

THURSDAY (DIES IOVIS) IN THE LATER ROMAN EMPIRE¹

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This paper discusses two scanty but complex groups of sources which seem to suggest that Thursday (dies Iovis, that is, Jupiter's Day in the Roman planetary seven-day week) was a day of rest in honour of Jupiter during the later imperial period: a number of ecclesiastical texts from late antique Gaul and Galicia, and three documentary papyri from Oxyrhynchus. The former imply that an unofficial observance of Jupiter's Day, as opposed to the Christian Lord's Day (Sunday), persisted among the populace despite Church opposition to such deviant behaviour. The latter hint at Thursday being a non-working day for official bureaux during the third and early fourth centuries, before the formalisation of Sunday as an official day of rest by Constantine in 321. The paper concludes with reflections on the idea that during the later imperial period –as the use of

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Translations provided throughout are my own. Unless otherwise stated, dates are AD. Abbreviations for classical authors and works follow those given in the latest edition of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Further abbreviations include:

CAG = *Carte Archéologique de la Gaule*

ILN = *Inscriptions Latines de Narbonnaise*

MGH SRM = *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*

P.Col. inv. = *Columbia Papyri*

P.Mon.Epiph. = *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, Part II*

P.Rain.UnterrichtCopt. = *Neue Texte und Dokumentation zum Koptisch-Unterricht*

the planetary week became increasingly popular— Thursday became the most important and sacred day in the Roman seven-day week by reason of being the day dedicated to the chief god of the Roman pantheon and, at the same time, the day associated to the astrologically favourable planet that had been named after Jupiter. If Thursday was ever a day of rest recurring on a hebdomadal basis during the later Roman Empire, it was presumably the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Sabbath and the Lord's Day that provided pagans with the notion of a weekly feast day.

I. THE SEVEN-DAY WEEK IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The seven-day week stems from two distinct traditions: the biblical week of the Sabbath, and the planetary week.² It is in the latter form that the seven-day cycle made its first appearance in the Roman West: the earliest traces of the use of the planetary week appear in Italy during the second half of the first century BC.³ Thereafter, in the course of the first centuries of our era, the seven-day

² Earlier research into the origins and history of the seven-day week in the Roman Empire and the Near East has been unsystematic. Thus far, the only monograph entirely devoted to the topic is Colson 1926. More limited, though valuable, discussions can be found in Maass 1902: 267–83; Schürer 1905; Boll 1912; Kubitschek 1928: 30–1; Dölger 1940; Gundel 1950: 2143–7; Rordorf 1962, esp. pp. 11–44; Balsdon 1969: 61–5; Bacchiocchi 1977, esp. pp. 242–4; Balsdon 1979: 232–4; Bickerman 1980: 58–61; Rüpke 1995: 456–471; 2001: 196–7; 2007: 199–200; 2011: 162–9; Llewelyn and Nobbs 2002: 113–8; Salzman 2004: 187–92; Hannah 2005: 141–4; Forsythe 2012: 131–3.

³ The earliest literary evidence consists of brief references to individual days of the week (Saturday, specifically) in Tibullus (1.3.18), Ovid (*Ars am.* 1.76 and 414 f.; *Rem. am.* 2.17–20), and Horace (*Sat.* 1.9.69). The earliest epigraphic attestation is provided by three fragmentary *fasti* dating to the Augustan and early imperial period: the *Fasti Sabini*, which were inscribed after 19 BC (*Inscr. Ital.* XIII 2.5), the early imperial *Fasti Nolani* (*Inscr. Ital.* XIII 2.37), and the Augustan *Fasti Foronovani* (*Inscr. Ital.* XIII 2.21). Before the nundinal column with letters from A to H, which refer to the eight-day

week became increasingly widespread throughout the Roman world, as literary, epigraphic, and documentary sources show.⁴ By the fourth century the habit of measuring time in cycles of seven days – either in the Judeo-Christian or in the planetary form – became general all across the Roman Empire (Colson 1926: 18).⁵

The planetary week is of astrological origin. Each day of this week was named after one of the seven planets or non-fixed heavenly bodies of the universe as it was known in antiquity: the Sun (Sunday), the Moon (Monday), and the five planets, which were named after the gods Mars (Tuesday), Mercury (Wednesday), Jupiter (Thursday), Venus (Friday), and Saturn

market cycle (*nundinum*), these three *fasti* display a column of letters from A to G, which indicate a cycle of seven days. Given the total absence of any form of ‘numbered’ week in the Roman West up to Late Antiquity, whilst roughly contemporary evidence from the same area indicates the existence and use of the planetary week, it can be assumed that these A-G columns refer to the latter (cf. Rüpke 2014: 138, 141). In addition to these three *fasti*, the earliest inscriptional record of the planetary week (first century) includes a number of Pompeian graffiti, as well as a graffito from Avenches, Switzerland (AE 1993, 1217).

⁴ For reasons of space it is not possible to discuss in greater detail here the entirety of this vast corpus of evidence.

⁵ While Josephus’ statement, at the end of the first century (*Ap.* 2.282), that the Sabbath was universally observed at his time ‘is an obvious exaggeration’ (Baldson 1979: 297 note 117, 233), as early as the beginning of the third century Cassius Dio (37.18) states that although the adoption of the seven-day planetary week had been relatively recent, ‘the use of referring the days to the seven stars called planets’ had by his own time become ‘an established usage among the Romans as well as all other nations’. My analysis of the literary, epigraphic, and documentary evidence relating to the seven-day week in Roman antiquity confirms that knowledge as well as use of it was widespread by the early fourth century.

(Saturday).⁶ Although the earliest traces of the existence and use of the planetary week appear in the Italian peninsula, it has been traditionally suggested that this type of week might have been a product of the Hellenized Egypt of the Ptolemies (Thumb 1900: 170; Maas 1902: 267–72; Boll 1912: 2555–73, esp. 2571–3; Kubitschek 1928: 32–4; Gundel 1950: 2143–4; Neugebauer 1963: 169–170; Zerubavel 1985: 12–19; Salzman 2004: 188.);⁷ in particular, both the astrological concept underlying it and the planetary week itself would have originated in the Alexandrian milieu, the foremost cultural and scientific centre of the Hellenistic Mediterranean, where Babylonian astrology was much developed by the Greeks and whence it expanded westward to the Roman

⁶ The explanation that is generally accepted for the order followed by the seven gods in the planetary week is provided by Cassius Dio (37.18–9), who takes up an astrological theory formulated by Vettius Valens (1.10) according to which the week was mapped out in one hundred and sixty-eight hours, with different influences ascribed to them. The seven planetary gods, by order of distance from the Earth – Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon – were assigned serially to the twenty-four hours of the day, and then to the one hundred and sixty-eight hours of the week, the god assigned to the first hour of each day also becoming the ‘lord’, or ‘governor’ of that particular day. Therefore each planet is assigned both to hours and to a whole day. The resulting sequence runs from Saturn (Saturday) to Venus (Friday), which indicates that the planetary week started on Saturday and not, as in the case of the Jewish week as well as the Christian week that will develop later, on Sunday.

