

*In his regular column, Babel's resident etymologist, **Simon Horobin**, explores the days of the week*

Where do the names we give to the days of the week come from? The Romans labelled them after the planets, which in turn were named after the gods and goddesses. These were then translated from Latin into Old English by the Anglo-Saxons, with Roman deities replaced by equivalents from the Germanic pantheon. In 'Tuesday', 'Wednesday', 'Thursday' and 'Friday', the Roman gods Mars, Mercury, Jove and Venus have been ousted by the Germanic gods Tiw, Woden (the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the Norse god Odin), Thunor (the Anglo-Saxon version of Norse Thor), and Frig (Odin's wife). The Roman days named after the sun and the moon, *dies Solis* and *dies Lunae*, became 'Sunday' and 'Monday' (from Old English *sunne* and *mona*).

'Saturday' is the odd one out, since in this instance the Roman god Saturn was kept in Old English *Sæternesdæg*. Modern Romance languages, which are derived from Latin, preserved the Roman deities, as in French *Mardi*, *Mercredi*, *Jeudi* and *Vendredi*. But in the case of Saturday, names like French *Samedi* are based upon an alternative Latin term, *dies Sabbati* ('day of the Sabbath'), adopted with the spread of Christianity. This Latin form is also the root of German *Samstag*, whose first element is from the Latin *Sabbata*. An alternative German term, *Sonnabend* ('Sunday Eve'), is based on the Christian idea of the vigil – the eve of a holy day – as an occasion for religious observance. Old English had an equivalent term in *Sunnanæfen*, although this died out in the fifteenth century. The Romance languages derive their names for Sunday from another Christian term, *dies Dominicus* ('Lord's day'), as in French *Dimanche*. This was the model for the English 'Lord's day', which began life as Old English *dryhtenlic dæg* (from the Germanic word for a lord). ¶

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