A Disappearing God? : Changes in Visual and Literary Portrayals of Janus after the Roman Republic

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“Make an offering of cakes to Janus, with these words: ‘Father Janus, in offering these cakes, I humbly beg that thou wilt be gracious and merciful to me and my children, my house and my household.’”¹ This passage from Cato the Elder’s *De Agricultura* is only one of many examples of the prominence of the god Janus during the Roman Republic and the great reverence in which the early Romans held him. Indeed, numerous other sources, from many different periods of the Roman age, from the Carmen Saliare² prayer of the monarchical period to the works of Cicero, Varro, Ovid, and Macrobius, attest to Janus’s legendary role as one of the earliest patrons and protectors of the state, such as the myths of how he reigned as a king during the legendary Golden Age, performing such deeds as inventing coinage³ and sheltering the god Saturn after he had been deposed by his son Jupiter; how he caused a hot spring to erupt and save the newly founded city of Rome when the Sabines attacked (as related by Macrobius, *fertur ex aede Iani per hanc portam magnam vim torrentium undis scatentibus erupisse*)⁴; and how the gates of his namesake shrine, the *Janus Geminus*, in the Roman forum would be closed in a great ceremony at the end of a war.⁵ In other words, all evidence indicates that Janus, his myths, and his rituals were deeply ingrained into Roman society from its origins, and so the extant literary and visual (coins, temple architecture, and statuary) records from this time reflect his venerable, grave character.

¹ Cato the Elder, *De Agricultura*, trans. W. D. Hooper and H. B. Ash (Loeb Classical Library: 1934.) The use of “thou” here, which is uncharacteristic of contemporary translations, is most likely a deliberate archaism on the part of the translators.  
⁴ Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, ed. Ludwig von Jan (Quedlinburg and Leipzig: Gottfried Bass, 1852), 73. The Latin here translates to “it is said that through this gate from the temple of Janus a great rush of boiling water erupted in gushing waves.” All translations of English and German are my own, unless stated otherwise.  
Moreover, Janus’s strong ties with the earliest origins of Rome and its associated perception as a golden age of heroes naturally appealed to Augustus and his enthusiastic promotion of those ideas, so many literary works in the earliest years of the Roman Empire feature Janus in the role of a wise patriarch or elder. Although this trend continued during the Julio-Claudian dynasty, due to ongoing demographic changes in the Roman Empire and the associated rise in popularity of the Greek Olympic pantheon and other non-Italian deities, by the turn of the 2nd century C.E. visual and literary portrayals of Janus had tapered off almost entirely. Janus once again became a fairly commonly occurring figure in the literature of the late 4th and early 5th centuries C.E., but Macrobius and other writers and historians of that time portrayed him as a remote figure from the distant past and early legends of Rome. In other words, at various times throughout the roughly five centuries of the empire, Janus appeared in art as a figurehead for imperial propaganda, an age-old, curious figure to be pored over by etiologists, and above all as someone bound to the very foundation of Rome itself.

During the Roman Republic, several trends for the visual and literary depictions of Janus emerged. As would have been appropriate to his role as the supposed inventor of coinage, some of the artistic depictions of Janus most commonly found today are his numerous depictions on coins: for example, when one searches for “Janus” on the Boston Museum of Fine Arts’ website, all of the classical-era works that appear are coins.6 This indicates that Janus clearly was highly venerated and considered critical to society, as coinage “was intended to be looked at, and was looked at. … Coins were more portable than busts, and more widely distributed.”7 Further showing Janus’s widespread presence in Republican Rome, these coins appear in multiple

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6 “Collections Search,” accessed 10/3/12, http://www.mfa.org/search/collections?keyword=Janus Note that several of the works featuring Janus are from the Renaissance and Baroque ages; the use of Janus in post-classical art will be discussed at the end of this paper.

denominations (As, Drachm, Didrachm, and Denarius)\(^8\) and are cast from both silver and bronze.\(^9\) The widespread use of Janus on many different kinds of currency shows the crucial role he had to the early Romans not only as the legendary inventor of money itself, but also as the more abstract god who governed all new transactions and undertakings. This visual of Janus was the standard for many years: “In der mittleren wie der späteren Republik war der I. bifrons der Standardtypus auf der Vorderseite des As...”\(^10\) Furthermore, these coins show the characteristic two-faced head of Janus. Early myths and visual representations all consistently had portrayed Janus with several faces on one head (due to the fact that he, as the god of archways and doorways, would be able to see all comings and goings, and also so that he could see past and future at the same time\(^11\)), and some of the very earliest, such as the Etruscan-made Janus Quadrifons cult statue, depicted the god with four faces\(^12\). The consistent portrayal of a two-faced Janus on Republican coins shows that a stable iconography of the god was beginning to develop, and this image would remain constant throughout later Roman history.