⁷ This idea would find support in Dio’s claim that ‘the custom of referring the days to the seven stars called planets was instituted by the Egyptians’ (37.18). Colson (1926: 53–5, 59) is sceptical about the possibility to locate the place of origin of the planetary week. Rüpke (1995: 456; 2011: 162) assumes that the seven-day week originated in Babylonia and ‘reached Rome by two routes, one of them in the form of the Jewish Sabbath, and the other via the Greek planetary week. The latter probably did not emerge until the Hellenistic period’ (2011: 162). He thus appears to acknowledge an origin in the Greek East for the planetary week.

world from the late Republican period on. Within this framework, my assumption is that the Romans probably played the fundamental role of putting into practice, for calendrical purposes, a hitherto purely theoretical concept of Greek astrology. In fact, this idea is plausible but not provable, since there are no traces of this particular astrological concept in the extant astrological writings of Hellenistic Egypt. Whether one accepts this hypothesis or prefers to think that the Romans invented the whole system *ex novo* –a possibility that cannot be totally excluded–, it is reasonable to assume that the introduction of the planetary week in the Roman world was at least promoted by the influence that the Egyptian calendrical system as well as further Alexandrian astronomical and astrological ideas exerted over the reformation of the Roman calendar by Julius Caesar in 46 BC and, more generally, over the western Roman world in the late republican and early imperial period.⁸ The Romans apparently started employing the astrological theory behind the planetary week as a means of measurement of time during a period when Roman scholars and politicians showed an increasing interest in time reckoning and chronology. As the Roman calendar was reformed on the initiative of Julius Caesar, scholars like Varro and Atticus sought to lay the foundation for a consistent chronology

⁸ It should be noted that Julius Caesar drew upon Egyptian astronomy for his reform (Macrob. *Sat.* 1.16.39) and availed himself of the expert advice of the astronomer Sosigenes of Alexandria (Plin. *HN* 18.211). On the idea that the Julian calendar was ‘essentially an improved version of the Egyptian calendar’, see Stern 2012: 211–4. Equally influenced by the Egyptian science of the stars was presumably Caesar’s lost work on astronomy *De astris*, on which see especially Domenicucci 1996: 89–99, who emphasizes the close relationship that must have existed between Caesar’s lost work on astronomy and his reform of the Roman calendar.

of the Roman past.⁹ It should be observed, however, that although an actual calendrical use undoubtedly developed quite early, the planetary week seemingly first spread in the Roman West as a purely astrological and astral-lore related concept (Rüpke 2011: 162–3). It appears as though it was the belief in the power and control of planets over the hours of the day that led to the adoption of the seven-day week. As an example, when dealing with the Jewish religion, Tacitus states that some people assumed that the sabbatical rest was in honour of Saturn, because, among other reasons, ‘of the seven stars by which mortals are governed, that of Saturn has the widest orbit and the highest power’ (*Histories*, 5.14.11). Not only we find here the biblical week linked to the planetary (Colson 1926: 17), but this is also a clear statement of belief in the planetary control of human affairs: what lies behind the days ordering in the planetary week is the belief that the planets control hours and days.

As mentioned, the seven-day week derived from two distinct traditions: the planetary week of astrological origin and the biblical week of the Sabbath, the latter drawing its origin from the Old Testament. The length of the week in this case is related to the seven days of Creation in biblical cosmology. The biblical account of creation explains God’s commandment to work for six days and rest periodically on the seventh day, which for the Jews was (and still is) the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8). Despite the great antiquity of the biblical seven-day cycle, the week was not used as a principle for constructing the calendar in the Bible, nor is there any trace of days of the seven-day week in priestly literature. A change occurs in the Book of Jubilees, which dates to the mid-second century BC, as well as, slightly later, in the Qumran texts. The value of these sources as evidence that the week was used for practical purposes, however, is not certain.

⁹ cf. Heilen 2007: 44, who adduces the example of Varro, who requested Tarutius of Firmum, a Roman expert in astral sciences, to calculate the exact dates of the conception and birth of Romulus as well as that of the foundation of Rome.

The days of the week are still absent from date formulae in the same period and will make their first appearance, on *ostraka* and administrative texts, in the first century of our era. It appears plausible that the Jews started using the days of the week for practical purposes, as well as for liturgy, in the first century BC (Ben-Dov 2008: 55–66). However, there are no traces of any connection of the Jewish week with the planetary week, which seemingly first appeared around the same period in the western Roman world. In the week of biblical origin, the days were not each under the patronage of a planet, but simply numbered. The sources indicate that during the imperial period the early Christians adopted the Jewish week and made Sunday, the Christian Lord's Day, the most important day of the week instead of the Sabbath.¹⁰

It is interesting to observe that in the sources from the Eastern part of the Roman Empire the seven-day week occurs almost exclusively in the numbered or Judeo-Christian form. The extant inscriptions with days of this type of week come predominantly from Greece (especially Athens, Corinth, and Crete), Thrace, Macedonia, and Asia Minor, as well as from the Roman Near East. Apart from a very limited number of exceptions, the planetary week is absent from the textual record of the whole eastern half of the Roman Empire.¹¹ The

¹⁰ cf. *Acts of the Apostles* 20; *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 16; *Book of Revelation* 1; Ignatius, *Epistula ad Magnesias* 9; *Didache* 14. On Constantine's formalisation of the Christian Sunday as a day of rest in 321 see note 46.

¹¹ A glaring exception to this distribution pattern is a series of inscriptions from the site of Byzantine Zoora/modern Ghor es-Safi in Jordan, which recently produced an exceptionally large number of Christian tombstones in Greek (Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou 2005 and 2008), mostly dating from the fourth to the sixth century, with days of the week both in the planetary and in the numbered form. How the overall evidence should be interpreted in the light of this entirely isolated case remains unclear.

numbered or Judeo-Christian week,¹² on the contrary, is very poorly attested in the epigraphic record of the West, even in the later imperial period and in distinctly Christian milieus. The evidence makes it clear that this type of week did not catch on in the West, at least in everyday usage. Despite attempts by Church Fathers and Christian preachers to eradicate the habit, common people, including Christians, largely continued to name the days of the week after the seven planets throughout the imperial period and in late antiquity, presumably due to the longer tradition of the planetary week in this area of the empire.

II. ECCLESIASTICAL SOURCES

In three of his sermons Caesarius, who was bishop of Arles in southern Gaul in the first half of the sixth century,¹³ refers explicitly to the fact that some Christian inhabitants of his diocese observed Thursday as a pagan day of rest.¹⁴ In *Sermon* 13.5, he affirms: ‘The devil has so beguiled some men and women that men do not work and women do not spin wool on the fifth *feria*’ [= Thursday] (*Aliquos viros vel mulieres ita diabolus circumveniat, ut quinta feria nec viri opera faciant, nec mulieres laneficium*). He then proceeds to warn his audience about the dreadful consequences that these men and women are doomed to face by observing the practice of resting on Thursday: ‘They shall be condemned to burn together with the devil’ (*ubi arsurus est diabolus, ibi et ipsi*

¹² A definition used, among others, by Zerubavel (1985: 24–5) and Rüpke (2014: 145).

