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Saturn

Roman god

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Saturn, Latin Saturnus, in [Roman religion](#), the **god** of sowing or seed. The Romans equated him with the Greek agricultural deity [Cronus](#). The remains of **Saturn's temple** at Rome, eight columns of the pronaos (porch), still dominate the west end of the Forum at the foot of the Clivus Capitolinus. The temple goes back to the earliest records of the republic (6th century bc). It was restored by Lucius Munatius Plancus in 42 bc and, after a fire, in the 4th century ad. It served as the treasury (*aerarium Saturni*) of the Roman state. Saturn's cult partner was the obscure goddess Lua, whose name is connected with *lues* (plague, or destruction); but he was also associated with Ops, another obscure goddess (perhaps the goddess of abundance), the cult partner of Consus, probably a god of grain storage.

In Roman [myth](#) Saturn was identified with the Greek Cronus. Exiled from Olympus by [Zeus](#), he ruled Latium in a happy and innocent golden age, where he taught his people agriculture and other peaceful arts. In myth he was the father of [Picus](#).

Saturn's great festival, the Saturnalia, became the most popular of Roman festivals, and its influence is still felt in the celebration of **Christmas** and the Western world's New Year. The Saturnalia was originally celebrated on December 17, but it was later extended to seven days. It was the merriest festival of the year: all work and business were suspended; slaves were given temporary freedom to say and to do what they liked; certain moral restrictions were eased; and presents were freely exchanged. **The weekday Saturday (Latin *Saturni dies*) was named for Saturn.**

Carnivals and Saturnalias

Some feasts and festivals provide psychological, cathartic, and therapeutic outlets for persons during periods of seasonal depression. The [Holi](#) festival of Hinduism during February–March was once a fertility festival. Of early origin, the Holi festival incorporates a pole, similar to the Maypole of Europe, that may be a phallic symbol. Bonfires are lit; street dancing, accompanied by loud drums and horns, obscene gestures, and vocalized obscenities, is allowed; and various objects, such as coloured powders, are thrown at people.

One of the best-known festivals of ancient Rome was **the Saturnalia, a winter festival celebrated on December 17–24**. Because it was a time of wild merrymaking and domestic celebrations, businesses, schools, and law courts were closed so that the public could feast, dance, gamble, and generally enjoy itself to the fullest. December 25—the birthday of [Mithra](#), the Iranian god of light, and a day devoted to the invincible sun, as well as the day after the Saturnalia—was adopted by the church as Christmas, the nativity of Christ, to counteract the effects of these festivals.

Carnival-like celebrations were held in England on [Shrove Tuesday](#), the day before the Lenten fast began, until the 19th century. Originating as a seasonal renewal festival incorporating [fertility](#) motifs, the celebrations included ball games that often turned into riots between opposing villages. Feasts of pancakes and much drinking followed the contests. This tradition of merrymaking continues, for example, in the United States in the [Mardi Gras](#) festival on Shrove Tuesday in Louisiana.