Furthermore, in the middle of the 1st century C.E. during the late Republic, various temples to Janus were renovated or rededicated in the city of Rome. The most famous of these, the so-called Janus Geminus in the Roman Forum, was a tiny arched passageway with doors on both ends, the opening and closing of which signaled the beginning and ending of war. This shrine, which supposedly dated back to the reign of king Numa Pompilius in the eighth century

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\(^8\) “Collections Search.”
\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Simon, “Ianus”, 620 The German translates to “In the middle as well as the late republic the Janus Bifrons was the standard type for the front of the As.”
\(^12\) “Forum Transitorium,” accessed 10/3/12, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/imperialfora/nerva/transitorium.html
B.C.E., continued to have a prominent role in the art and politics of Rome for centuries to come, as discussed later in this paper. In addition to this temple, another temple to Janus in the Forum Holitorium situated beside the Tiber River beneath the Capitoline Hill, was also continuously used and restored up through the end of the Republic. This temple of Janus, which dates from 260 B.C., was part of a group of three adjacent temples, the other two being dedicated to Juno Sospita and Spes, parts of which remain embedded in the walls of the Renaissance-era church of S. Nicola in Carcere. The remains of this temple, the northernmost of its group, are built of “travertine, tufa, and peperino, with no traces of marble, except in the late restorations” and the temple as a whole is “Ionic, hexastyle, and peripteral except at the back, and of its columns six are standing, 0.70 metre in diameter, also built into the church walls.” The Ionic order was the most frequently used for temples during the Republican era, as is visible in the very well-preserved temple of Portunus (also known as the Temple of Fortuna Virilis) nearby. The temple of Portunus features many key features of Republican temples, such as stucco-covered tufa columns and an elaborately decorated frieze. Although the temple of Janus is much less well preserved, the frieze of the front entablature “is riddled with small dowel holes for applique decoration, presumably in metal, in a garland motif similar to that… on the Temple of Portunus.” Although this temple was first “[v]owed by C. Duilius after the Roman victory off Mylae… in 260 BC,” the widespread use of peperino, “a high-quality building stone”, did not

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid. 391.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
21 Ibid. 281
22 Ibid. 39
become widespread until the second century B.C.E.\(^{23}\), which suggests that these columns may have been added at a later date. These traces of rich, ornate decoration show the veneration that the Republican-era Romans had for Janus, whom they honored with elaborate temples built and often renovated with the latest and finest methods.

After the Republican period, however, the Roman state would be changed forever: the assassination of the charismatic leader Julius Caesar plunged Rome into years of bitter civil war, and the ongoing rise and rapid expansion of the Roman Empire would bring profound change to older Republican institutions. When Octavian, who as emperor took the name Augustus, was ultimately victorious after the death of Julius Caesar, he faced not only physical conflict and turmoil, but also “hopelessness engendered by the age of civil wars that would never end.”\(^{24}\) He therefore felt the need to offer both “a religious and a secular”\(^{25}\) solution to these problems, and he did so by changing the political structure of the Roman state; sponsoring many works of literature, public buildings, and construction projects; and also by instituting a strong revival of older religious practices. (Indeed, as a result of years of brutal civil war, the Roman people “felt that they were being punished by angry gods … even after Octavian had defeated Antony and Cleopatra…”\(^{26}\)) For example, one of Augustus’s religious reforms was to revive the centuries-old Arval Brotherhood of priests\(^ {27}\), which maintained many of the most ancient elements of native Italic religion, such as conducting rites in a sacred grove of trees.\(^ {28}\) This new emphasis on ancient religion, mythology, and religious practices is also visible in much of the literature and art of the time, such as the famous friezes on the Ara Pacis, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, and several works

\(^{23}\) Ibid.


\(^{25}\) Ibid. 56

\(^{26}\) Ibid.


of Ovid including the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*. As Janus was one of the earliest, most traditional gods of the Roman pantheon, he is prominent in both the historical and literary records of this age. In other words, Augustus and the new imperial state heavily promoted the veneration of Janus (and even other ancient divinities who had long since lapsed into obscurity) to promote their own connection with Rome’s glorious origins and legendary past.

