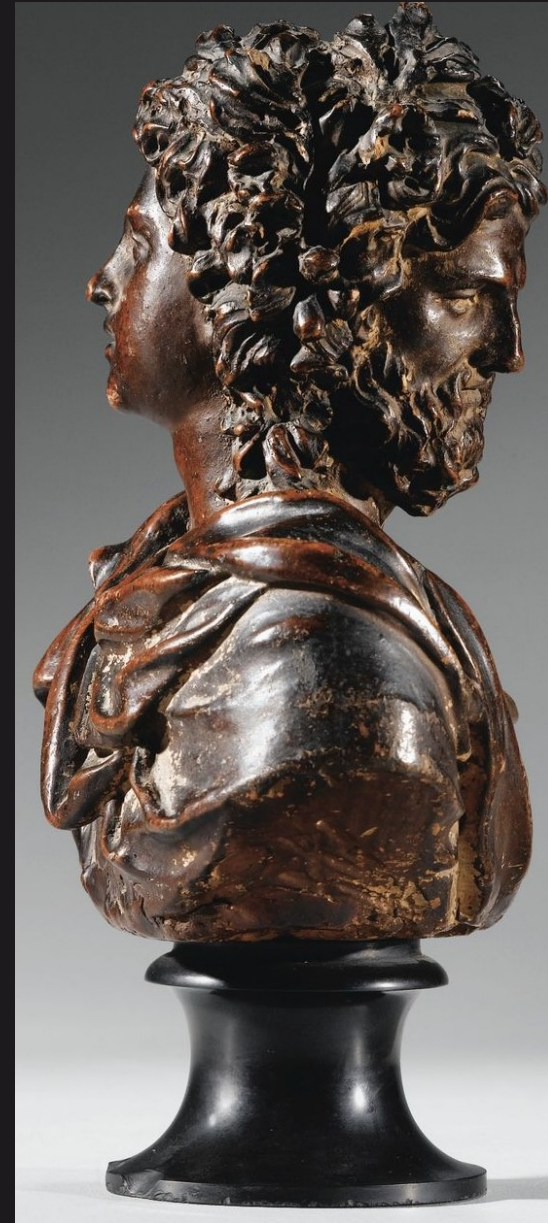


ARCHAIC ROMAN RELIGION

Chapter 3: Janus



The concept of Roman Mythology

- In 753 B.C when Rome was founded, the major Roman divinities (equivalent of the Greek Olympians) probably did not have much mythology, or any artistic depictions of their human forms.
- The idea of the gods having anthropomorphic qualities and human-like personalities and actions is a concept that was not developed until later in Rome's history. Under the influence of the Greek and Etruscan religions.
- Unlike their Greek counterparts, the Roman gods were originally, *Numina: divine powers of presence and will that was not necessarily have a physical manifestation of their power.* (Cicero: *Nature of the Gods*)

Janus / Ianus – the origins of the god in the ancient texts

- Another origin story for Janus is proposed by Nigidius Figulus. Stating that Janus is the combined form of both the god Apollo and his twin sister Diana.
- Cicero, Ovid and Macrobius all put forth the idea that Janus derives from the Latin verb *ire* (to go) and is based on the interpretation that Janus is the god of beginnings and transitions.
- Macrobius proposes the theory that Janus was first an Italian King who was blessed by Saturn, the god of agriculture, when he arrived in Rome.
- Ovid tells us that the god Janus was known to have been the Roman god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, and endings.
- Ovid also says that when he came face to face with the god the god introduced himself by claiming that in the early days of the Roman religion:
- *“The Ancients - I’m a primitive phenomenon – used to call me Chaos.”*
- Janus as an embodiment of Chaos is based of a *definition of Chaos* by Paul the Deacon in the 8th century A.D

Janus / Ianus in modern scholarship

- Matt Clayton (2017) states Janus' duties in much the same way as the ancient writers. He makes the additional assertion that as the god of doorways Janus could control who could communicate with the other gods directly.
- He gives a possible origin of the god, which is similar to the one proposed by Nigidius Figulus that Janus was a combination of two different gods. In this case the Etruscan deities, Ana (goddess of beginnings) and Aita (god of endings and the underworld).
- Schmidt (2004) says that Janus was linked to another deity Jana and that they were adored as the images of the sun and moon. He also gives the same account as Ovid concerning the prayer to Janus.
- Berens (2015) says that Janus was a king of Italy who welcomed the exiled Saturn into his court.

