**Ep 86 Calendar**

**Aven:** [00:00:00] Welcome to the Endless Knot Podcast where the more we know,

**Mark:** [00:00:04] the more we want to find out

**Aven:** [00:00:05] tracing serendipitous connections through our lives

**Mark:** [00:00:08] and across disciplines.

**Aven:** [00:00:16] Hi, I'm Aven

**Mark:** [00:00:17] and I'm Mark.

**Aven:** [00:00:18] And today we're talking about the calendar. First happy solstice, because you're not listening to this on the solstice, but we are recording it on the solstice. So I wish you a happy solstice from the past .By now, the sun is coming

**Mark:** [00:00:32] back. That's true.

**Aven:** [00:00:33] So, yeah, we're going to be talking about a video from the past year last year, last year. That's all about the calendar and the names of the months and weekdays basically. But before we get to that only a couple of little things. One is we now have some posters available on red bubble. Which are new. We've had some merchandise like that in the past, but, and we haven't taken that stuff down, but we now have a Redbubble store.

And specifically we have the Magic poster there and Spelling at the moment. And when I say poster, I mean the the main image from a video that we've done with all of the different connections on it made into a printable poster. So, if you're interested in such things, you can go to endlessknot.redbubble.com to look at that.

And we are going to add other videos there too, and maybe some other merchant, if there's anything in particular, you'd like, please let us know because we'll only be doing it when we have time. But if there's some particular demand, there was a number of people asking about the magic one, which is why we've done it also.

Over the last in November, we hit 30,000 subscribers on the YouTube channel, which was very exciting.

**Mark:** [00:01:49] We are, as of this moment, a little over 35,000,

**Aven:** [00:01:54] it was a very big month for us for slightly confusing and an unknown reasons. But we got a lot of new subscribers, so welcome to any new subscribers who made your way to the podcast.

And because of that, we are planning to do what we've done in the past for big milestones, which is live stream Q and A, however, it all came sort of so fast and unexpectedly that we just didn't have of time. So we're going to do it in the new year, hopefully fairly soon in the new year. what that means is it'll be on YouTube and we'll be answering questions in real time.

We will post our information about that on all our social media, if you're interested. But if you want to ask us any questions and have us answer them, have Mark answer them, probably. Most people always want him to answer things about words. You can email them to us or tweet them at us or leave them as comments on the community tab on YouTube channel.

So please do, if you're interested in that and we will try to make sure that, you know, when we're doing the live stream,

**Mark:** [00:02:50] So since it's the solstice we are having our traditional solstice drink. We were going to have it in any case. And since we're recording tonight, that is our beverage of choice: mulled apple cider.

And, you know, traditionally, I suppose one would spike it with Brandy. However, we have a special liqueur to doctor our mulled apple cider with which is a new spirit from our local craft distiller, Crosscut. And it's called cloves optional holiday spirit. And so it's got the, you know, what you would expect as the traditional Christmas time spices.

So it's cloves and cinnamon and allspice. Yeah.

**Aven:** [00:03:38] But very cloves forward. Yeah. So it's a nice addition to the mulled cider, which already had closed in. And of course, so, yeah, so cheers. Hm. Not really a cocktail, I suppose, but a warming beverage,

We always have hot cider on. The solstice and usually have big parties. In the past it was my family. And then the last 10 years it's been friends of ours in our hometown. We always go back for solstice, but this year we're not going anywhere for Christmas.

**Mark:** [00:04:08] Those of you in the distant future, this is being recorded in 2020.

Yeah.

**Aven:** [00:04:12] The year we all stayed home. So we are not able to have our solstice celebrations with our family and our friends. But we've had a few zoom calls and we're at least going to have the food. Yeah. Because if nothing else we'll have the food and drink, really, we're not doing too badly. So that's all the prelude we have.

do you want to say a couple of words about the video before we watch it?

**Mark:** [00:04:33] Yeah. So this video is not only our seasonal Christmas episode-y thing. It's actually, well, it mentioned some, some Christmasy stuff, but it's about, the calendar in general, and it kind of also was maybe more specifically a new year's special this time round talking about the calendar and the turn of the year on all of that sort of thing. It also is the third part of a series of videos about calendrical topics. The first of which was about the word Sabbath, the second about millennial and this one about calendar.

So it, it forms a kind of trilogy of videos about about that sort of stuff. And we will eventually get to around to making. Podcasts of those first two parts. But we're doing this one now right away our seasonal podcast.

**Aven:** [00:05:29] So in, in the script, as we will hear you do refer back to those videos a couple of times, but just think of it as being referring forward, because time is wibbly wobbly.

That's right. Okay, good. Well then we'll listen to that. We'll we'll, I'll play the Voiceover for calendar. And then we will reconvene and talk about just, just a couple of additional things. This, this video is very focused in some ways and in a way that sometimes ours are not. But there's a couple of additions that we wanted to make.

**Mark:** [00:06:02] The history of calendars can be traced back to the urban revolutions, when humans began to shift from small communities to large cities in the bronze age. These complex cities led to things like writing, currency, and standardized weighs and measures, which allowed for financial transactions and taxation, and calendars soon followed, which not only regulated human time important for agriculture and taxation, but also religious time important for festivals and other observances. First came the Sumerian lunisolar calendar, which was organized by both the solar and lunar cycles, followed by independent calendar systems developed in other parts of the world, such as the Egyptian solar calendar, early solar calendars in China, and the famously complex Mayan calendar in Mesoamerica, which led to the famous 2012 millenarian phenomenon because of the mistaken belief that the Mayan calendar predicted the end of the world in that year — in fact it was really just the end of a 5126 year long cycle tracked in their calendar, important but not apocalyptic.

The word calendar actually comes from the Roman calendar, in which the first day of the month was named the Kalendae or “Kalends”, traditionally spelled with a <k> even though the letter was very rare in classical Latin, from calare “to call, summon”, being the day when the priests would announce the new moon and declare the number of days, five or seven depending on the month, until the next named day, the nonae or “nones” meaning literally “nine”, which, if you count inclusively, that is counting both the day you start with and the day you end on, is nine days before the next named day, the idus, or “ides” [as in the famous ides of March when Julius Caesar was assassinated], etymology unknown but perhaps Etruscan, coming on either the 13th or 15th of the month, and all the other days of the month were simply counted back inclusively from these named days. Those named days, by the way, were likely originally there to mark the phases of the moon. For the Romans, the word for “year” was annus [from which we get annual], ultimately from the Proto-Indo-European root \*at- “to go”, thus indicating the idea of the period of time gone through. The English word year comes from Old English gear, ultimately from the Proto-Indo-European root \*yer- meaning “year, season”, which also came into Greek as hora “season”, which eventually found its way into English in the words horoscope, and hour indicating a very different unit of time. The word for month in most languages is usually connected with the word for moon, since a month was, originally at least, a cycle of the moon. The Romans called the month mensis, and our English word month, related to moon, comes from Old English monað, and all of these words can be traced back to the Proto-Indo-European root \*me- “to measure”, also source of words such as measure, metre, moon, and menstruate.

We’ve already explored the details of the Babylonian and Jewish calendars, and how lunar, solar and lunisolar calendars work in our previous videos on the words “Sabbath” and “Millennial”, so if you want to learn even more about those topics, check them out, but to briefly summarize the key issues relevant to our modern calendar, the modern secular calendar is strictly solar, which keeps in sync with the solar cycle, determined by the earth’s orbit around the sun, so that the solstices, when the day or night is at its longest, and the equinoxes, when the day and night are the same length, occur at the same time every year. But as I mentioned before, there are other natural cycles that can be used in organizing a calendar, such as the daily cycle determined by the rotation of the earth, and the lunar cycle or lunation determined by the moon’s orbit around the earth. The problem is, none of the cycles line up properly. The year can’t be divided up into an even number of lunations [there’s about 29.53 days in a lunation, and about 12.38 lunations in a solar year], so luni-solar calendars that track both cycles have to cheat by adding in extra days or months here and there to reconcile the different cycles, what are known as intercalary days or months, intercalary meaning “inserted into the calendar” from Latin inter “between” and that same root as calendar. And in fact the year can’t even be broken down into an even number of days [it’s actually 365.24 days], hence our need for leap years.

Now although our secular calendar is not dependent on lunations, only needing to reconcile the daily and yearly cycles, since our modern calendar was in part developed by the Christian church, based on the Roman calendar and the Jewish calendar, we do also have bear in mind the lunar cycle when we look at its history. The 7 day week seems to have originally been derived from the phases of the moon in the Babylonian calendar, which was then transformed in the Jewish calendar to a simple repeating 7 day cycle ending in the Sabbath no longer tied to the lunar phases. But the Jewish calendar was nevertheless still a lunisolar calendar, and so festival days also depended therefore on lunation, and since the Christian tradition was based on Judaism, some of the Christian festivals are also based on the lunar cycle. This is why in the Ecclesiastical calendar, sometimes referred to as Kalendar with a <k> as in that ancient Roman tradition, there are movable feasts, based on the lunar cycle, and fixed feasts, based on the solar cycle. This is why Christmas, a fixed feast, occurs on the same date every year, but Easter, a movable feast, based on the lunar cycle, moves around.

So today we’re going to focus on how we got our modern international calendar, with the months and weekdays we know and love. And to do that, we have to start with classical Rome.

The Old Roman calendar originally had only ten months, starting with March and ending with December, with a number of intercalary days after December to reconcile the calendar with the solar year, and later on these intercalary days were replaced with two new months, January and February, and the start of the year was eventually moved to the beginning of January. But this is why the months September, October, November, and December, which etymologically come from the Latin numbers septem “seven”, octo “eight”, novem “nine”, and decem “ten” are no longer the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth months. That original Roman calendar was modified over and over again, with the length of months becoming fixed so that they no longer represented lunar cycles, and it was brought more in line with the solar cycle, for instance by adding leap days, as we have it now. Every year divisible by four contains a leap day, unless the year is divisible by one hundred in which case it isn’t a leap year, unless the year is divisible by four hundred in which case it is a leap year again. Got that? It was the Roman Julius Caesar, who had that unlucky day in March, who originally added the leap day every four years, in the year 46 BCE, hence it’s called the Julian calendar, but since the year is slightly less than 365 and a quarter days long, Pope Gregory XIII promulgated the current more complex system of leap years in 1582, hence our calendar now is called the Gregorian calendar, though it was actually the work of physician and astronomer Aloysius Lilius, with further refinements by Jesuit German mathematician and astronomer Christopher Clavius, who by the way first introduced brackets in mathematics and was one of the first to use the decimal point in the West. But that explains why historical dates are sometimes messed up. Because in order to get the calendar back on track from the 10 day difference that had built up since the Julian calendar started being used, in 1582 October 4th was followed immediately by October 15th. And to make matters worse, only Catholic countries adopted the new calendar in 1582, with Protestant and Orthodox countries only adopting it some time later, leading to many discrepancies. Britain didn’t adopt the new calendar until 1752, by which point the slippage had increased to 11 days, so in Britain in 1752, September 2nd was followed by September 14th. And of course many at the time complained about the “loss” of those 11 days. You can imagine this would be a financial problem, calculating things like interest for instance. Some Orthodox churches are still a number of days out, which is why Orthodox Christmas is on January 6th, though most traditionally Orthodox countries have finally switched to the Gregorian calendar for secular purposes, but often only relatively recently, with Russia switching only in 1918, and Greece as late as 1923. The other confusing element about historical dates is the fact that the date of New Year’s Day, when the numerical year would tick over, kept switching around. Julius Caesar moved it from March to January 1st, once those new months were created, but under the influence of Christianity it was often moved to various days of religious importance, such as Christmas, the Annunciation in March, or Easter, but the Gregorian reform moved it back to January 1st, and non-Catholic countries often only switched once they adopted the new calendar. But all this is for instance why the Russian October Revolution actually took place in November.