¹³ On Caesarius of Arles, see especially Klingshirn 1994. See also Daly 1970. On Caesarius’ sermons: Morin 1953; Delage 1971–1986; Courreau 2000.

¹⁴ Regarding the sense that we should assign to the term pagan in this context, Klingshirn (1994: 201) convincingly argued that ‘to Caesarius, as to the other church leaders, “paganism” designated all religious behaviour and belief that he could not ascribe to Christianity or Judaism. In addition to the phenomena of Gallo-Roman religion, it included all other ritual activity that evaded his control, much of which was arguably Christian or religiously neutral in intention, if not in appearance.’

damnandi sunt). Shortly afterwards, Caesarius alludes to the fact that this ‘evil practice’ was associated to some form of reverence towards the Roman god Jupiter:

Isti enim infelices et miseri, qui in honore Iovis quinta feria opera non faciunt, non dubito quod ipsa opera die dominico facere nec erubescant nec metuant.

I have no doubts that these poor and miserable people, who do not work on the fifth *feria* in honour of Jupiter, do not feel ashamed nor afraid to do the same work on the Lord’s Day [= Sunday].

Thus, according to Caesarius, as late as in the sixth century an unspecified number of members of his community (cf. *Sermon 13.5: Aliquos viros vel mulieres*) –who were presumably Christians, given that they were expected to observe the Lord’s Day– observed a Thursday-rest ‘in honour of Jupiter’ and at the expense of the Christian Sunday rest.¹⁵

In *Sermon 19.4*, Caesarius returns to this issue and proclaims:

Nullus in honorem Iovis quinta feria observare praesumat ne aliquid operis faciat: contestor, fratres, ne hoc ullus vir aut mulier aliquando observet, ne inter paganos magis quam inter christianos a Domino iudicetur, qui, quod observari die dominico debet, in die Iovis hoc sacrilege transferunt.

No one shall dare to observe the fifth *feria* in honour of Jupiter by abstaining from work. I confirm, brothers, that nobody, man or woman, shall observe this practice, unless they wish to be regarded by the Lord as pagans, rather than Christians. For they sacrilegiously transfer to Jupiter’s Day [= Thursday] what should be observed on the Lord’s Day [= Sunday].

¹⁵ Blackburn and Holford-Strevens (1999: 578) assume that ‘more probably (...) some folk kept both days holy’.

The equation between the Christian Sunday and the pagan Thursday as the day in the week dedicated to the Lord and the day in the week dedicated to Jupiter, respectively, could not be expressed in a clearer manner. This passage corroborates the assumption that the objects of Caesarius' criticism are some members of his diocese, that is, Christians who impiously treated Thursday as Sunday (*...ne inter paganos magis quam inter christianos a Domino iudicetur*). In *Sermon* 52.2, Caesarius associates the practice of Thursday-rest with various traditional beliefs of astrological and calendrical nature –the latter referring to the observance of auspicious and inauspicious days in the Roman year¹⁶, and insists:

Non solum in aliis locis, sed etiam in hac ipsa civitate dicantur adhuc esse aliquae mulieres infelices, quae in honore Iovis quinta feria nec telam nec fusum facere vellent.

It appears that not only elsewhere, but also in this very city there are still now miserable women who refuse to weave and spin wool on the fifth *feria* in honour of Jupiter.¹⁷

¹⁶ 'Foolish people believe that they should worship days and calends, sun and moon'. Both these pagan traditions and the observance of Thursday are part of a conspicuous series of 'survivals' of pagan cults, superstitions, and divinatory and magical practices which Caesarius reproaches to his parishioners at various times in his sermons. The question of the level of Christianisation and the survival of paganism in Merovingian Gaul has been intensely debated. Different views are expressed, for instance, by Konda 1970; Delage 1971: 138–142; Audin 1981; Markus 1990: 199–211, esp. pp. 206–11; 1992: 157–162; Hen 1995: 162–72 (see also 2002; 2009: 70–4; 2012); Brown 2003: 150–4; Filotas 2005, esp. pp. 2–7 and 45–51 (who provides a summary of the debates); Brunnen 2013.

¹⁷ The specification *non solum in aliis locis, sed etiam in hac ipsa civitate* most likely implies that women would refuse to ply their looms on Thursday not only in the countryside, where traditional religious practices and beliefs must have been more persistent than in the urban environment, but in the city of Arles as well (Klingshirn 1994: 201; Jones

A few decades later, Martin, who from around 550 to 580 was bishop of Bracara Augusta in Galicia (present Braga in north-western Portugal), addressed similar issues in a sermon that became subsequently known as a separate treatise titled *De correctione rusticorum* (*On the correction or castigation of peasants*). This work, composed around 574, is clearly influenced by the sermons of Caesarius of Arles (Barlow 1950: 183–203; Hillgarth 1969: 55–63; Hillgarth 1980).¹⁸ In his treatise, Martin seeks to prohibit country-dwellers from engaging in a wide range of ‘pagan’ practices, including the habit of naming the days of the week after the planetary gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon and the habit of observing propitious days of the week to perform specific activities.¹⁹ When dealing with the Christian Sunday-keeping, Martin mentions the pagan practice of honouring Jupiter by observing Thursday as a day free of work (c. 18):²⁰

Nam satis iniquum et turpe est ut illi qui pagani sunt et ignorant fidem Christianum, idola daemonum colentes, diem Iovis aut cuiuslibet daemonis colant et ab opere se abstineant, cum certe nullum diem daemonia nec creassent nec habeant. Et nos, qui verum deum adoramus et credimus filium dei resurrexisse a mortuis, diem resurrectionis eius, id est dominicum, minime veneramus!

How evil and shameful is it that those who are pagans and ignorant

2014: 122). Cf. the point made by Löhr (2007: 9), that in the Western world ‘the countryside presumably resisted Christianisation –if it ever became completely Christian– far longer than the urban population’.

¹⁸ Cf. McKenna 1938: 85–107; Meslin 1969; Hen 2001; Filotas 2005: 48–9, 61; Jones 2014: 123–4.

¹⁹ C. 8–9, 16. Comparable concerns are expressed in Caesarius’ *Sermon* 193.4.

²⁰ Martin speaks again about observing the Lord’s Day at c. 14 and 17. Cf. McKenna 1938: 94; Harmening 1979: 156–7; Hillgarth 1980: 16. Strangely enough, Delage 1978: 436–7 n. 2, affirms that ‘Martin of Braga does not mention this habit among the superstitions for which he reproaches his parishioners’.

of the Christian faith should worship the idols of demons, observe the day of Jupiter or of any other demon and abstain from work, even though these demons neither created nor control any day. Yet we, who worship the true God and believe that the Son of God arose from the dead, shall we not revere the day of His resurrection, that is, the Lord's Day?