In Religious ceremonies

- Janus had no *flamen* or specialised priests of his own.
- The king of the sacred rites (*Rex sacrorum*) carried out the necessary rituals and ceremonies sacred to Janus.
- Even though he had no priests of his own Janus still had a presence in Roman rituals throughout the year. His name was invoked at the start of all dedications. Regardless of whichever god or goddess was being celebrated.
- According to Ovid (65-70) the prayer to Janus went something like this:
- *"Two-headed Janus, origin of the quietly gliding year, you who alone of the gods above see your own back, be present to bless our rulers, by whose labour the fruitful earth has peace secure, the sea has peace; be present to bless your fathers and the 'people of Quirinus', with your nod unbolt the shining temples."*

Temples and Religious centres

- The main temple of Janus stood in the Roman Forum near the Argiletum. There were doors on each end of the temple and a statue of the two faced god between them, which is why they are referred to as the '*Gates of Janus.*'
- According to Livy 1.19 king Numa Pompilius (*second king of Rome*) wanted to distract the early and very warlike Romans from their violent tendencies by instilling in them a sense of both awe and reverence. His projects included the promoting of religion and certain priesthoods as well as the building of temples. The temple of Janus was Numa's most famous architectural project.

Closing of the gates

- Plutarch in the life of king Numa wrote that *[Janus] has a temple in Rome with double doors, which they call the gates of war; for the temple always stands open in time of war, but is closed when peace has come.*
- Plutarch also writes the closing of the gates occurred in the time of Augustus after his defeat of Mark Anthony. Also during the consulship of Marcus Atilius and Titus Manlius.
- We do have Augustus' account of his closing of the gate in his *Res Gestae*.
- Cassius Dio 51.20 and 53.27 gives the dates of the first two closures 29 and 25 B.C respectively.
- The third closure remains a matter of scholarly debate. The only ancient author to date it was Orosius who associated the event with the birth of Christ c. 1 B.C. Modern scholars almost all reject Orosius because the Roman armies were campaigning in Germany and/or the Far East by 2 B.C.
- Inez Scott Ryberg and Gaius Stern date the third closure to 13 B.C after Augustus and Agrippa returned to Rome after pacifying the provinces
- Sir Ronald Syme dates the closure to 7 B.C, to coincide with Tiberius' triumph as well as his 2nd consulship.
- Nero and Vespasian both also closed the gates.
- The poet Virgil includes the opening of the gates of Janus in his Aeneid to start the war with the Trojans and the Latins

Janus and other deities

- Janus and Bellona: these two are often shown together in statues. The connection between the war goddess and Janus is that she is the defender of the army in times of war and he is the defender of the city in times of peace.
- Janus and Portunus: Portunus may be defined as a sort of duplication of Janus. His original definition shows he was the god of gates and doors and of harbours. Unlike Janus, portunus had his own flamen, which were known as the *Portunalis*.
- Janus and vesta: The relationship between Janus and Vesta touches on the question of the nature of the gods. While Janus has the first place Vesta has the last, both in theology and in ritual (*Ianus primus, Vesta extrema*). The last place implies a direct connection with the situation of the worshipper, in space and in time. Vesta is the goddess of the hearth of homes as well as of the city. Her inextinguishable fire is a means for individuals and as a community to keep in touch with the realm of gods., and the goddess of the hearth of man, which symbolises through fire the presence of life. Vesta is thought to be indispensable to the existence and survival of the community.

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