So as we’ve seen, the names September, October, November, and December are simply derived from the Roman numbers, and those are by the way cognate with our English numbers, coming from the Proto-Indo-European numbers \*septm-, \*okto-, \*newn-, and \*dekm- respectively. The -ber ending on those months, by the way, is of uncertain etymology: it might be related to mensis “month”, which would then have produced a form \*-mensris and then \*-membris, or it might simply be from the Latin adjectival suffix -bris from the noun suffix -bra or -brum, ultimately from the Proto-Indo-European noun-forming suffix \*-dhrom. But what about the other months of the year? Well let’s start with January or Ianuarius in Latin which is named after the two-faced god of doorways Janus, very appropriate for the newly instituted first month of the year. The name Janus or actually Ianus in Latin is related to the word ianua “door” which gives us English janitor, who was originally a doorkeeper, and comes from the Proto-Indo-European root \*ie- “to go”, which might lie behind the root \*yer- and would thereby be related to the word year, also appropriate. Now the early Germanic peoples had their own calendar system too, and some of those old month names continued to be used for a while before being replaced by the Roman names, so in Old English December and January roughly coincided with Geolamonaþ or “Yule month” in reference to the old pagan festival Yule now associated with Christmas, and later was divided up into two months Ærra-Geolamonaþ “before Yule month” for December and Æfterra-Geolamonaþ “after Yule month” for January, and you can learn more about the etymology and significance of Yule in our “Yule” video. Yuuuule love it!

Next up is February, the other “new” month that the Romans added to their originally ten month calendar. Since Februarius was the last month in the Roman calendar until the first month was changed from March to January, there were a number of Roman festivals then that were concerned with endings and boundaries, such as Parentalia which involved honouring ancestors and propitiating the dead, and Terminalia a festival in honour of Terminus the god of boundaries. Another festival in Februarius was the purification ritual known as Februa or Lupercalia, and it’s from this that the month takes its name. Februa is the plural form of februum meaning “means of purification, expiatory offerings”, presumably some sort of instrument used in the purification ritual. In his calendar poem called the Fasti, Ovid suggests the word comes from an “ancient tongue” presumably Etruscan or possibly Sabine, another Italic language related to Latin, but ultimately the etymology of the word is unknown. It might come from the Proto-Indo-European root \*dhegwh- “to burn, warm” also the source of the word fever, or the root \*dheu- “dust, vapour, smoke” also the source of the word fume, either way suggesting a ritual involving fire and/or smoke. In the Germanic calendar, February is equivalent to Solmonaþ, which the Venerable Bede, in his De temporum ratione or The Reckoning of Time, explains means “month of cakes” because the English used to offer cakes to their old Germanic gods in that month, though some scholars have suggested that instead it might mean “mud month” since “mud” is the usual meaning of the word sol, and that time of year is particularly wet in the climate of England. Bede, by the way, was one of the foremost Latin writers in early medieval England, and his De temporum ratione, which not only gives and explains the Latin and Old English names of the months, but also the Hebrew and Greek names, is a work about computus, that is the calculation of the calendar, and specifically the calculation of the date of Easter, which moves around every year since it’s based on a lunar calculation, unlike most of the rest of the Christian calendar. There was a controversy about the method of calculating Easter just prior to Bede’s time revolving around whether the English should calculate Easter following the methods of the church in Rome or following the Irish church’s method. Bede was a staunch supporter of the Roman church, so the climactic moment of Bede’s most famous work Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum or Ecclesiastical History of the English People was when the Synod of Whitby decided in favour of the Roman method of calculation, as well as the Roman form of tonsure or haircut instead of the Irish. The other thing Bede’s Historia ecclesiastica achieved was popularizing the system of BC and AD years, which we discussed in the “Millennial” video. As for the calculation of Easter, it was originally tied to the Jewish Passover — the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples before the crucifixion is presented in at least some parts of the New Testament as a Passover seder. But because Passover moves around so much in relation to the solar Roman calendar and also because the early Christian church wanted to distance themselves from Judaism, their calculation is instead based on the equinox and the full moon, that is the Sunday following the full Moon which falls on or after the equinox, though even that isn’t exactly how the calculation works.

Now moving on to March or Martius in Latin, this month is named after the Roman god of war Mars, appropriate since it was typically the opening of the military campaign season, who was held to be the progenitor of the Roman people as father of the legendary founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, and who became associated with the Greek god of war Ares. This is a process known as syncretism, when one tradition is understood by interpretation and comparison to another tradition. In this case Romans reinterpreted their native gods by comparison to the Greek gods reconciling the two traditions, thus it is specifically known as interpretatio graeca. So since Mars was understood as a god of war, he was seen as equivalent to the Greek Ares who had the same role, and thus the Romans borrowed the rich tradition of mythological stories associated with Ares. The word syncretism, by the way, has a surprising etymology, coming from Greek synkretismos, from the prefix syn- “with, together” and a debated second element, possibly the the name of the island of Crete, because the earliest attested use of Greek synkretismos is to refer to a federation of Cretan communities, though some have also suggested a connection to Greek krasis “mixture”. As for the name Mars, its source is uncertain, but it may be connected to the Etruscan god Maris. And as for Mars himself, he seems to have originally been a thunder god, not a god of war, and may descend from an old Indo-European god of thunder and oak trees, \*Perkwunos meaning literally “oak”, also the source of the Germanic god Thor, though the name \*Perkwunos was transferred to Thor’s mother Fjörgyn. The connection between thunder and oak may be that lightning has a tendency to strike the very tall oak trees. As for the name of the month of March in the Germanic calendar, Hreþmonaþ, this refers to a different god, Hreðe, to whom Bede tells us the English sacrificed at this time. We know nothing more about this goddess, but her name seems to mean either “victorious” or “famous” related to Old English hreð “glory [in battle], victory” and from the same root as the first element in the names Rudolph literally “famous-wolf” and Roger “famous-spear”.

Next is April or Aprilis in Latin, which marks the beginning of spring, and one traditional etymology reflects this, with Aprilis coming from Latin aperire “to uncover, open”, from Proto-Indo-European \*apo- “off, away” and \*wer- “to cover”, since all the plants open up at this time of year. Ovid mentions this etymology, but also provides a different derivation, that since it is the month of the goddess of love Venus with her festival on the kalends, the name comes from the Greek equivalent Aphrodite. This could make sense coming through Etruscan Apru, a borrowing of the shortened version of her Greek name Aphro. Now the name Aphrodite is itself of uncertain origin, but Ovid goes on to mention the usual Greek understanding of her name that it comes from Greek aphros “foam”, because of the myth of her origin from sea foam produced by Uranus’s genitals when his son Cronus cut them off and threw them into the sea. The word aphros in turn might come from the Proto-Indo-European root \*nebh- “cloud”, also the source of nebula, nimbus, and Neptune, the Roman sea god who became syncretized with Greek Poseidon. The second element of Aphrodite might be related to Greek deato “seemed, appeared” and delos “clear, visible” [also the source of the second element in psychedelic] from Proto-Indo-European \*dyeu- “to shine”, suggesting she might originally have been a dawn goddess. More recent arguments, however, generally derive Aphrodite’s name from a pre-Greek language, as the goddess herself seems to be largely influenced by eastern cults of the Phoenician Astarte, cognate with Babylonian Ishtar, herself influenced by Sumerian Innana, so a lot of syncretism going on there. A completely different etymology for the name of the month Aprilis is that it might come from an otherwise unattested form \*aperilis meaning “the following, the next” ultimately from that same Proto-Indo-European \*apo-, since it was the second month in the older Roman ten month calendar. According to Bede, the Germanic name for April is Eosturmonaþ or Easter month, named after an old Germanic goddess Eostre who is celebrated in that month. The Germanic name was then borrowed to refer to the Christian festival of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. Most non-Germanic languages refer to Easter with some form of the semitic word for Passover, which is Aramaic Paskha and Hebrew Pesach, literally “he passed over” in reference to the story in Exodus in which the spirit of God passed over the homes of the children of Israel in Egypt while inflicting the tenth plague of the death of the Egyptian first-born. Thus for instance the word for Easter in French is Pâque, in Italian Pasqua, and in Spanish Pascua, but in German it’s Ostern. As for the goddess Eostre, we don’t know very much about her, though the name is attested in the month names of a number of other Germanic languages, as well as in some placenames and other fragmentary evidence. Etymologically it seems to be traceable back to the Proto-Indo-European root \*aus- “to shine”, also the source of the word East, and thereby identified as a descendant of a Proto-Indo-European dawn goddess \*Hausos, also the source of the Roman goddess Aurora, the Greek goddess Eos, the Vedic goddess Usas, and the Lithuanian goddess Ausrine.

Next up is May or Maius in Latin, named after the Roman earth goddess Maia, who might be related to or have become conflated with the Greek goddess of the same name. The Greek Maia was the daughter of the Titan Atlas and the mother of Hermes, equivalent to Roman Mercury. The Roman Maia is also said to be the wife of the blacksmith god Vulcan, equivalent of the Greek Hephaestus. Maia also became connected with the mystery cult goddess referred to as Bona Dea meaning “Good Goddess”, though her actual name was only known to women, so the Roman male authors didn’t know much about her or the rituals associated with her. The Romans saw Maia as a goddess of growth, deriving her name from the comparative adjective maius, maior “larger, greater”, from which we get the word major. The Greek word maia, on the other hand, was an honorific term for older women, perhaps derived from mater “mother”. However, both the Greek and Latin names might simply mean “she who is great” from the Proto-Indo-European feminine form \*mag-ya-, from the root \*meg-, which is in any case the root that lies behind Latin maius. Bede tells us that the Germanic name for May is Þrimilcemonaþ literally “three milk month” because in that month cows can be milked three times a day.