In this passage Martin undoubtedly drew from Caesarius' writings (in particular, from *Sermons* 13.5, 19.4, and 52.2). However, Martin's perspective appears to be slightly different from that of Caesarius: while the latter, as seen earlier, addresses and reproaches some members of his Christian community for they sacrilegiously observe a Thursday-rest in honour of Jupiter at the expense of the Christian Sunday, Martin does not directly criticize Christian peasants in his diocese but rather warns them that keeping Thursday (instead of Sunday) by abstaining from work is a distinctly pagan custom that implies the worship of Jupiter, the supreme god of the Roman pantheon.

Going back to Gaul, after Caesarius, later in the sixth century, the Ecclesiastical authorities were apparently still concerned about Christians observing Jupiter's Day by abstaining from work. Indeed, next to the recommendation that 'nobody, neither a free man, nor a slave, nor a Goth, nor a Roman, nor a Syrian, nor a Greek, nor a Jew, shall carry out any kind of work on the Lord's Day' (c. 13.3. Migne, *PL* 84. 611), the fifteenth Canon of the Council of Narbonne of the year 589 reveals (c. 13.6. Migne, *PL* 84. 613):

Ad nos pervenit quosdam de populis catholicae fidei execrabili ritu die quinta feria, quae dicitur Iovis, multos excolere et operationem non facere.

It has come to our attention that a good number of catholic devotees celebrate with a despicable ritual and refrain from work on the fifth *feria*, which is known as Jupiter's Day.²¹

²¹ Cf. Boese 1909: 43–4; Vives 1963: 147; Hillgarth 1980: 15, 27–8; Audin 1981: 331.

This is a particularly valuable piece of evidence: although Gallic church councils are far from being unproblematic sources as to their interpretation (Bailey 2016: 10–1), there is no reason to doubt that most of them addressed ‘specific problems experienced at the particular time and in the particular place where they were issued’ (Filotas 2005: 52).²² Furthermore, even assuming that church canons repeated issues and rulings over a long period of time, the fifteenth Canon of the Council of Narbonne would still suggest that sometime before the year 589 a certain number of people in Gaul did keep Jupiter’s Day. Even so, it is not possible to establish how many people observed a Thursday rest and when precisely such practice was in place.

While not directly mentioning the observance of *dies Iovis*, further canons of Gallic councils of the sixth and seventh centuries repeatedly condemn any kind of work performed on Sunday.²³ The observance of Christian holy days, especially Sunday, recurs in the work of Gregory of Tours, the Gallo-Roman historian and bishop who lived in northern Gaul during the second half of the sixth century.²⁴ About twenty anecdotes in his *Miracula* record the dreadful effects of working on Sundays or on other Christian festivals.²⁵ In addition, in a chapter of his *History of the Franks* (1.23), Gregory stresses that Christ rose again

²² Similar views appear in Bailey 2016: 10–1, 130–2.

²³ For example, the Council of Agde in 506, the Council of Orléans in 538, the Council of Mâcon in 585, the Council of Chalon in 647–653, and the diocesan synod of Auxerre in 561–605 (CCSL 148 and 148A). On church councils in late antique Gaul, see Mathisen 2014. Cf. Wood 1979: 63–4. In the same period, the sacrosanct nature of the Christian *dies dominica* was defended in non-Gallic councils too, such as in the Council of Braga of 572.

²⁴ On Gregory of Tours, see especially Wood 1994; Heinzelmänn 2001; Mitchell and Wood 2002.

²⁵ On the *Miracula* (MGH SRM 1.2): Wood 1979: 62–3; Brown 1981: 130–1; Van Dam 1993; Bordier 2003.

on a Sunday, in opposition to those who regarded Easter day as the Sabbath.

All these sources seemingly signal ‘a period of considerable concern over Sunday observance on the part of churchmen’ (Wood 1979: 64). It appears as though at the turn from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages the Christian Sunday managed with some difficulty to reach its special position in the weekly cycle (Veit 1936: 134; Schreiber 1959: 55). Apparently, the Christian Lord’s Day had to compete not only with the Saturday of Jewish origin but also with the pagan Thursday. We should probably refrain, however, from overestimating the problem of Sunday observance in sixth-century Gaul. Judging from the available sources, it appears likely that compliance with the Sunday keeping was generally the norm, while deviance from it presumably involved a small portion of the population (Wood 1979: 64).

An indirect allusion to the sacred character of Thursday can possibly be detected in the *Liber Pontificalis*, a book of biographies of popes from Saint Peter to the fifteenth century, whose initial version was probably compiled in the sixth century (Duchesne 1955–1957).²⁶ The chapter on Pope Miltiades, who occupied the Holy See in the early fourth century (311–314), reports as follows (*LP* 33): ‘He decreed that none of the faithful should on any account fast on the Lord’s Day or on the fifth *feria*, because the pagans kept those days as holy fast’.²⁷ As Duchesne (1955–1957) pointed out, the reason provided for Miltiades’ decision regarding fasting on Sunday and Thursday is hardly credible. There is no evidence of any pagan fasts on specific days of the week. Since the chapter

²⁶ A summary of the scholarship on the origins and date of the *Liber Pontificalis* can be found in Verardi 2013.

²⁷ Translation slightly modified from Davis 1989: 14. This passage distinctly echoes *Didache* 8: in both texts, Christian calendar practices are intended to create a contrast with the calendar practices of others – pagan practices in the *Liber pontificalis*, Jewish practices in the *Didache*.

continues by stating that Miltiades ‘discovered Manicheans in the city’, it appears likely that this passage reflects some confusion between pagan and Manichean observances. As there is no hint of a second weekly fast as part of Manichean practices other than the one on Sunday (Duchesne 1955–1957: I, p. 169),²⁸ it could be thought that two distinct elements relating to two separate traditions, that is, the Sunday fast of Manicheans and the pagan Thursday ‘sacredness’, were mistakenly conflated in the chapter on Pope Miltiades in the *Liber Pontificalis*.

Moving on to the mid-seventh century, we find a further reference to the Thursday-rest in the *Life of Saint Eligius* (Migne, *PL* 87.477–594; *MGH SRM* 4: 663–741; Head 2001: 137–68). Eligius became bishop of Noyon in northern Gaul in 640 and was apparently a very active preacher in his diocese. In a passage of his biography, which allegedly gives a sample of his sermons and includes his attack of various pagan practices and superstitions, he is reported to have urged (*PL* 87.528; *MGH SRM* 4: 706):

Nullus diem Jovis absque festivitatibus sanctis, nec in Maio, nec ullo tempore in otio observet, neque dies tinarum, vel murorum, aut vel unum omino diem, nisi tantum Dominicum.

No one shall observe Jupiter’s Day in idleness –except when it coincides with a (Christian) holiday– not in May, or in any other time, not on the day of larvae or mice, or on any day but the Lord’s Day.²⁹

²⁸ Duchesne also observed that in the *Doctrina Apostolorum* (8) Thursday’s fast is condemned together with the fast performed on Monday, however as a Jewish and not as a pagan observance (cf. Epiph. *Adv. haeres.* 16.1).

