as the days of Pliny the Elder (who perished in the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A. D.). In this oracle the spirit prescribed the worship of the planetary gods on their respective days. The message itself is written in a Greek dialect and in verse form. While we do not know which of the oracles of Apollo delivered it, undoubtedly it was composed much earlier than the time of Porphyry himself.

Porphyry is quoted as saying: “The gods frequently make it manifest by foreshowing their decrees, that knowing the conditions under which each individual is born they are, if one may so say, consummate diviners and casters of nativities. Apollo also, in an oracular response, has said: ‘Invoke Mercury, and the Sun in like manner on the day of the Sun, and the Moon when her day comes, and Saturn also, and Venus in succession, with unuttered prayers, which the best by far of the Magi devised, the king of the seven-toned [harp], whom all [men] know.’ But when the hearers said, ‘You mean Ostanēs,’ he added: ‘And also according to each enduring god strongly to make the sound seven times.’”²⁷

²⁷ Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, book 5, chap. 14, in J. P. Mine, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 21, cols. 347, 348, author’s translation. See also J. C. Hare, “On the Names of the Days of the Week,” in *The Philological Museum*, Vol. 1 p. 9; W. Hales, *A New Analysis of Chronology and Biography, History and Prophecy*, 2d ed., Vol. 1, p. 19; Paul Cotton, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 128.

“On the Day of Mercury”

Another old Christian sepulchral inscription, in Latin also, gives “the day of Mercury” in its text. The date of the epitaph is believed to be either 291 or 302 A. D.²⁸

²⁸ E. Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*, Vol. 2, p. 118, No. 3033.

A Schoolbook

We are informed that “in the third century A. D. students in Egypt dated their written work after the days of the planetary week, as shown by a wooden tablet in the Museum of Marseille [France], whose text has been deciphered by Fröhner.”²⁹ Then follows in the Greek the portion of the work in which the date is plainly given thus: “Aurelius Theodorus Anubionus wrote on the 28th, on the day of the Sun, in the consulship of the prefects Flavius Constantius and Vaicrius Maximianus, Caesars.”³⁰

We are also told: “The concise story is repeated three times, being apparently the working exercise of a student. The date is 294 A. D.”³¹ The Flavius Constantius mentioned was the father of Constantine the Great, whose famous civil Sunday law will be noted later.

²⁹ E. Schürer, “Die siebentägige Woche im Gebrauche der Christlichen Kirche der ersten Jahrhunderte” in *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1905.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*