June or Iunius in Latin was the last originally named month in the old Roman calendar, the rest simply being numbered. Ovid has three different goddesses claiming the month as theirs, giving three possible etymologies for Iunius. In the first, the one that most modern etymologists agree with, the goddess Juno wife of Jupiter, syncretized with Greek Hera and Zeus, says the month is named after her. The name Juno either comes from that same root \*dyeu- meaning “to shine” that we saw in connection to Aphrodite with the sense “sky, heaven” plus \*en-es- “burden”, from which we get the word onus, thus forming a compound meaning “having heavenly authority”, or from the root \*yeu- “vital force, youthful vigour”, which also gives us the words youth and young. Then the goddess of youth and rejuvenation Juventas says the name comes from iunior “young person”, from which we get the word junior, in contrast to maiores or “elders” which she says is the actual source of the name of the month Maius. This etymology would also ultimately come from the root \*yeu-. And finally the goddess of marriage and society, Concordia, says the name comes from the word iungere “to join” in honour of her uniting the Romans and the Sabines. Latin iungere comes from the Proto-Indo-European root \*yeug- “to join”, which also gives us the words join, yoke and yoga, through Sanskrit, because yoga involves the joining with the supreme spirit. Another theory is that it comes from the name of the Iunia clan, either after Marcus Junius Brutus who made the first sacrifice to the goddess Carna on the kalends of June, or Lucius Junius Brutus, the founder of the Roman republic who overthrew the last of the Etruscan kings and became one of the first Consuls of Rome. The clan name Iunia is probably itself connected with the goddess Juno. Bede tells us both June and July are called Liþa from liðe “mild” because both the months are mild and feature gentle breezes suitable for navigating on the sea. Ultimately the word comes from the Proto-Indo-European root \*lent-o- meaning “flexible” also the source of the words lithe and relent.

Now it’s interesting that we just mentioned Marcus Junius Brutus, because there’s another more famous Marcus Junius Brutus who is connected with the month of July. July was originally called Quintilis just meaning the “fifth” month, but was renamed in honour of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE, and the sixth month, originally Sextilis, was renamed Augustus in honour of Caesar’s adoptive son, the first Emperor of Rome, in 8 BCE. You see when Julius Caesar was making his power grab people were worried he would make himself king and end the republic, and so there was a conspiracy to assassinate him. One of the conspirators, as you may remember from Shakespeare’s play, was Marcus Brutus: “Et tu Brute?” Brutus’s full name was Marcus Junius Brutus, also a member of the Iunia clan, and purported descendant of Lucius Junius Brutus who founded the republic, so as you can imagine Marcus Brutus, most definitely an “honourable man”, felt a certain pressure to defend that republic. The Julius of Julius Caesar is another of those clan names, the gens Iulia, and it is probably a contraction of Old Latin \*Iovilios “pertaining to or descended from Jove”, Jove being another form of the name Jupiter. Jove goes back to that same root \*dyeu- “to shine” which has a number of derivatives in the various Indo-European languages that mean either “sky” or “god”, such as Latin deus “god” and Greek Zeus, suggesting the existence of an Indo-European god \*Dyeus who would have been the father of the dawn goddess \*Hausos. Jupiter is derived from a vocative compound \*dyeu-pəter meaning something like “O Father Jove”. Augustus was actually an honorific title given to the first emperor, who was born Gaius Octavius Thurinus, meaning “august” or “venerable”, and either comes from Latin augere “to increase” from the Proto-Indo-European root \*aug- “to increase” also the source of augment and wax as in a waxing moon, or might be related to augur, as in augury [fortune telling through birds], which itself might come from the root \*aug-, or might come from the root \*awi- “bird” also the source of the words aviary and egg. For the English it was Weodmonaþ literally “Weed Month” though more broadly and accurately “Plant Month”, because as Bede tells us they grow most abundantly in that month.

Now as we’ve already said September through December are just numbered months. According to Bede September was called Haligmonaþ “Holy Month” but it is also called Hærfestmonað “Harvest Month” according to another early English writer Ælfric. October was called Winterfylleþ literally “Winterfull” because as Bede explains winter begins on the full moon of that month. November is called Blotmonaþ meaning “Sacrifice Month” or “Blood Month” because cattle were to be slaughtered and sacrificed to the gods then, and if you want to know more about that, and the names of the seasons, you can check out our video on the word “Feast”. And finally as we’ve already seen December is part of Geolamonaþ.

Moving down from the month, we have the week, which roughly represents the four phases of the moon. Another numerical reason for the seven day week is perhaps the fact that the year breaks down into 52 weeks plus one day. The word for “week” in European languages is usually related to the number seven, as in Greek hebdomas and Latin septimana from septem, from which comes French semaine and Spanish semana. The English word week, on the other hand, is Germanic-derived, from Old English wuku, ultimately from Proto-Indo-European \*weik- “to bend, wind” [which also gives us the other word weak] probably in the sense of “turning” or “succession”, though there’s no clear evidence that it referred to a period of seven days in Germanic culture until after the influence of the Roman week. The Romans themselves didn’t originally have a week in their calendar system, as we’ve seen it was really organized by counting back from the various named days, though they did have an 8-day market cycle. We have to go back to Babylonian astrology to really understand where the weekday names come from. You see the Babylonians associated the planets visible to the naked eye [since there were no telescopes back then] with gods, and this may have inspired the Hellenistic Greek astrologers. Some of them even seem to line up in syncretic associations, with the chief Babylonian god Marduk associated with the planet Jupiter, and the goddess of love, beauty, and sex Ishtar, whom we’ve already seen connected with Aphrodite, associated with the planet Venus. For the Hellenistic astrologers there were seven planets, since they included the moon and sun, which moved across the sky relative to the “fixed” stars. And eventually these seven classical planets became associated with the seven days of the week, which were eventually adopted by the Romans from Hellenistic Greece and called dies Solis “day of the Sun” or “Sunday”, dies Lunae “day of the Moon” or “Monday”, dies Martis “day of Mars” or “Tuesday”, dies Mercurii “day of Mercury” or “Wednesday”, dies Iovis “Day of Jove” or “Thursday”, dies Veneris “day of Venus” or “Friday”, and dies Saturni “day of Saturn” or “Saturday”. But why this order? Well, the order that they placed the planets in in terms of distance from the Earth was based on their apparent speed moving across the sky, so in order of slowest to fastest Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon, called the Chaldean order, but that’s not the order of the days of the week. The answer lies not in assigning the planets to the days of the week directly but in assigning them to the hours of the day, called planetary hours in which each planet/god had power over that hour, and there’s some evidence to suggest that the Hellenistic astronomers got this idea from the Babylonians as well. If you start with Saturn on the first hour of the first day and cycle through all the seven planets in the Chaldean order, then start over with Saturn on the eighth hour, and so on, and then continue that pattern hour-by-hour over the seven days of the week, each day will begin with a different planet in the order of the days of the week as we’ve just seen in the Latin names.

Now let’s look at the etymology of each day specifically. First of all Sunday or dies Solis in Latin, originally hemera Helíou in Greek, which was later rendered Sunnandæg in Old English and Sunnudagr in Old Norse, with all of these words for the sun and correspondingly for the personification of the sun in each pantheon, with Sol in Latin and Helios in Greek coming from the same Proto-Indo-European root \*sawel- “sun”. The word helium, by the way comes from the Greek word, because the element helium was first detected in the sun through spectroscopic observation of a solar eclipse. Now you might assume that the words for “day” are all related too, but surprisingly not. First of all Greek hemera, from which we get the English word ephemeral, comes from the Proto-Indo-European root \*amer- “day”, whereas English day, from Old English dæg, comes from an unrelated root, probably \*agh- “day”, though the initial /d/ in the Germanic forms is hard to account for, or \*dhegwh- “to burn, warm”, which we’ve already seen as possibly lying behind the month name February. And though Latin dies looks superficially similar to English day, it actually comes from that root \*dyeu- meaning “to shine”. Now in the Romance languages derived from Latin, that original name connected to the sun was replaced with forms derived from Latin dies Domini “day of the Lord”, so domingo in Spanish and dimanche in French.

For Monday, or Monandæg in Old English and Mánadagr in Old Norse, we’ve already seen that moon, as well as month, come from \*me- meaning “measure”. Latin Luna, from which we get lunar, comes from the Proto-Indo-European root \*leuk- “light, brightness”, also the source of light, illuminate, and lucid, and from Latin dies Lunae come French lundi and Spanish lunes. And Greek Selene, Moon, is related to selas “light” from the root \*swel- “to shine, burn” also source of English sultry and swelter. The Roman goddess Luna, by the way, was said to be the sister of the sun god Sol and the dawn goddess Aurora, who as we’ve seen might be related to the Germanic goddess Eostre.

Now things start to get particularly interesting with Tuesday, which is dies Martis or “day of Mars” in Latin, which leads to French mardi and Spanish martes. The Greek equivalent is of course hemera Areos, or day of Ares, the Greek god of war, whose name comes from the Greek word are “bane, ruin, curse”, perhaps from Proto-Indo-European \*eis- which seems mean “to move rapidly” and is found in words denoting passion, also leading to such words as ire, iron, and estrogen. Through the process of interpretatio germanica, the Roman war god became associated with the Germanic war god Tiwaz, who becomes Tyr in Old Norse and Tiw in Old English, thus producing the weekday names tysdagr in Old Norse and Tiwesdæg in Old English, leading to Modern English Tuesday. Interestingly though, Tiwaz was not originally a war god, but instead descends from the Proto-Indo-European god \*Dyeus who also lies behind Zeus and Jupiter. Tiwas may originally have been a more prominent god in the Germanic pantheon, but his role seems to have been usurped somewhere along the line by the god Odin, who is the subject of our next day of the week.

Wednesday, from Old English Wodnesdæg, is named after the Germanic god Woden, more famously known by the Old Norse form of his name Odin, hence Old Norse óðinsdagr. This is a syncretic rendering of Latin dies Mercurii “day of Mercury”, which becomes French mercredi and Spanish miércoles. But what’s the point of comparison between the chief Norse god and Mercury, the Roman equivalent of Hermes, the Greek messenger god? Well one of Hermes’s responsibilities was to guide the souls of the dead to the afterlife, a position called a psychopomp. Odin too is associated with the dead, playing host in Valhalla in the afterlife to warriors who died in battle. Also, when Odin travelled amongst humans on Midgard he wore a broad-brimmed hat and cloak and carried a staff, which was visually similar to the appearance of Hermes, who was also a god of travellers, merchants, and commerce. The name Hermes is probably connected to the Greek word herma “heap of stones, boundary marker” because of the god’s associations with travellers, but the ultimate etymology of that word is unknown, possibly from a non-Indo-European root, though a connection to the Proto-Indo-European root \*ser- “to line up, bind together” has been suggested. Interestingly, Hermes is thought to have originated as a form of the Greek pastoral god Pan, taking on the boundary marking associations and leaving Pan with the rustic associations. Pan is thought to descend from an original Indo-European god \*Pauson, with the name ultimately coming from the root \*pu- “to blow, swell” also leading to the words pustule and prepuce, another word for foreskin. Getting back to the Roman equivalent Mercury, the root sense of his name seems to be connected specifically to commerce, probably being related to such words as merchandise and market, coming ultimately from either the Proto-Indo-European root \*mark- meaning “to grab” or to an Etruscan root referring to aspects of commerce, though another possible connection might be to the Proto-Indo-European root \*merg- meaning “boundary, border”, which also gives us the words margin and mark as in a boundary mark. Odin’s name, however, demonstrates a rather different association, being related to Old Norse óðr, “mad, frantic, furious”, and coming ultimately from the Proto-Indo-European root \*wet- meaning “blow, inspire, spiritually arouse”, which also gives us the words fan and atmosphere.