²⁹ This source, along with the passages by Caesarius discussed above, are used by Blackburn and Holford-Strevens (1999: 578) as evidence of the fact that the keeping of Thursday as a holiday persisted in late antique and early medieval Gaul. Cf. Filotas 2005: 71.

It is generally agreed that although the *Vita Eligii* was originally composed by Eligius' friend and contemporary Saint Owen around the years 673–675, most of the work is in fact not authentic. The biography has apparently come down to us in the form of a revised version of the Carolingian period, which, however, probably preserves sections of the original work. It has therefore been argued that the themes of this sermon reflect the concerns of the early to mid-eighth century, rather than those of Eligius' time (Markus 1990: 209–10; 1992: 167; Head 2001: 139; Hen 2001: 39–40). It is also widely acknowledged that the chapter of the *Vita Eligii* that includes the passage mentioned above was largely modeled on the sermons of Caesarius of Arles, as well as on Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum* (Markus 1990: 209–10; 1992: 166–7; Banniard 1992: 73; Hen 2001: 39–40).³⁰ As such, the work can hardly be regarded as an accurate reflection of paganism in seventh- or eighth-century Gaul. However, it is conceivable to assume that the *Vita* witnesses the fortune of traditions and practices of the pagan past in the Roman provinces of Gaul and Germany. Among these traditions and practices was the observance of *dies Iovis*/Thursday as a day of rest, although nothing is known of when such practice was in use.

The *Homilia de sacrilegiis*, ascribed approximately to the same epoch as the *Vita Eligii*, returns to the idea that whoever observes *dies Iovis* as a day of rest in honour of Jupiter is not a Christian but a pagan (c. 12; Caspari 1886: 8):

Whoever inspects the days, which pagans named after the planets
Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, and believes he

³⁰ Both Boudriot (1928: 58–60) and Harmening (1979: 155–7) attribute the whole tradition of references to the observance of *dies Iovis* in sources later than the sixth century to the influence of Caesarius' sermons. This relates to the wider idea that the sermons of Caesarius dealing with paganism and superstitions became a source of inspiration to later writers. On this see also Flint 1991: 42–5, 88–9; Hen 2002: 229–30; Filotas 2005: 1–2, 45–8. Filotas (2005: 71), however, specifies that while some later texts rely wholly on Caesarius, others show original elements. Cf. Hen 1995: 162.

should conduct himself or deal with any activity according to these days, (...) or, due to Jupiter, observes the same day, which (pagans) named Jupiter's Day, or does not work on that day, this person is not a Christian, but a pagan.³¹

This passage shows close similarities with a number of excerpts from Caesarius' sermons, some of which have been examined earlier: both Caesarius (*Sermon* 193.4) and the *Homilia* list the seven planetary gods in week order (from Sun/Sunday to Saturn/Saturday), thus referring to what I earlier characterized as beliefs of calendrical nature, as well as to astrological beliefs associated more specifically to the gods of the planetary week;³² both assert that work is not being performed on Thursday in celebration of Jupiter; both, finally, declare that whoever observes the Thursday-rest is regarded (by God as well as, presumably, by other members of their Christian community) as a pagan rather than a Christian.

Analogous ideas are found again in the eighth-century *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum* ('A short list of superstitions and pagan practices') (Homann 1965; Hen 2015: 183–8), as well as, subsequently, in further Christian homilies and penitentials, such as the one that was composed around 740, possibly by Archbishop Egbert of York (8.4): '(...) to observe the fifth *feria* in honour of Jupiter, or the calends of January, according to the pagan tradition.'³³

³¹ The passage is discussed, for example, by Veit 1936: 134–5; Homann 1965: 111–2; Hen 1995: 37; Filotas 2005: 137.

³² Cf. Harmening 1979: 157–8, who argues that both Caesarius and the *Homilia* primarily struggle against the 'Wochentagsastrologie'. Cf. also Boudriot 1928: 60, who states that the Thursday observance is a late antique tradition linked to the 'Tagesgötterglauben', against which Caesarius fought particularly vehemently.

³³ *vel V feria in honore Jovis vel kalendas Januarias secundum paganam consuetudinem honorare*. For further details about this and further later texts mentioned here, see Harmening 1979: 155–9 and Filotas 2005: 70–2.

More recent penitential books suggest that the memory of the pagan observance of Thursday survived for a long period. For instance, the *Corrector sive medicus*, which was written around 1000 by Burchard, bishop of Worms, and widely used as penitential book, asks such questions as (c. 92): ‘Did you make diabolic amulets (...), did you observe the fifth *feria* in honour of Jupiter?’³⁴

It is unquestionable that these late antique and early medieval texts cannot be taken indiscriminately as descriptive accounts of contemporary non-Christian religious practice, nor of ‘pagan survivals within the Church’ (Brown 2003: 153).³⁵ This does not mean, however, that each and every reference to pagan customs in ecclesiastical sources should necessarily be regarded as a Christian creation of paganism, as is illustrated, for instance, by the case of the festival of the *kalendae Ianuariae*.³⁶ On the other hand, even in such cases where practices of the past clearly persisted into Christian times, these can be defined as distinctly pagan in their original forms, but not necessarily in subsequent periods. Of the sources considered above, the fifteenth canon of the Council of Narbonne is the one that is most likely to be genuinely implying that the weekly celebration of Jupiter’s Day represented a real problem for ecclesiastical authorities sometime in late antique Gaul, although such deviant behaviour cannot be dated precisely and its scope is ultimately unknown. Even assuming that every reference to the Thursday observance in the sixth and later centuries was in fact a mere reiteration of sections of earlier ecclesiastical writings, thus devoid of any actual resemblance to contemporary local behaviour, it is

³⁴ *fecisti phylacteria diabolica (...) vel quintam feriam in honorem Jovis honorasti?* See Harmening 1979: 155–6; Filotas 2005: 2, 56–7 with references at note 191.

³⁵ The idea that patristic sources are often more about Christian self-definition than actual pagan practice has been recently reiterated, among others, by Lucy Grig (2013: 199).

³⁶ On the *kalendae Ianuariae*, see Meslin 1970; Graf 1998; Lim 1999.

nevertheless plausible to suppose that this repetition originated from a practice that existed sometime in the pagan past.

III. ZEUS' DAY IN LATE ROMAN EGYPT

In an attempt to substantiate the assumption that during the Roman imperial period Thursday was kept as the most important and sacred day in the Roman seven-day week and that perhaps it was even observed as day of rest on a hebdomadal basis, we now move to late Roman Egypt. Three late third- and early fourth-century documents on papyrus from Oxyrhynchus raise the possibility that official business was regularly suspended on Thursdays during the period in question. The first papyrus (*P.Oxy.* LIV 3741) preserves part of an official daybook, possibly compiled by a *logistes*.³⁷ The document has been attributed to the year 313 and more precisely (albeit tentatively) to the time span from 2 September to 7 October in that year.³⁸ The dates on the daybook are expressed according to the Egyptian calendar and run from 6 Thoth (= 4 September) until 10 Phaophi (= 8 October). Beside each date, the functionary who drafted the daybook recorded any activity relating to his office that was performed on that day. The office in question was not particularly frenetic, judging by the frequency with which the business conducted is described as οὐδέν, 'nothing'. Particularly significant for our present purpose is the regular occurrence of the entry Διός, 'of Zeus', every seven days: on 6, 13, 27 Thoth, and on 4 Phaophi (l. 13, 18, 36, 44).³⁹ It is noteworthy that none of the days marked as Διός are characterized by any kind of activity – the space next to each of these four entries is consistently left blank. Since Διός can be understood as a short form for ἡμέρα Διός, which corresponds to the Latin *die Iovis*, the regular

³⁷ On the *logistes/curator* in Roman Egypt, see Scheuble-Reiter 2016.

