SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]
In Cicero’s time, the Saturnalia, an ancient Roman agricultural festival, lasted seven days. Augustus, however, limited the celebrations to three days so the civil courts would not have to be closed for an extended time.

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

The celebration of the *Saturnalia* was extended with the *Sigillaria*, so named for the small earthenware figurines which were sold and given as gifts. [Macrobius I.10.24]

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

After the Julian reform of the Calendar, the original first day of the Saturnalia was dedicated to Ops in the festival Opalia.

Ops, the consort of Saturnus, signified the abundance and fruits of the earth.

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

In the Roman Calendar, the *Saturnalia* was designated a holy day, or holiday, on which religious rites were performed.

As an example, the woolen bonds, which fettered the feet of the ivory cult statue of *Saturnus*, were loosened to symbolize the liberation of the god.

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]
The origin of red & green Christmas decorations -
During the Saturnalia, the Romans decorated their homes with evergreen wreaths (serta) bearing red berries.

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

The Roman god *Saturnus* was often identified with *Kronos* and was worshipped according to Greek ritual.

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SATURNALIA
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The Temple of *Saturn*, the oldest temple recorded by the pontiffs, had been dedicated on the *Saturnalia*.

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

After sacrifice in the Temple of Saturn, the celebrants would enjoy a public banquet, after which they would enter the streets shouting “IO SATURNALIA.”
[Macrobius I.10.18]
SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

The *Saturnalia* was the most popular holiday of the Roman year. In poem XIV, Catullus describes the festival as “the best of days.”

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SATURNALIA
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The *Saturnalia* was an occasion for celebration, visits to friends, and the presentation of gifts, particularly *cerei*, wax candles, and *sigillaria*, clay figurines.

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

The exchange of wax candles called *cerei* is thought to have symbolized “*Sol Invictus,*” the unconquered sun, as part of the winter solstice tradition.

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

During the *Saturnalia*, slaves were treated as equals by their masters, in memory of an early golden age thought to have been ushered in by the god *Saturnus*.

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

The ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia recalled an age of general merriment and goodwill, ruled by Saturnus.
SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

By the second century A.D., *Brumalia*, the winter solstice celebration, replaced the *Saturnalia*.

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SATURNALIA
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By the middle of the 4th century A.D., many customs of the *Saturnalia* were adapted to the celebration of Christmas.

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

During the *Saturnalia*, Roman men replaced the *toga* with a loose-fitting garment called the *synthesis*.

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SATURNALIA
[December 17-23]

The ancient Romans honored *Saturnus*, the god of seed and sowing, with a festival after the autumn planting was completed.

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