Thursday, Þunresdæg in Old English and þórsdagr in Old Norse, is named after the Germanic thunder god Thor, and it’s not hard to see the connection between Thor and the Roman and Greek gods Jupiter and Zeus, as they are all associated with lightning. Latin dies Iovis “Day of Jove” became French jeudi and Spanish jueves. As we’ve already seen, the names Jove, Jupiter, and Zeus all descend from that Indo-European sky god Dyeus, who in the Germanic pantheon becomes Tiwaz of Tuesday. As for Thor’s name it’s simply related to the word thunder, from the Proto-Indo-European root \*[s]tene- “to thunder” that also gives us the words tornado, astonish, detonate, and stun.

Friday is dies Veneris “day of Venus” in Latin and hemera Aphrodites “day of Aphrodite” in Greek, named after the Roman and Greek goddesses of love, becoming vendredi in French and viernes in Spanish. We’ve already looked at the etymology of Aphrodite, and the etymology of the name Venus, from which we get the word venereal as in venereal disease, is pretty straightforward, coming from the Proto-Indo-European root \*wen- “to desire, strive for”, also source of the words win, wish, and venerate, but also of venom, which originally referred to a love potion rather than a poison. However the Germanic association is somewhat complicated by the fact that there are two distinct but similar goddess Frigg and Freyja. The goddess who gives her name to Friday, Frigedæg in Old English and frjádagr in Old Norse, Frigg in Old Norse and Frige in Old English, is the wife of Odin and particularly associated with married love. Her name is similar to, and sometimes confused with, the goddess named Freyja, goddess of love and beauty, also connected with fertility. Well, you can see why they might be identified with each other, and it has been suggested that they might originally have referred to the same goddess. Interestingly, the name Freyja, only attested in Scandinavian sources, comes from a Proto-Germanic root that means “lady”, a root that also leads to modern German Frau, ultimately from the Proto-Indo-European root \*per- meaning “forward”, whereas Frigg goes back to the Proto-Indo-European root \*pri- that means “to love”, also giving us the words friend, free, and afraid [which means literally “out of peace”].

And finally we come to Saturday, which is dies Saturni “day of Saturn” in Latin. As seems clear from the Old English form Sæternesdæg and Modern English Saturday, the English didn’t seem to have a close equivalent to the Roman agricultural god Saturn and just borrowed the name instead. Saturn was associated with the Greek god Kronos, one of the Titans and father of Zeus, and also a god of agriculture. The etymology of Kronos’s name is uncertain, though many suggestions have been made ever since the ancient world, including the ancient association of Kronos with the similar sounding Chronos, the personification of time, which I suppose does make sense in terms of an agricultural god being concerned with time in terms of the seasons of the year, and the more recent suggestion that Kronos comes from the Proto-Indo-European root \*[s]ker- “to cut” since he’s often depicted with a scythe not only because of agricultural associations, but also because of his role in the Greek creation myth of castrating his father Ouranos, the sky, from whom we get the [later] planetary name Uranus. As for the Roman Saturn, he may be a borrowing of the Etruscan god Satre, though the Romans themselves suggested an etymological connection with the Latin word satus meaning “sown”, as in sowing seeds, which comes ultimately from the Proto-Indo-European root \*se- “to sow”, also source of the words sow, seed, and season. Now in Old Norse, instead of just borrowing the name from Latin, we find the day name laugardagr meaning “wash day”, which by the way puts paid to another of those medieval myths, that people in the middle ages bathed only once a year — there was literally a day of the week named after this activity! Interestingly, in most Romance languages, the Latin name was replaced with some form of the word Sabbath, as in French samedi and Spanish sábado, and for the complex etymology of that word, check out our previous video on the topic.

So now that we’ve covered the days of the week, let’s take one last quick look at another type of calendar, particularly appropriate to this time of year — an Advent Calendar, counting down the days of the Advent season leading up to Christmas. The tradition of the Advent calendar has its foundations in the German Lutheran homes in the 19th century, in which they might mark chalk or paint lines on the floor leading up to Christmas, or hand different devotional pictures on the wall, or light a new candle every day from December 1st until Christmas. Then, homemade advent calendars started appearing around 1850, which included a bible verse, drawing, or even a sweet for each day. The first commercially produced printed advent calendar was published in 1903 by Gerhard Lang, designed by Richard Ernst Kepler, called Münchener Weihnachtskalender or “Munich Christmas calendar”. And today there are many kinds of Advent Calendars, not only the ones with little chocolates behind cardboard doors, but also online Advent Calendars, including our own etymological Endless Advent Calendar on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook!

And of course, the Advent Calendar ends with Christmas, closely followed by New Year’s [at least in some calendars!], which brings us back to January, where we started this etymological journey. And one thing this journey through the calendar has shown is how very classical its roots are — and that’s fitting, given the origin of “classical” itself. The words class and classical come from Latin classis which originally referred to the Roman people under arms, in other words the army or fleet. The underlying sense is a “call to arms” as the word comes from Proto-Indo-European \*??kelə- meaning “to shout”, the same root that lies behind Latin calare “to call, summon”, and thus also the word calendar And this classically-based calendar has been changed and adapted many times to reconcile different gods, religions, and natural cycles of the sun, moon, and seasons — also fitting, since reconcile is another descendant from that same “shouting” root, coming from Latin reconcilare “to bring together again; regain; win over again, conciliate” from the prefix re- “again” and concilare “to make friendly”, from concilium “a meeting, a gathering of people”, from the prefix com- “together, together with” and that “shouting” root, with the notion of “a calling together”. And the root \*kelə- also comes into Greek as kalein “to call” and prefixed with ek- “out” as ekkalein “to call out”, which led to the noun ekklesia, which in Classical Athens was the principle assembly of Athenian democracy, but was later used by early Christians to refer to a religious assembly or the Christian Church as a whole, and from that we get the word ecclesiastical—as in the Ecclesiastical or Church Kalendar and Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People. And with that, I hope this has made the origins of the modern calendar very clear — to draw on yet another word from the root \*kelə-. And if you’re celebrating around this time of the year, we at the Endless Knot wish you a happy Yule and happy New Year — and a calendar filled with fun and relaxation!

Well, I'm sorry to say that, as it turns out , 2020, wasn't a great relaxing calendar calendar year.

**Aven:** [00:46:40] Yeah, I mean, we, it's not wrong of us to have wished that for people,

**Mark:** [00:46:45] it didn't turn out that way.

**Aven:** [00:46:47] I mean, we wish that for you this year too, but I think. You wouldn't

**Mark:** [00:46:52] believe us. Yeah.

**Aven:** [00:46:55] All right. Well, leaving that aside for the moment, that was a lot of material.

**Mark:** [00:47:02] A lot of etymologies

**Aven:** [00:47:03] a lot of etymologies. This was a really heavily etymology, not that much history, comparatively, and also just very long. So we're not going to add, or I'm not going to add anymore etymologies, you might be, but.

What I thought I would do is talk about someone that you cited a lot and some thing that you cited a lot, but didn't explain in detail, which is Ovid's "Fasti". So when you were talking about the months, the Roman months and the gods associated with them, you cited his Fasti quite a lot.

But you didn't really say what it was. Understandably and it's a slightly odd thing. So I thought it would be worth talking about it a bit. And in doing so, talking about, you know, what, what is a calendar, why do we have calendars and what does it mean to have them and the Roman calendar in particular?

So Ovid's Fasti is a six book Latin poem written by the Roman poet Ovid and published around AD 8 . So Ovid is also best known for the Metamorphoses, a long series of stories of Greek myths and Roman myths.

And also the Ars Amatoria, like a lot of ' Sexy poems and exciting poems and entertaining poems. And then he wrote this poem about the calendar. So I sort of want to talk about why. Now the poem is six books. Each book is one month. Now you may note that there are. 12 months in the Roman calendar by this point, because after Julius Caesar there were 12 months, so it's incomplete.

It's an unclear whether it's intentionally so or not. It's a big area of discussion because in another poem, he mentions that he's finished all 12 books of the fasty and then he goes into exile. So in AD 8, he's exiled by Augustus to the Black Sea. And at that point he seems to have edited and published the first half.

But we have no trace of the second half. no mentions of it by other authors, no quotations, no nothing. So it's not clear whether he finished it and never put it out or he didn't actually finish it. Who knows. Anyway, so we have six months of it and it's written in elegiac couplets and it's didactic.

So what that means is that it's not written in the Epic meter, which didactic poetry of one type, Hesiod and Lucretius who write didactic, write in that Epic meter of dactylic hexameters. But there's a tradition that goes back in particular to Callimachus who's a Hellenistic writer that writes in elegiac couplets.

So he's kind of going with that. And Callimachus wrote this big long thing called the Aetia that was about the origins of things. And one of the things that the Fasti does is it has, it's filled with a lot of aetiologies , explanations for why places in Rome are called what they're called, why certain rites or festivals happen, why, people do certain things at Rome.

So there's a lot of that kind of origins of things. So it makes sense in that way, that it's, it's in the tradition of Callimachus and also of Propertius, an earlier elegiac writer, who wrote a book of poetry like that, too. It's framed as a series of eyewitness reports from the gods and goddesses involved and interviews with those gods as if he's basically this Roman poet, this vates is like interviewing the gods to be like, so why, what, what do you do in this month and why is this festival held?

And would you tell us a little bit about what you feel about these events? And so they kind of come on stage and explain the origins of Roman holidays and customs and things like that. And it does have humorous bits in it, for sure. So let me give you his own words. I'm going to read the opening from poetryintranslation.com.

This is a translation of the first few lines.

" I'll speak of divisions of time throughout the Roman year, their origins and the stars that set beneath the earth and rise. Germanicus Caesar, accept this work with a calm face and direct the voyage of my uncertain vessel. Not scorning the slight honor, but like a God receiving with favor of the homage I pay you. Here you'll revisit the sacred rites in the ancient texts and review by what events each day is marked. And here you'll find the festivals of your house and see your father's and your grandfather's name, the prizes they won that illustrate the calendar that you and your brother Drusus will also win. Let others sing Caesar's Wars. I'll sing his altars and those days that he added to the sacred rites."