³⁸ For details about this date proposal, see Coles, Maehler, and Parsons 1987: 108–9.

³⁹ 20 and 21 Thoth are missing from the papyrus.

occurrence of the entry every seven days could be interpreted as an indication that in the early fourth century official bureaux at Oxyrhynchus were kept closed on Thursdays.⁴⁰ In the daybook there is a clear distinction between the several occurrences of οὐδέν-days, when activity apparently could have been performed but it was not, and Διός-days, when no activity was scheduled.

A confirmation of the supposed holiday-status of ἡμέρα Διός/Thursday at Oxyrhynchus in the late third and early fourth century may be provided by a second papyrus, a petition against a nomination as *dekaprotos* dating to 31 December 287 (*POxy.* XXII 2343).⁴¹ Lines 8–9 of the document refer:

(...) ἐδίδαξάμην ἀπὸ τῆς β' τοῦ ὄν[τος μηνός Τυβι Χρυσάμ[μ]ωνα ῥήτορα καὶ διὰ τὸ [ἰερομηνεῖ[αν εἶναι] τῆν. β τοῦ Διός οὐκ ἐντετύχηκε, τῇ δὲ γ' εἰσι[ό]ντι σοι εὐτυχῶς εἰς τι φροντιστήριον προσῆλθον καὶ ἔφησθα (...)

(...) I instructed the advocate Chrysammon from the 2nd of the current month Tybi, and because the 2nd was a festival of Zeus, he did not apply, but on the 3rd I met you on your auspicious entry to the council-chamber and you said you were busy (...)

Coles (1985: 113) assumes that the word ἰερομηνεῖα should be understood simply as 'festival';⁴² indeed, the term *hieromenia* was originally used to refer to the period of interruption of hostilities connected with the great athletic festivals, but already by the fourth century BC it came to identify any festival

⁴⁰ As already postulated by the editors of *POxy.* LIV 3741 and echoed by Barnes (1992: 656 n. 47), who calls Thursday in Roman Egypt a 'legal holiday', Blackburn and Holford-Strevens (1999: 578), Potter (2014: 418), who affirms that 'in Egypt it appears to have been traditional for judges to take Thursdays off', and Edwards (2015: 195). Girardet (2008: 343) is more cautious but regards the idea as plausible.

⁴¹ The text has been re-edited with various improvements by Coles (1985), who suggested the date given above.

⁴² He refers to App. *B Civ.* 5.130 for this sense of the word.

period during which the legal apparatus of the state was suspended (Caulfield *et al.* 1989).⁴³ The later sense fits with the hypothesis that the term was used in our papyrus from Oxyrhynchus to express the fact that 2 Tybi was a day dedicated to Zeus on a weekly basis, that is, a Thursday. In other words, the assumption is that ἱερομηνία τοῦ Διός was used here as an alternative to the usual formula ἡμέρα Διός. This conjecture is supported not only by the parallel of official bureaux closing on Thursdays offered by *POxy* LIV 3741, the *logistes* daybook discussed above, but also by the fact that, as Coles (1985: 113) aptly summarizes, ‘Tybi 2, year 4 and 3 (see 14 init.), = 29 December 287. This was indeed a Thursday’. According to this interpretation, the sense to be attributed to lines 8–9 of *POxy*. XXII 2343 is that being 2 Tybi a Thursday –a non-working day–, the man who wrote the petition against a nomination as *dekaprotos* could not approach the prefect and had to wait until the next day.

Although its text is fragmentary and its interpretation is not unproblematic, a third document appears worth being brought into this discussion. *POxy*. LX 4075 is another *logistes* daybook, probably dating to 4/13 June 318.⁴⁴ At the very beginning of what is preserved of its recto, it records:

[-ca.?-] ι ὁ λογιστ[ῆς] τὰ αὐτὰ ἔπραξεν. ια Διὸς ο[ὔ]σῃ[ς] ὁ λογιστῆς [...]

On the 10th, the *logistes* did these things. On the 11th, as it was Zeus’ (Day), the *logistes* [...]

In the light of what was suggested regarding the two papyri examined above, this entry of the *logistes* daybook could be taken to mean that on the 11th, since it

⁴³ The term occurs with this meaning in a number of papyri dating to the late third century. Cf. *Suda* ‘ἱερομηνία’; Phot. ‘ἱερομηνία’; Hsch. ‘ἱερομηνία’; Anonymous in Hermog. *Prog.* 7.67.21; Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 3.12.6; Philo *Specialibus legibus* 2.41.7.

⁴⁴ Apparently the only other existing example of a *logistes* daybook is the document examined earlier (*POxy*. LIV 3741).

was Thursday and hence the bureau was closed, the *logistes* did not conduct any activity. As in the other official daybook considered earlier, in this case too Thursday would be expressed solely by the word Διός, 'of Zeus', which implies ἡμέρα, 'day'. In this context, it should be pointed out that in contrast with the pattern for the days of the week in the epigraphic and literary sources, where the word ἡμέρα (or Latin *dies*) regularly accompanies the planetary or numbered designation, the evidence from documentary papyri includes a number of cases where the word ἡμέρα is in fact omitted.⁴⁵

Beyond what is suggested by the three documents just examined, the Oxyrhynchus papyri do not provide any further hint of a regular suspension of work on Thursdays during the later imperial period. My analysis of all documents from Oxyrhynchus which would count as official activity (such as replies to petitions, tax receipts, and any other document that emanated from a public bureau and was signed or approved by an official) has offered no conclusive evidence in this regard. It should be noted, however, that this is due in the first place to the inadequate number of precisely dated documents among this specific type of material. As a result, it was not possible to determine what the pattern was –if any– in terms of the days of the week on which these official activities were performed.

Supposing that Jupiter's Day was a hebdomadal day of rest at Oxyrhynchus before Constantine's formalisation of the Christian Sunday as a non-working day in 321,⁴⁶ it still remains unclear whether Thursday was a

⁴⁵ e.g. *P.Rain.UnterrichtCopt.* 252.9, 18 (= *P.Mon.Epiph.* 618. cf. Ast 2013: 15–6); *P.Col. inv.* 75 (= Ast 2013); *PSI VII* 843.13 (cf. Ast 2013: 14–5).

⁴⁶ The earliest evidence of Sunday as a non-working day in Roman Egypt is provided by a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus dating to 2 October 325 (*POxy.* LIV 3759). See also *POxy.* LIV 3758, 119–20. Cf. Llewelyn and Nobbs 2002: 106–13; Ast 2013: 12–3; Potter 2014: 419. In 321 Constantine decreed Sunday a day of rest (*Cod. Iust.* 3.12.2–3 March 321; *Cod. Theod.* 2.8.1 – early summer 321. See also Eus. *Vit. Const.* 4.18.2 and 23, and

holiday for the entire population or only for administrative and judiciary officials. Moreover, the extant sources do not allow us to determine whether the alleged status of Thursday as a non-working day would have been limited to the Oxyrhynchite or if it applied to the whole of Egypt, or perhaps to further regions of the Empire.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Although any conclusions drawn from the material examined above regarding the role of *dies Iovis*/ἡμέρα Διός as a weekly day of rest in sixth-century Gaul and in late third- and early fourth-century Oxyrhynchus must be tentative, there is enough evidence to justify the raising of the 'Thursday issue'. It is thus deemed worth offering some concluding reflections on the idea that Thursday gradually became the most important and sacred day in the Roman planetary seven-day week by virtue of being the day dedicated to the chief god of the Roman pantheon, and, at the same time, the day associated to the astrologically favourable planet that was named after Jupiter;⁴⁷ in turn, this circumstance may have led official bureaux in third-century Oxyrhynchus to remain closed regularly on Thursdays or given rise to the late antique idea, among churchmen in Gaul and Galicia, that a practice such as a hebdomadal rest on Thursday had existed in the –not-so-far– pagan past.

Jupiter was consistently celebrated as the chief deity of the Roman pantheon throughout the imperial period. The god had a prominent role in

9.10, 17.14; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 1.8.11; *CIL* III 4121). As pointed out by Di Berardino (2008: 320), Constantine's regulation on Sunday was the first of a long series of imperial legislations on Sunday observance, which, in fact, was not really established as a public holiday before the fifth century.

⁴⁷ Although there is no evidence that Thursday ever acquired the status of *dies ferialis* in the Roman calendar, it cannot be excluded that the hebdomadal *dies Iovis* may have been observed privately through small domestic sacrifices.

imperial ideology, being traditionally associated with assumption to the throne (Fears 1981, esp. pp. 97–119).⁴⁸ With reference to the renewed role of Jupiter in the imperial propaganda under Severus Alexander, Clare Rowan (2012: 248) has recently observed that ‘the alignment between the head of the empire and the head of the Roman pantheon (...) was not an innovation, but the continuation of an existing tradition that had become particularly marked from Commodus on’. In this connection, Franz Dölger (1940: 234) put forth the theory that just as the fact that Constantine established Sunday (*dies solis*) as the Christian day of rest and prayer in the hebdomadal cycle appears to be dependent upon the Sun having previously been the emperor’s preferred and patron deity, similarly Diocletian, who traced back his lineage to Jupiter and attributed himself and his dynasty the epithet *Jovius*, may have ascribed a particular significance to Thursday, the day of his patron god Jupiter.⁴⁹

In particular, Jupiter Optimus Maximus, who incidentally appears as recipient of a number of votive dedications on monuments from Roman Gaul and Germany that bear representations of the seven-day week deities,⁵⁰ was

⁴⁸ More recently Boin (2015: 93–5), referring to Noreña’s work (2011: 152, 204, 250–63, 336), has emphasized the central role of Jupiter in Roman imperial cult. This preeminence is also exhibited on coins, for example as part of the numismatic propaganda of the third-century emperors (Manders 2012: 102–7, 121–4. Cf. also Rowan 2012: 74, 95, 162, 207, 219–33). On the role of the emperors in decisively influencing the official stance towards certain cults and religious practices, see Beard – North – Price 1998: 251–2.

⁴⁹ In more recent times, both Girardet (2008: 343) and Edwards (2015: 195) echoed Dölger’s supposition.

⁵⁰ This specific type of provincial monument, known as ‘Jupiter columns’, became widespread throughout Roman Gaul and Germany during the second century and continued to be popular until approximately the mid-third century (see Picard 1977 for the Gauls and Bauchhenß–Noelke 1981 for the Germanic provinces. Cf. Fears 1981: 105;

regarded as the supreme god of Roman public religion and therefore as the major protector of *Urbs et Orbis*, that is, of Rome, the Roman provinces, and the Emperor. The vast popularity of Jupiter Optimus Maximus during the imperial period was not limited to the Gallic and Germanic provinces: in the Roman West (with the exception of North Africa, where Saturn was the most popular Roman god), the dedications to Jupiter –and especially to Jupiter Optimus Maximus– outnumber by far those to any other deity, and cut across all social grades (Fears 1981: 100–3; Rives 2015: 423). In this respect, it is worth recalling that the three Oxyrhynchus papyri examined above date from the late third and early fourth century, which was a period that represented a crucial phase in the spread of the seven-day week in the Roman Empire: it was indeed during the later imperial period that the hebdomadal cycle, especially in its planetary form, came to gradually enjoy more and more popularity.⁵¹

Beard – North – Price 1998: 146–7; Woolf 2001; Van Andringa 2002: 190–1). Their bases usually consist of two parts: at the bottom, a quadrangular stone block decorated on all sides with images of deities, and above it a further stone block, often octagonal and occasionally showing the high relief bust of each of the seven planetary week gods on each of its faces, in week order: Saturn, Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, and Venus. See, for example, *CIL* XIII 4467 (= Espérandieu 1913: no. 4414; *CAG* 57.1: 501) and *CIL* XII 2183 (= Espérandieu 1907: 281-1, no. 412; *CAG* 38.1: 111-2, no. 176; *ILN* V.2, 320). Cf. Duval 1953: 287; Turcan 1972: 132–3; Desnier 1993: 600–5; Lichtenberger 2011: 260-1.

⁵¹ Cf. Section I. An intense phase of diffusion of the planetary week in the Roman West seems to have coincided with the reign of the Severans. The literary sources refer to Septimius Severus as being a firm believer in astrology (Dio Cass. 77.11.1; *Hist. Aug. Severus* 2.8 f., 3.9, 4.3) as well as an expert in astrology himself (*Historia Augusta* 10.3.8-9, 11.9.6). Moreover, consider Severus' *Septizodium* or *Septizonium* in Rome, which probably bore images of the seven planetary week deities, as well as one of the octagonal altars dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus mentioned earlier (note 49 – *CIL* XII 2183), which shows the emperor's bust as part of the decorative cycle