And then it goes on and talks more about the, addressee. So it's addressed to and dedicated to the heir apparent or one of the heirs apparent. The reason I can never remember who he is cause he dies.

Like most of Augustus's household, he dies before he becomes Emperor or anything like that. So he's, it's addressed to the Imperial family. So the thing I really want to point out right away then is the political aspects of the calendar. This may just be about days of the week or sorry, days of the year and months of the year, but it's not because it's about politics and it's about power.

The word Fasti itself, the title of the poem refers to the calendar. It is the word used for the calendars and for the big calendars that are put Painted on the sides of walls and that we have some remaining, but it's also the name for the consular lists, which are the lists that are also placed in public spots in Rome, that list the consuls for every year, going back as far as they have potential sort of memory of which are important. Those are the Fasti, those are the spoken things. That's really what all of this comes down to. And they're really important because the Romans didn't number their years. Hm, you talk about that a little bit, but you don't get into it too much. They didn't have a number.

I mean, they could, they sort of had a one that the historians used, but in daily speech, nobody numbered the years, what they used was the names of the consuls. So that list of fasti is actually the list of time, but it also is the list of all the important families. All the people who've had power, all the ancestors of all the people, you know, the consuls until the emperor is the most important people in Rome and they continue to be important because there, it takes a long time for them to start dating by Imperial reign.

So the Fasti is as a name, even of the calendar, it's already a political thing. It's the name of the lists of the magistrates. The other thing that is mentioned in those opening lines, that's important. He says let other sing Caesar's Wars, I'll sing his altars. And those days that he added to the sacred rites . And he also says here, you'll find on the events of your house, your father's and your grandfather's name, the prizes they won that illustrate the calendar. So. In a very blunt way. That's August and July, that Julius and Augustus. Though they aren't in the half that survives. Right. And people have wondered if that's why he never finished it because after his exile, he was too bitter against the, the family to publish the, the months that were July and August.

just speculation, but it's an interesting thing, but this opening makes it sound like they're going to, but even without those, the other thing is a lot of good number of festivals on the Roman calendar. And there were a lot of festivals in the Roman. They didn't have weekends, like you said, they didn't have weeks, but they had a lot of festivals. A lot of them mark battles.

They mark battles in the Republican history, but they also mark, you know, that's a festival on the battle of Actium, there's a festival, you know, the Imperial the important battles. And some of those are festivals and some of them are days that are nefastus. That is unlucky days where you can't do business or do anything.

So great losses are marked down there. and then under the Imperial family, you start to have festivals for birthdays of the members of the imperial family or death days. And up until around Julius Caesar's time festivals were added over time by the Senate. So the Senate would occasionally get an basically import, a new God or mark a new festival because an Oracle or the Sibylline Oracles or somebody told them like, You know, the gods hate you right now, that's why you have a plague. So they'd institute a new festival to, and then that once the Romans didn't take things off the calendar, once it was on the calendar, it was on the calendar. But up till then, it really had been the Senate who did that. But Julius Caesar reorganized the entire calendar. And when he reorganized the entire calendar, something that had been up until then a senatorial power.

He then also added in like new festivals, revived festival, Augustus revived, a bunch of festivals that had kind of fallen out of favor. They were on the calendar, but people didn't do them very much so. Just the calendar as it was by eight CE was a really tangible representation of the power of Julius Caesar and Augustus and sort of Tiberius, but really Julius Caesar and Augustus at this point, who had literally been able to manipulate time who had reorganized it and put their mark on the days of the, of the year. So when Ovid tells the story of the calendar, he's not just telling you, like, if I told you the days of the, the months right now, it might not feel like that was very political, right. Because we, it is. So, though we'll come back to that. It's so much sort of, it's just the fabric of our life, right?

Like, especially, you know, the days of our month are counted in numbers, not in festival days, but if I have a calendar that has all the holidays on it, I mean, you can even see this, like, which, which holidays do you mark, do you only mark Christian holidays? Do you mark Jewish holidays? Do you mark Muslim holidays?

My calendar marks Canadian holidays, but it also often marks American holidays too sometimes because I need to know what those are. That's a polit, you know, th those are political issues. And when you think about it that way, and you think about, I've read a good article, talking about how, you know, Caesar's taking over responsibility for the calendar was taking it over from the elite. So up until Caesar, you talked about those intercalations, right? The intercalary months. The thing that happened all the time with that is by sticking in extra days between the end of one consular period and the time when the new consuls took power or before, you know, sticking in new days before the elections took place You could actually, if you were the consul in charge, you could literally manipulate it so that you know, more of your own voters got to the city in time, or others had been called out to war and weren't there or so that you were in charge long enough to oversee certain court cases that were going to help your friends before you laid down power, you know, because you had essentially like almost two months worth of, and because nobody really knew.

Whether or not, they needed more days that year or not, you know, technically you consulted experts and stuff, but like man on the street had no idea. So the people, you know, there was a small band of elite people who were in charge of time, in a really real sense. And then that messed up. Like, you'd be like, okay, I'm going to plant my crops at a certain time, but you entirely reliant on natural signs because the calendar didn't tell you.

Anything, not only was it all out of whack, but like you might think it was going to be right. And then they'd stick in an extra half a month. And then suddenly you don't know, you know, when is the next market day gonna be? When is the next festival day? I want my daughter to get married, but it needs to be on a, on an allowed day, not on a nefastus day, but suddenly they added in four more days.

And so now we can't get a, she can't be married on that day because now that is you know, The mere fact that Caesar established a stable calendar that could go up on a wall that wasn't going to change. That was going to be the same every year, you know? Yes, it was slightly off, but really. For most people's purposes and there wasn't going to be any of this random sticking in a few days.

that stable publicly consultable calendar was a political act and it to very real extent, took the power out of an elite group and made it the people's power or made it shared equally among people, because now you actually knew when the market days were going to be, you knew like when you going to travel and what was happening and when the elections were going to be, so that, that element is, is really so all Ovid's poem while it seems in many ways, like it's about little, little trivialities could be seen just in the mere fact that it's celebrating the calendar as celebrating an Imperial thing.

Right because the calendar itself had was a political act to create it. I mean, obviously it also had this huge tradition and, and it was a very, but you know, you you're defining Roman life when you define the catalog. So that was the main point I wanted to make. And I, you know, I can tie that to now that, you know, Calendar continues to be political.

I'd mentioned holidays. Think about that as like commemorative days that are named or renamed, you know, the quite reasonable fuss over Columbus day, or all the municipalities that love to declare, you know, the such and such a, a local day of celebration. Those are all political acts.

Those are all trying to inscribe yourself into the calendar. Try to get yourself in the calendar. what changes, whether you can open on Sundays or not. Like those things are all about social and political structures and even like the most trivial things like businesses, or as we've noticed recently politicians sending you calendars with their name on it.

I mean, they want their name on the calendar, even if it's just beside the calendar, because the calendar is so central. You know, if they are associated with it, then they're they, they take on so that the power of the calendar to sort of,

**Mark:** [01:00:10] yeah, yeah. Even still, right. It does regulate your, your, when you're working and when you're on the weekend or whatever.

**Aven:** [01:00:17] Yeah. Oh yeah. So all sorts of things like that.

we're used to the calendar controlling us, but when we don't, I think often remember how much the calendar is controlled. You know, the fact that it now lines up with the solar year tends to make it feel like it's an astronomical and therefore natural thing. But of course, it's still not like, yes, the number of days in a year.

That is a natural cycle, but how many months there are, they're not lined up with the moon anymore. So they're not just natural and you know, the days of the week and it's a while back now, but the five day work week was an immensely political thing to be achieved, and the fact that we generally have a five day work week in most countries now, or many countries that wasn't true 150 years ago, you know, so.

So, yeah, I think all of those things can, for a long time, the Fasti was considered like a really boring poem and not very interesting and probably not very good either, but mostly people just didn't read it because Ovid wrote so many other amazing things. But I think there's a lot of really interesting things going on in it.

And it, that also should mean. That we also have to take it with a grain of salt when we use it as a source because especially for things like etymologies, and then, you know that, I mean, you said that in the video, like he gives multiple ones and he's giving them and the choices he's making are political choices, as well as literary choices and are not going to reflect necessarily historical reality, but anyone who uses Ovid as a source for anything always has to know that.

So that's my piece on the calendar.

**Mark:** [01:01:47] Well, I'm not going to talk more about the calendar because we don't know actually all that much about early Germanic calendars. But when instead, what I'm going to talk about, again, relates to sources. cause I do mention few sources In reference to the various Germanic gods.

Right. And so I'm going to talk about those sources and how we know what we know and how we should interpret those sources in terms of what we know about the gods, the Germanic gods. And the most important thing in terms of thinking about sources of Germanic myth is that there is this huge scarcity of information, right?

So most of this stuff doesn't get written down until after they become Christianized. So therefore you have to take it with a grain of salt, that these are people who no longer believe in those gods anymore. They're the ones writing it down.

**Aven:** [01:02:35] And who are not actively practicing the rituals and, you know, you don't know at this point, how many generations they are removed perhaps from people who were yeah.

**Mark:** [01:02:43] Now the most well attested source for Germanic mythology is Norse mythology. But that's all very late. And so it's not the same as earlier continental Germanic beliefs. It's going to be different and it's, you know, it's years

**Aven:** [01:03:00] later, so late.

when are you talking about,

**Mark:** [01:03:03] so the Norse stuff doesn't get written down until, what's called the medieval period. when you get into the 12, 13, 14th century or later whereas, the period of Germanic paganism goes back well to the second, third, fourth century, you know, it can go back very far.

And we have bits of information about that. But when you try and line up the Norse stuff from like maybe a thousand years later

**Aven:** [01:03:28] Yeah, that's slippery. And then you're talking about continental Germanic, but there's also English. Yes. Or British not Celtic, but the Germanic English stuff. And that's yet another set.

Right?

**Mark:** [01:03:41] So the most important source for Germanic myth in general. And specifically Norse is the prose Edda by Snorri Sturluson, who lived from 1178 to 1241. It was probably written around 1220. And it's a collection of myths from Scandinavian religion compiled in order to preserve them after the advent of Christianity.

And it's sort of a literary purpose because he was worried that people would no longer be able to understand the old references, which are often very

**Aven:** [01:04:09] elusive. Right. So he wanted, it was like a crib book for old poetry. Yeah. Basically,

**Mark:** [01:04:14] but he was Christian. We have scattered bits and pieces from other earlier Germanic traditions.

We also have info from outside of the Germanic people. Most importantly, the Roman author, Tacitus who describes Germanic culture in his Germania. So Tacitus lived from 55 to 118 CE

**Aven:** [01:04:37] much earlier,

**Mark:** [01:04:38] much earlier. so it's a foreign writer's account of people that were foreign to him.

These foreign Germanic peoples it, doesn't only talk about religion and mythology. It talks about their culture more broadly. It's probably written around the year 90 CE. And this is the earliest written sources we have of Germanic religious belief.

So it's an anthropological description of the Germanic people, what we might refer to as an ethnography.

And then, of course we have non-literary sources of information. So archeological evidence, placename evidence,and later folklore. So for the archeological material, culture side of things, there are things like decorated artifacts, such as swords or helmets or runestones with brief inscriptions. There's the English Franks' casket, which has some mythological stories depicted on it.

By the way, it's not connected with the people, the Franks, it was just at one point owned by a guy named Franks. So it was Franks'

**Aven:** [01:05:40] casket. That was very disappointing.

**Mark:** [01:05:44] As I say, place name evidence is surprisingly important. So you can look at the distribution of, you know, the places named after whatever particular God, and you can. From that surmise. Well, this God was worshiped here or there or

**Aven:** [01:06:00] not. and might've had this kind of associations if they're always Springs or if they're always Hills or they're always whatever, but yeah, but that's very can get quite tenuous.

Yes.

**Mark:** [01:06:10] As for those literary sources. In addition to the pros Edda, by Snorri there's the poetic Edda, which is older than Snorri there are sagas lots of Norse sagas, which have. You know, sometimes only brief mentions, but brief references are still can be useful. There's the Gesta Danorum by Saxo Grammaticus who is a Danish writer.

There's the Nieblungenlied which is a German, you know, or middle-high German poem there's some old English poetry that mentions.

Briefly names and stuff including Beowulf, which you know, is an important source for at least some mythological information,

**Aven:** [01:06:49] all old English sources we have are post-Christian right. Every written source. Yeah. Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:06:54] There are some charms and spells that are preserved and I'll talk about one of them in a bit more detail.

There's as I say, Tacitus' Germania, there's also Julius Caesar's Gallic war, right? So he does mention a few things, a few things in there. And then there are various works by Bede. And so I'll, go into Bede in, in a bit of detail as well. And then as I say, Snorri is, is the latest, the most recent source, but it's the most detailed

**Aven:** [01:07:19] and the most narrative in many ways, the one that actually tells you stories rather than you trying to explain them.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Mark:** [01:07:26] So as I say, Tacitus was the earliest but the thing to keep in mind about Tacitus, I mean, it's good that we have something really early so that we can see, you know, what's changed by later. But the important thing to remember about Tacitus is that he describes the Germanic people as kind of noble barbarians as a counterexample of, in his opinion, the increasingly uncivilized Romans.

So he has an ax to grind and he uses the Germanic peoples to kind of, he makes them sound good in some ways also he makes them sound weird to be

**Aven:** [01:07:59] exotic. Yeah. Yeah. Well, and also, as far as I know, he, didn't go there.

**Mark:** [01:08:04] No, we, we

**Aven:** [01:08:04] don't know for no reason that to know that he has any firsthand knowledge, he didn't speak to our knowledge.

You know, he never says that he spoke their language. So anything he knows is from. Other people or from Germans who spoke Latin or, you know, like this is, I mean, it's ethnography, but it's armchair ethnography to a very large extent. So yeah. So taking anything he says as like you would never take anything he says over archeological evidence, put it that way, but most of the time we don't have anything except him.

Yeah. But it's important to remember that he's not good evidence.

**Mark:** [01:08:36] Now we mentioned Bede. So Bede, just to put it in terms of time Bede lived from 673 to 735, right? So he is an English monk and scholar he's Christian who wrote many important scholarly works on things like grammar and rhetoric and computation, natural history, church history, hagiography saints' lives, that sort of thing.

His most famous work is the Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum which is the ecclesiastical history of the English people, which briefly mentions some elements of Germanic paganism, but he kind of describes them as sort of devil worshipers because he's

**Aven:** [01:09:15] Christian. Right? So. Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:09:17] So

**Aven:** [01:09:17] how much that's not going to really help you very much with their actual beliefs.

Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:09:21] So as a Christian writer writing for other Christians, when he does mention Germanic, religion and myth, he does so to point out the sinful past of the English people, right? However, he does write that work that I quoted a bit, which is really a book about computation. But in explaining the, the calendar he gives what I guess he believed to be true anyways.

About where some of these old Germanic names come from. Right.

**Aven:** [01:09:51] Which is what you

**Mark:** [01:09:52] quoted. Yeah. But of course he's writing, you know, years after anyone actually practiced those religious beliefs. And,

**Aven:** [01:10:01] So yeah, and it's, it's important to, to when people, so the people understand when we say he was Christian, we don't mean he was Christian.

And there were a lot of other English people around who were not by the time we have English writing, everyone in the culture is like, it is, I don't think we have any evidence for pockets of paganism or anything like that. So it's important to sort of realize that we're not talking about, you know, some Christians writing about other coexisting pagan groups or whatever, it's that.

That's really, is in the past, I mean, of course there are surviving beliefs and folk beliefs and stuff, but there's no groups of people

**Mark:** [01:10:37] doing that. The other thing that I may talk a little bit about later is that there is a period in recorded English history in which there are pagans and Christians living side by side, and that's during the Viking invasions.

Right,

**Aven:** [01:10:51] right.

**Mark:** [01:10:52] Because

**Aven:** [01:10:52] they were different kinds of pagans. They're not from the same tradition. Yeah. I mean, similar, but not the same. Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:10:58] But you know, there's no, no one writing in that place at that time. So there's not no direct firsthand account of that interaction between Christians and pagans.

So all the writing is being done.

**Aven:** [01:11:08] No know each other's languages necessarily. So it's not like they're, they're in a community where some people are doing one thing and some people are doing another. Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:11:15] Well, just, I mean, there was intermarriage, but very quickly the paganism dies out because it's usually the mother who is English

**Aven:** [01:11:23] and she brings her children up

**Mark:** [01:11:25] children and her Christian religion.

So Now charms and spells are kind of interesting. You know, there's some that go back a fair ways. There's the Merseburg charms recorded in old high German in the ninth century. So that makes them a very early source of Germanic pagan beliefs in a Germanic language. So this is not being written, you know, in Latin or something.

This is actually in a Germanic language. There are also some spells and charms recorded in old English. such as a poem called Æcerbot or "acker-boat" though, now I'm thinking there should be an æcer-bot on Twitter that tweets whenever you talk about this poem or something, right.

**Aven:** [01:12:04] Or whenever you have the diseases it's got charms against or something.

Yeah.

So

**Mark:** [01:12:09] someone make that happen out there. Someone who knows how to make bots on Twitter, make an Æcer-bot. No, the bot is actually "boat", I guess, for like remedy, right? Like boot,

**Aven:** [01:12:19] bootless. Which is not, yeah,useless.

**Mark:** [01:12:22] Useless. So it's a remedy for unfruitful land and it has the line, "Erce, eorðan modor" "Erce, Erce, Erce" you know, it repeats her name.

So this is some kind of goddess, right? There's no other reference to this name anywhere else.

**Aven:** [01:12:39] Earth mother is the English for it.

**Mark:** [01:12:41] Yeah. So yeah. Eorðan modor earth mother. So she

**Aven:** [01:12:45] remember, not everyone speaks old English. It's important to translate.

**Mark:** [01:12:49] It's some kind of earth mother goddess. Right. But

**Aven:** [01:12:52] that's the only, that's

**Mark:** [01:12:53] the only reference to her ever.

It's

**Aven:** [01:12:55] not cognate with any of the other ones we know, no,

**Mark:** [01:12:57] no. There's no, there's no connection that we have. Though there is one intriguing connection in Tacitus, you know, as you know, we said careful, but Tacitus does mention about the Angli and that's probably quite significant because the Angli become the English.

The noteworthy characteristic of the English or Angli to foreign eyes was that they were goddess worshipers. They looked on the earth as their mother.

**Aven:** [01:13:26] But he doesn't give a name.

**Mark:** [01:13:28] No, he doesn't give a name. Is that

**Aven:** [01:13:30] Erce?

Yeah. Who knows?

**Mark:** [01:13:32] Only the Æcer-bot knows.

So. I'll talk a little bit about what the poetic Edda are. The poetic Edda is a body of old Norse poems about mythological topics. Its date is highly uncertain and highly debated as it likely existed in an oral tradition for some time Now I think the most important manuscript of it possibly the earliest manuscript of it is the Codex Regius , which dates to the 13th century.

**Aven:** [01:13:59] So very late

**Mark:** [01:14:00] compared to when we think it might come from. But the poems are pre-Christian and possibly composed before Iceland was even settled. So that was about 870. So it could go back very far you know, to early Scandinavian, Oral traditions. The name of the poetic Edda is baffling.

We don't know exactly why it, why it is that the word, the old Norse word Edda means Great

grandmother.

So one suggestion is that it may have been a shortening of something like eddumál or eddasaga, which would mean something like grandmother tales.

**Aven:** [01:14:34] Mm. Right.

**Mark:** [01:14:36] So, you know, these old stories passed down or something, or they may be connected to the word óðr, which means poetry or poem.

We talked about that word in a previous podcast episode, the poetry one. I've talked about the story about the mead of poetry and all of that. Sure. I don't remember which episode number it was, but anyways, I gave that whole story and it's also, etymologically therefore connected to Odin as well.

And so you can go back to that episode to hear that whole bit. Or it may mean "book from Oddi" as Oddi is the farm where the supposed author of these poems, Sæmundar, lived we no longer believe that that's the guy who wrote them, but

**Aven:** [01:15:18] this was

**Mark:** [01:15:18] an attribution given at the time at some point.

Yeah. And also where Snorri Sturluson spent his youth.

now of course the, the word Edda may have been connected to these poems much later.

So did that, that may not go

**Aven:** [01:15:31] back.

**Mark:** [01:15:32] In any case, the poetic Edda can be very allusive in nature. As of course they assume that you already know the stories, so they're kind of describing it, you know, poetically,

**Aven:** [01:15:43] just using them as references rather than yeah.

**Mark:** [01:15:46] But they do have lots of references to Germanic mythology in them.

So. I mentioned the Niebelungenlied. This is a middle high German Epic poem written around 1200. It's based on oral tradition, some of which have their origins in the historical events and figures from the fifth and sixth centuries. But obviously again, written as a, as the poem that we have it now anyways much later.

And then I mentioned the Gesta Danorum, the deeds of the Danes, it means. It's written by Saxo Grammaticus. He lived from 1150 to 1220, and it's a patriotic work of Danish history. So the latter bit of it talks about actual recorded historical figures. It's 16 books long, the first nine books deal with Norse mythology and semi legendary Danish history.

Right.