If we assume that Jupiter's Day became a weekly day of rest during the later imperial period, the question remains as to how the Romans came to such an innovation in their calendar. Traditionally, the Romans had no feast day recurring on a hebdomadal basis. They had public *feriae* (that is, official festivals acknowledged by the state and celebrated by state priests) scattered throughout the year, which were public holidays: on *feriae*, work and business were stopped to avoid polluting the sacred days. If the Romans did ever celebrate Thursday as a feast day, they presumably borrowed the idea of having a fixed weekly holiday from the Judeo-Christian tradition, in particular from the Jewish Sabbath. The latter had been generally known in various areas of the Roman Empire since remote times –in Rome and Italy at least since the first century BC (Michael 1924; Stern 1974: 318–26, 341, 347–9; 1980: 110; Goldenberg 1979; Balsdon 1979: 234, 297 n. 117; Feldman 1993: 158–67, 351–2, 356, 375; Schaefer 1997: 82–92; Isaac 2004: 471; Williams 2013: 35–6, 49–61, 214). The earliest sources relating to the planetary week in the Roman West reveal that Saturn's Day (Saturday) was very soon identified with the Sabbath (Tib. 1.3.18; Frontin. *Str.* 2.1.17; Tac. *Hist.* 5.4.11; Dio Cass. 37.16.1–4, 37.1.7.3, 49.22.4–5, 66.7.2; Tert. *Ad nat.* 1.13). The emergence of the planetary week in the Roman West occurred roughly concomitantly with the Romans becoming increasingly familiar with the Jewish observance of the Sabbath, as a large number of Jews arrived in Rome and Italy after Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BC and after Sosius' re-capture of Jerusalem from the Parthians in 37 BC (Williams 2013: 34, 49). Despite occasionally misapprehending it and regarding it essentially as a foreign *superstitio*, the Romans of the early Empire were well aware of the

representing the planetary week gods. As for the preeminence of Jupiter in imperial ideology, Septimius Severus was no exception: indeed, 'Septimius carefully used the coinage to highlight his unique relationship with Jupiter' (Fears 1981: 115). Cf. Manders 2012: 105; Rowan 2012: 227.

Jewish Sabbath.⁵² Before the emergence of the Christian Sunday, the Jewish Sabbath was a unique expression of the idea of having a feast day recurring on a hebdomadal basis. Although Sunday was quite early distinguished by the Christians as the Lord's Day⁵³ (*dies dominicus / dominica*; Greek *kyriake*) on account of being the day of Christ's resurrection, there is no evidence that Sunday was an official day of rest in the Roman Empire before Constantine. The question is debated. As Willy Rordorf observed (1962: 152), our sources suggest that 'for the first Christians, Sunday was essentially a day of worship and prayer; only subsequently and at a relatively late stage did Sunday become the Church's day of rest'.⁵⁴ If Christians had really 'advocated making Sunday into a day of rest', it is hardly conceivable that no explicit reference to such attempts would have been left in patristic sources; these, on the contrary, clearly focus 'on the religious rituals and prayer appropriate to Sunday as the "Lord's Day"' (Salzman 2004: 199). This theory is supported by the fact that

⁵² On the familiarity of the Romans with the Jewish Sabbath, and on the fact that they typically considered it as a superstitious practice – an idea that is consistent with the Romans' general tendency to denigrate foreign cults and traditions and regard them as *superstitiones*, that is, deviations from the Roman religion (Grodzynski 1974) –, see *Ov. Ars am.* 1.76 and 414 f., and *Rem. am.* 217–20; *Hor. Sat.* 1.9.63–72; *Juv. Sat.* 14.96–106; *Pers.* 5. 179–84; *Plut. De superst.* 8.166A and 169C; *Suet. Aug.* 76.2; *Apul. Flor.* 6; *Sen. apud August. De civ. D* 6.11, *Joseph. Ap.* 2.282; *Tert. Ad nat.* 1.13 and *Apol.* 16.11. Cf. Stern 1974: 105, 318–26, 347–9, 429–32, 509–11, 545–50; 1980: 37–8; 204–5, 347–78; Goldenberg 1979: 430–1; Feldman 1993: 158–67; Schaefer 1997: 82–92; Gordon 2008, esp. pp. 91–2; Williams 2013: 57, 105.

⁵³ Possibly since the second century. Some scholars, including Carson (1982: 16 and *passim*), believe that Sunday worship arose even earlier, in New Testament times.

⁵⁴ For similar views see, for example, Carson 1982: 14–6 and *passim*; Llewelyn and Nobbs 2002: 112; Salzman 2004: 187, 198–9; Girardet 2008: 343; Rüpke 2011: 163–4. *Contra*, among others, Jewett (1971) and Beckwith (1996: 47–50).

before the conversion of Constantine Christianity was far from being the official religion of the Roman Empire – suffice to think of the anti-Christian policies in the Roman Empire, which occurred intermittently during the first centuries of our era. In other words, it is hardly credible that early Christians in the Roman Empire could simply abstain from work on one day out of seven. In pre-Constantinian times, when all the inhabitants of the Roman Empire were still expected to be taking part in the sacrifices and rituals for the gods of the Roman pantheon, Christians would celebrate the Lord's Day with meetings and prayers in secrecy, either at dawn or at night, that is, either before the working-day started or after it had ended (Di Berardino 2008: 332; Rüpke 2011: 164). Presumably, then, before the fourth century non-Christians were not as familiar with the Christian Sunday practice as they were with the Jewish adherence to the Sabbath.

Alternatively, it has been suggested that the notion of having a non-working day recurring on a hebdomadal basis originated within the Roman tradition itself (Dölger 1940: 234–5). According to this hypothesis, the Roman eight-day 'week' (*nundinae*) would have been the direct antecedent of the seven-day week, and the market day that occurred every eight days (on the ninth day, really, hence its name) would have been the predecessor of Jupiter's Day. Dölger pointed to Macrobius' designation of the *nundinae* as *feriae Iovis* (*Sat.*1.16.30), as well as to an inscription from Pannonia of the year 238, which testifies to the existence of a cult of Jupiter Optimus Maximus Nundinarius (*CIL* III 3936 = III 10820 = *ILS* 7116). However, it should be pointed out that the status of *nundinae* as *feriae publicae* is problematic. Balsdon (1969: 59-61) regarded the *nundinae* essentially as market days and stressed that 'the day was a *dies fastus*, on which legal transactions could be effected'. Rüpke (2011: 32–4, 59–63; 2014: 144–5) points out that the day's character is 'ambivalent', as the *nundinae* apparently shared a number of features that are typical of both *feriae* and *dies fasti*; in any case, continues Rüpke, the *nundinae* were not a general holiday

from work.⁵⁵ Indeed, the ancient sources clearly state that the cessation of work on the *nundinae* concerned exclusively farmers, who on that day would leave the countryside for the city to attend the market.

On these bases, it appears more likely that, if Thursday did at some point act as a pagan rest day, the concept of a weekly holiday was ‘borrowed’ from the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day (and presumably, it was especially the former that acted as a model) rather than from the *nundinae*, the Roman eight-day market cycle. Regardless of how this supposed Thursday-rest might have originated, it is fair to recognize that any conclusions drawn from the two groups of sources analysed earlier must remain open to consideration. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the present study will encourage further discussion on the role of Thursday/*dies Iovis* during the later Imperial period and in Late Antiquity.

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⁵⁵ Similar views are expressed by Ker (2010), who emphasizes the multi-functionality of the *nundinae*.

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