**Aven:** [01:16:37] Like early Roman history, that sort of history of the Kings and stuff. Yeah. Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:16:40] And of course the last one is Snorri, I'll go in a bit more detail about Snorri.

**Aven:** [01:16:46] Not just because he has the best name, but also because he has the best name.

**Mark:** [01:16:50] So he's roughly contemporaneous with Saxo Grammaticus. He's an Icelander though.

And as I said, it was written around 1220, so it's a collection of myths from the old Scandinavian religion compiled in order to preserve them after christianity comes. So that readers, as I say, can still understand the allusive references in the poetry, things like the poetic Edda. Right, right. It's it's kind of there to explain the poetic Edda.

**Aven:** [01:17:16] And is why it's called the Prose Edda,

**Mark:** [01:17:19] or at least why someone at some point called it that

**Aven:** [01:17:20] yeah, because it has this relationship to the poetic one.

**Mark:** [01:17:23] And it includes passages from mythological poems. So there's some poems that get preserved in it that were well-known in his day, such as bits from the poetic Edda.

So rather than being a simple collection of stories, though, it's woven into a narrative of a contest undertaken by the King of Sweden. And so it's got these layers.

**Aven:** [01:17:43] Yes. So it is such a complicated frame narrative. Like it is hard to understand. I've got to say,

**Mark:** [01:17:49] has this, inexplicable ending So it begins with a rationalization of Norse myths, attempting to explain how these stories came to be in light of the Christian worldview of,

**Aven:** [01:18:01] and they weren't.

Yeah. Starting from the assumption they weren't true. Why would anybody have come up with them yeah

So

**Mark:** [01:18:06] it begins with a biblical account, and then the people lose all knowledge of God and thus invent the Scandinavian gods. It also works in for good measure. The story of Troy,

**Aven:** [01:18:20] everyone has to be connected to try or else you're just nobody in the medieval world.

**Mark:** [01:18:24] And there's also, you know, elements of rational, scientific observation, kind of trying to tie it to the natural world, and,

**Aven:** [01:18:32] so forth. Let me sort of, euhemeristic slash allegorical cause stuff. Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:18:37] So the frame narrative is this contest between the Christian King Gylfi and the Norse gods, the Æsir and he asks the Æsir various questions, Gylfi , wins.

If they can't answer; the Æsir win, if he runs out of

**Aven:** [01:18:53] questions.

**Mark:** [01:18:55] So, this is obviously representing a kind of conflict between Christianity and paganism. Right. Got that going

**Aven:** [01:19:02] though? Not one that actually was ongoing at the time, right? It's not, yeah. It's not an actual defense in terms of people needing to be comforted or something.

Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:19:11] And as I say, it has this ambiguous ending, cause he keeps coming up with questions and eventually they seem to get tired of answering them vanish.

**Aven:** [01:19:19] So like who won,

**Mark:** [01:19:21] Some interpretations that means Gylfi wins. However, it could also be interpreted to mean that the Æsir win and the people of Scandinavia adopt the the Norse religion.

As a result of this, he goes back and tells them all these things he knew. And they decide, Oh yeah. Okay. We'll believe that now. Right. Because he, it we're told, he goes back to his people and tells them what he has learned. And that title Gylfaginning it it means the deluding of Gylfi. So that sounds like he was deluded.

**Aven:** [01:19:49] Right.

**Mark:** [01:19:49] So no, one's certain how

**Aven:** [01:19:51] to interpret this, but it adds this whole extra element to the stories he's telling, right. Because yeah. Now is he Snorri even telling like the right stories or are they the wrong stories or are they carefully adapted so that they are foolish sounding or so that they do match?

I mean, there's all the questions about. Is the Ragnarok story, even a real story or, or, or the ending of Ragnarok, is it actually trying to mesh it up with revelation style, biblical ideas about the ending of the world? Right. So Ragnarok has become the central idea of Norse myth for people now. And that's what you think.

Yeah. And for all we know, I mean, he probably didn't make it up completely. Well, he, he didn't

**Mark:** [01:20:30] because we, we know it is in the poetic Edda.

**Aven:** [01:20:34] But the, but the details of it and like what happens at the end of it in particular, right. The new world being created.

**Mark:** [01:20:39] Yeah. Yeah. I don't think that's attested outside of, outside of there.

**Aven:** [01:20:43] So, how does

**Mark:** [01:20:44] this, what do these things tell us then about the, central gods of Germanic belief? Right. Well, it's a polytheistic religion with a Pantheon that has some similarities to other Indo-European religions, such as the Greco-Roman mythology that seems to descend from the proto Indo European.

mythological

**Aven:** [01:21:07] base,

**Mark:** [01:21:08] Though there is also some evidence that there is a Germanic kind of belief in animism that spirits inhabit everything,

**Aven:** [01:21:16] which of course is not surprising. Yeah. And the Roman religion is animistic. So, so

**Mark:** [01:21:22] the central God, as we have it in these later, sources is Odin as he's called in old Norse or Woden or Wotan is the sort of reconstructed early Germanic form of that God's name.

And as I said he's this death God with that whole psychopomp thing that I mentioned, and he's also served by the Valkyries who collect the souls of those slain in battle and take them to Valhalla the hall of the slain. And they are portrayed as warrior women with armor. So he's, he's a war God, but he's also a God of wisdom and poetry,

**Aven:** [01:21:58] which is not the same as other pantheons

**Mark:** [01:22:02] and unlike other pantheons he's not a sky God.

Right. So he's not related to that central like Zeus and, Jove and so forth. So he came from somewhere else. We don't know exactly how . then I also mentioned Tyr or Tiw or Tiwaz. He is the sky god. Right? So he is the equivalent, as I said to Zeus and Jove/Jupiter. However, the way that he seems to be depicted in later Germanic stories, particularly the Icelandic ones as Tyr is as a war.

God, not a sky, God, again, so somewhere along the lines, He kind of got shifted around a bit and then he becomes less important. So we believe he's probably, more important the Supreme God in earlier Germanic, but

**Aven:** [01:22:50] that's only through reconstruction of what he probably was because of proto Indo European and all the rest of it.

Not because you have any sources that say so.

**Mark:** [01:22:57] but he gets usurped by Odin to the point where, you know, in Tacitus, We believe what Tacitus is referring to as Mars probably represented Tyr,

**Aven:** [01:23:07] but he doesn't give a name. So you can't know for sure. Right.

**Mark:** [01:23:10] and so by the later old Norse versions in the myth, even his associations as a war, God, he gets sort of mentioned as that, but there's not a lot of stories connected with him.

So Odin's taken on all the war, gods stuff too.

**Aven:** [01:23:22] Right.

**Mark:** [01:23:22] So he becomes less important. Really he only has the story about losing his hand, putting his hand in Fenrir's mouth But he is still somewhat associated with war, according to Snorri. So Snorri does mention that, but

**Aven:** [01:23:35] and the putting his hand down Fenrir's mouth is presumed bravery.

Yeah. Gives us a link to bravery and strength. Yeah. Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:23:42] So Odin seems to have inherited the qualities of the earlier Wotan Woden, whatever figure who was a war, God. And Tiwaz, that sky God leaving Tyr as just kind of a shadow. Tiwaz is also however, associated with law and justice, unlike Odin, who can be fickle and even treacherous at times.

So he's got that association. Now, Thor is probably has more stories about him than even Odin or they're the two anyways, that get the most stories in Norse mythology. So he was very popular for the Norse anyways. For the Scandinavians his name would be Þunor in old English or Donar in a reconstructed early Germanic.

He is primarily a thunder God. Thus the association with Jove and Jupiter, right in those days of the week. Tacitus also seems to be referring to him with the name Hercules. So probably that's just because he's a big, dumb, strong man with a blunt weapon. Right. They have that superficial

**Aven:** [01:24:48] similarity.

And I mean, well, and Thor you say he has a lot of stories.

He has stories and their hero stories. Yeah. They really like, they're not, yeah. I mean, some of them are God's stories, but most of them really aren't, God's stories, they're hero stories. He goes on adventures. He has, you know, contests and tricks and gets brides. And, you know, like if he weren't a God, he would be, we would think he was a hero.

If we weren't told very clearly he was. So, I mean, in that sense, Hercules is the same really. I mean, he is a God and a hero. I think there's lots of reasons for conflating them, but. it doesn't tell us anything necessarily that we don't already know about Thor. Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:25:23] But again Tacitus doesn't mention the name, the Germanic name.

He just

**Aven:** [01:25:28] calls him

**Mark:** [01:25:28] Hercules. So then there is the wife of Odin Frige who is the goddess of love and marriage, et cetera. And I talked about that complicated conne ction between Frige and frig and Freya who is different. And I'll talk about why exactly she's different in a minute. Then there is a God who is mentioned by name by Germanic name in Tacitus, Tuisto, who is said to be the progenitor of all people and gods sounds

**Aven:** [01:25:58] pretty important.

**Mark:** [01:25:58] Yup. Now this is kind of interesting. So the name Tuisto

means two

**Aven:** [01:26:04] Like the number

**Mark:** [01:26:05] two, the number two. Yeah, twin as also does the old Norse figure Ymir right.

**Aven:** [01:26:12] You talked about this a little bit in monster.

**Mark:** [01:26:14] Yes.

So what I think the current belief is that this is probably that there is this tradition of a kind of hermaphrodite God or being, which gives birth to gods and people.

And you find it in a bunch of traditions. these kind of twin gods note also that His grandson gives the name to the tribe, the Ingaevones who are known as the Ing. So, you know, there seems to be some kind of connection between all of these and Freyr.

You know, that's significant because as we'll talk about in a second, when I talk about Freya they're twins, right? Freyr and Freya. Freyr is the, the male one, right? Freya is the sister, the female

**Aven:** [01:26:57] twin.

**Mark:** [01:26:58] And there seems to be this common twin God motif in a lot of different religions.

So there may be something to this Tuisto, that that's, what's being referred to here.

**Aven:** [01:27:09] Right.

**Mark:** [01:27:09] Anyways another goddess. God /goddess that's mentioned in Tacitus is Nerthus , so that's a Latinized version of the name, but if you kind of Germanized it, it would be Nerþuz.

**Aven:** [01:27:20] Okay.

**Mark:** [01:27:21] According to

**Aven:** [01:27:21] Tacitus,

**Mark:** [01:27:23] Nerthus is an earth mother goddess.

Also associated with an Island, a sacred Grove and, connected to this ritual involving a chariot.

**Aven:** [01:27:32] Okay.

**Mark:** [01:27:33] Now the belief is that there may be, so etymologically, this, this name seems to be exactly the same as Njord, the Norse God Njord At least it seems to be the same name, whether it referring to the same god is hard to say But you know, as I say, the Island connection, well,Njord is a God of the sea. The sacred Grove might be a connection that makes sense for Njord. The chariot seems to be supported by some archeological evidence, right? So there may be some connection here, but you know, again, it's a thousand years later

**Aven:** [01:28:07] in a different part of the world.

**Mark:** [01:28:08] The other thing though, is that the gender has changed: Njord is ma e, Nerthus, according to Tacitus is is female. So this may be another example of this hermaphrodite God, right? This twin God.

**Aven:** [01:28:21] There are certain religions where like, we get this a lot in Hinduism where. and there are other places where you have like every God is a male and a female, the Romans do that because their animistic views, like there's a lot, there's a whole bunch of sort of really Roman, not Greek gods where there's a male and a female form of Faunus and Fauna or whatever.

So that wouldn't be so weird. And if only one of them survives until later stories for whatever

**Mark:** [01:28:45] reason. Right. and it's significant that Njord is the father of Freyr and Freya

**Aven:** [01:28:51] another, another

**Mark:** [01:28:52] pair. So it may have just passed down to the next generation.

**Aven:** [01:28:55] You even get that in Greek in Homer, you have Zeus and the mother of Aphrodite in the Iliad is Dione.

So Dio and Dione. Right, right. Zeus is just, Dio, it's as if there was a pair, right. Brother and sister, presumably that were the parents of Aphrodite, which is just God and goddess, Dio and Dione right. So yeah, I think this pattern, I mean, I'm no Indo Europeanist, but it feels to me from these five instances I have come up with, this may be an Indo-European pattern.

**Mark:** [01:29:24] Well, and Freyr and Freya kind of come to replace Njord in terms of their concerns anyway, so the, basically the same God, right? According to Norse Myth Freyr and Freya are also the offspring of Njord and his own unnamed sister. Right. So, they don't say that it's the female form of the name, but you know, it is, it may well be.

Now there is a reference in Tacitus to someone corresponding to Isis, the goddess Isis. Is this also referring to Nerthus? We don't know. But there is a kind of, I think a ship symbol that is in common there. So or is this a reference to, there's a Frisian goddess named Nehalennia.

So could it be connection there? Might be etymologically connected again, we don't know. So that is that. And then of course there're also less distinct personifications, goddesses such as night, Nótt, who is said to be the mother of earth.

There is earth or Jörð in Norse , sun or Sól in Norse. So, you know, there's a bunch of those now another one that is mentioned that is, that does come up in some detail in old English material is Wayland or Welund whose Norse name is Völundr who is either portrayed as a God or a mortal hero. But in either case he is the legendary Smith of the gods and. Whether or not, this represents an older detail that connects the two or whether this was added by influence of the Greco-Roman tradition is said to be lame.

That's a common pattern with Smith gods. So hard to know how that you know, that detailed where

**Aven:** [01:31:04] it comes from.

**Mark:** [01:31:05] But it is mentioned. So that's probably one of the ones that you get the most detailed reference in

**Aven:** [01:31:11] English, right?

**Mark:** [01:31:12] Because most of the other ones you've got the name, but you don't have any stories.

So yeah. W what do we know about the Germanic Pantheon in Anglo-Saxon England? Well, we don't know what early English paganism was like, cause we don't have any direct.

References. We have little more than the names of the gods in the weekday names. And in you know, things like regnal lists you know, people have them in there,

**Aven:** [01:31:37] their ancestry saying that they're descended from some God or another. Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:31:40] So we get the names mentioned a bunch, but no stories attached to them.

So there's no solid evidence in Early England of, the myths, the stories related to the Norse versions. There's very little archeological evidence of the gods or myths in early medieval, England Germanic paganism did continue to be re introduced into England by the Vikings.

So there could be some reborrowing of stuff there, but again, no text was being written in the North of England at that time. So it doesn't get recorded

**Aven:** [01:32:14] due to the

**Mark:** [01:32:16] invasions. And really the pagan gods come to be explained as human beings. You know, it's that idea that you said of euhemerism, right?

The theory that historical and legendary heroes come to be venerated as gods and thus the gods can be explained away as human beings. Snorri himself uses this idea in the prose edda, as I say, they're mentioned in King lists there also is The genealogy given of Hengist and Horsa, were the legendary founders of the English people who came over, the first to invade. And Hengist and Horsa themselves have also been speculated to have been gods who have become treated as human heroes, legendary heroes.

It certainly fits the pattern of the twin gods. Right. These two guys whose names both mean horse. And so it's like the same pattern as Freyr and Freya and horses do seem to have been venerated. There's a kind of a horse cult, so maybe they are a reflection of an earlier pagan belief.

People have speculated on the pagan background of the word "weird "

**Aven:** [01:33:24] See your video. Yeah. Don't get into all of that. the video and podcast on the word. Weird.

**Mark:** [01:33:30] We do have the old Norse Norns, Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld, two of which are etymologically related to weird. We do have in old English, the word os, which means God it's etymologically the same as old Norse Ass or the Æsir.

**Aven:** [01:33:46] In

**Mark:** [01:33:47] old Norse myth there are the Æsir and the Ásynjur, Æsir the male ones Ásynjur the female ones. These are the chief gods in Norse myth. There's also a separate group of gods.

This is something that most people probably don't know about Norse mythology, the Vanir who are fertility gods and early on the Vanir are at war with The Æsir, the Vanir are God or gods the farming class. And, you know, you could say that, okay, the Æsir are the gods of the warrior class. And so it shows some sort of historical thing.

They were, as I say, originally at war, but peace was made with the exchange of hostages, Njord being the hostage from the Vanir to come live with the Æsir and thus they become allies. And that story spins out with the whole mead of poetry thing. So. You can go and listen to that previous episode, but people have speculated that the Vanir may represent an earlier Pantheon of gods who come to be replaced by the Germanic Pantheon.

Yeah.

**Aven:** [01:34:43] There's of generations of gods is found, found in

**Mark:** [01:34:46] everywhere,

**Aven:** [01:34:48] Greek myth and Mesopotamian myth. And like, so yeah, it's hard to know,

**Mark:** [01:34:52] hard to know. But incest seems to be allowed amongst the Vanir, hence the, Njord/Nerthus, Freyr /Freya originally, they were married, but in later versions they weren't. And then the sort of third grouping of divine beings in at least Norse myth are the Norns Urðr, Verðandi and Now. Okay. So that's a general overview of the Germanic gods. And I'm going to take it just one step further.

So there's \*Dyeus who is the father sky, . the Indo European levels.

**Aven:** [01:35:27] Okay.

**Mark:** [01:35:28] So \*Dyeus is the Indo European sky god, father sky represented in

Tiwaz , zeus Jove, et cetera. There's also That name is, reflected in a number of other religions. And there's the old Irish Dagdae oll-athir the, the good God or super father, there was also probably a sun deity, a male sun deity,

**Aven:** [01:35:52] you mean, you need to say, because you're not saying which kind of

**Mark:** [01:35:55] sun. Oh, as in the sky, the sun in the sky

**Aven:** [01:36:00] talking about you, male father, God, and then a sun deity. It's not very clear,

**Mark:** [01:36:06] Because there is this common motif of the horse drawn chariot. Again, that may be connected to the Hengist and Horsa thing.

Is the idea there. I mentioned \*Perkwunos. And the other interesting connection with that is that Thor's hammer Mjöllnir is cognate with words in Celtic and Balto Slavic languages for

**Aven:** [01:36:27] lightning.

**Mark:** [01:36:29] So that possibly connects Thor to this thunder, this Indo European thunder God. The proto Indo European word for stone, secondarily refers to heaven. And so this is why it's thought that \*Perkwunos is a God of both thunder with both Oak and stone because there's this folk motif of lightning bolt that impregnates rocks and trees, especially Oak. And so this, the word for stone doubles up for words, for heaven in some

Indo European languages like Indo Iranian and Germanic which may be because of a conception of heaven as a Stony vault, from which fragments might fall in the form of meteorites, or maybe connected with the Stony missiles thought to be hurled by the God of thunder. Okay. I mentioned \*Hausos the Dawn goddess that lied behind Aurora and maybe Easter.

And it's interesting to note in this, that the Indo Europeans oriented themselves by facing East, right? So towards the Dawn as shown by the fact that the word that means South in proto indo European was expressed by the word for right Dex Dexter in, in Latin, for instance, Whereas East itself was expressed by the word for Dawn

**Aven:** [01:37:46] for fairly obvious reasons.

**Mark:** [01:37:48] So Aurora comes from the root \* aus as I said, English, East and so forth. And similarly West was expressed by the word for evening. So the sun being behind,

**Aven:** [01:38:01] this is not surprising.

**Mark:** [01:38:02] So \*wes-pero- meaning evening or night in, indo European, and Vesper in Latin hesperos in Greek. North the word North seems to come from the proto Indo-European root \*ner- , meaning under or left. And so it's the source of the Greek word nerteros, lower infernal. So it means both under and left. However, all the romance languages borrowed the Germanic word for North. So they lost the Latin word.

the Latin word being ,septentriones which is a reference to it's an astrology reference. So it refers to a constellation, the seven plow oxen in the constellations that we know more commonly as the great and little bear. As I said, earth mother goddess is probably somewhere in a proto indo European belief.

The divine twins. We see all over the place in Greco-Roman mythology, like castor and Pollux. And we see it in Vedic. Religion Latvian folklore. There's a reference to the sons of heaven. So it's all over the place in Indo-European religions and very often they are the offspring of the sky father.

So they're youthful connected with, or even took the form of horses. Hence we say that Hengist and Horsa might be them. So, and they're connected especially with the horses that draw the chariot of the sun.

So that's, as far as we can go, though,

**Aven:** [01:39:29] Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:39:29] So as we saw, I mean, a number of those gods that are common to the Germanic Pantheon and the Greco-Roman pantheons, may well be because of a proto Indo European common source for both.

**Aven:** [01:39:43] All right. Well, that was as comprehensive as one could be. On the topic.

Cause that's what we have.

**Mark:** [01:39:49] That's what we have. Yeah.

**Aven:** [01:39:50] Well, I think that's time to. We've moved on to the next day already. It's no longer the solstice. It's true. while recording. So I think it's time to call it a halt to our calendrical discussions for the night. And there's a whole, as Mark said, there's a whole, there's two other videos we will come to at some point to talk about. You've been talking about those things over and over again, and they keep coming up in little pieces here and there.

So, you know, we'll, we'll, we'll revisit some of these topics and other intervals. In future episodes. Okay. So for now, we'll wish you, I don't know, quite when you're going to, I'm hoping, hoping you're going to hear this over the holidays because I'm hoping to be done with it. So we'll wish you happy holidays as happy as they can be though.

I know everybody is having, very many people are having to face very different holidays. We certainly are among them. It will not be the same as it normally is, but we send our warm thoughts out to you and let us all collectively hope for a better new year.

**Mark:** [01:40:52] Indeed.

Bye-bye

**Aven:** [01:40:54] bye.

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Thanks for listening.

**Mark:** [01:41:40] Bye.