Once he took power, Augustus knew he had to implement policies that would serve contemporary Rome, and not just the glorious past. For example, he allowed extensive development outside the former city walls and *pomerium*\(^29\) (indeed, the Esquiline, Circus Flaminius and Trastevere districts, all of which were extensively developed under Augustus, fell wholly outside this boundary\(^30\)), but he was certainly most proud of his supposed renewal and restoration of the Roman state. This is most visible in his *Res Gestae*, a list of his political and military victories, in the thirteenth section of which he writes:

\[
\textit{Ianum Quirinum, quem claussum esse maiores nostri voluerunt, cum per totum imperium populi Romani terra marique esset parta victoriis pax, cum prius, quam nascerer, a condita urbe bis omnino clausum fuisset prodatur memoriae, ter me principe senatus claudendum esse censuit.}\(^31\)
\]

The very first words of this passage (*Ianum Quirinum*) are a metonymy for the aforementioned ancient Temple of Janus in the Roman Forum, the closing of whose doors indicated the end of war. Here, Augustus extolls how he was able to do so by the long-awaited peace he had brought to all corners of the Roman Empire (*cum... pax*), and that such a closing of the doors of the Forum’s Temple of Janus supposedly had occurred only twice before in Roman history (*a... fuisse*) but he had managed to do so three times. Above all, one can see Augustus’s own self-


\(^{30}\) Ibid.

promotion and his connecting of himself with Roman antiquity, even when this passage
ostensibly focuses on Janus’s own temple. This is indicative of the combination of Augustus’
self-importance as well as emphasis of mythology and legend that permeated the art and
literature of the time.

Janus was part of the visual art of Augustus’s regime as well. Firstly, Augustus brought a
statue by Praxiteles or Scopas, both of whom were prestigious Greek sculptors, from Egypt to
either the Janus Geminus temple in the Forum Romanum or the other temple to Janus in the
Forum Holitorium\(^{32}\) (which Augustus restored\(^{33}\)). This gilded statue apparently showed Janus
himself, but this attribution to Praxiteles or Scopas is problematic, as these were “hardly artists
who would have concerned themselves with a central Italian deity.”\(^{34}\) Furthermore, Rabun
Taylor suggests that:

Janus’ identity was being projected upon a non-Roman god who himself may
have been a hybrid, for Ovid claims that the Greeks had no god equivalent to
Janus… The usual resolution of this problem of attribution is to suggest that the
statue was a thoroughly Greek bifrontal herm imported by the Ptolemies to Egypt
and then adopted as Janus by Augustus.\(^{35}\)

One can glean several things about Augustan-era religion from this: that the iconography of
Janus as a two-faced, bearded figure was known throughout the Mediterranean region (and thus
that people would have recognized the parallel between images of him and an otherwise
unknown double herm), but on the other hand that Janus as a god truly was unique to the Roman
heartland in the Italian peninsula. Citizens of every region of the empire certainly would have
recognized the god, but only Latium and its vicinity had major temples to him.


\(^{33}\) Claridge, *Rome*, 281.

\(^{34}\) Taylor, “Watching the Skies,” 37.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.
Augustus seems to have promoted Janus-related imagery elsewhere: namely, even though Janus does not directly appear anywhere on the structure’s many friezes, scholars postulate that traditional Janus worship and iconography heavily influenced the construction of Augustus’ famous Ara Pacis altar. The Ara Pacis Augustae (“Altar of Augustan Peace”) was first dedicated by the Senate on July 4th, 13 BC, and its structure was that of two bracket-shaped enclosure walls, the exteriors of which were carved with intricate friezes showing the ruling family and scenes of peace and bounty, surrounding the altar proper on the inside. This simple form of a modest “rectangular precinct with a doorway at each end”, according to some sources, is a deliberate homage to the structure of the famous Janus Geminus temple in the Forum. This claim certainly is plausible, given Augustus’s widespread promotion of early Roman traditions and the connection of the closing of the Janus Geminus (as previously cited in the Res Gestae) with the coming of peace. Furthermore, iconography used in the Ara Pacis friezes also strongly recalls Janus and his worship. One of the friezes in the inner portion of the structure closest to the altar itself shows a procession of magistrates, priests, and Vestal Virgins bringing three animals to be sacrificed. These three animals are a ram, steer, and heifer. This combination, as Inez Scott Ryberg argues, is noteworthy:

The association of a ram, steer, and heifer as a triple offering is unparalleled in Roman religion, but, as Pax regularly received a heifer, it seems reasonable to assume that here the third victim is the sacrifice to Peace herself, preceded by victims to two other deities who served to introduce the establishment of the new goddess in the state pantheon. Janus and Jupiter, to whom the victims offered in state cult were a ram and a steer, are the deities most appropriate to such a context. Janus and Jupiter were not infrequently associated in religious rites, and in some instances these two gods received introductory offerings at rites performed to other deities. Moreover, Janus and Jupiter were both specifically connected with

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37 Ibid.  
Pax by their association with the return of Peace after victory in war, Jupiter as recipient of the spoils presented at the triumph, Janus as *index pacis bellique* whose gates were closed in time of peace.\(^{39}\)

Not only does this image of the three animal offerings affirm Janus’s position as one invoked at somber sacrifices, as Cato the Elder and many other earlier authors and scholars had noted, but the strong connections between Janus and the newfound *Pax* were yet another reason for Augustus to promote Janus and his associated traditions. Nevertheless, one can see signs of Janus’s future obscurity and marginalization among the public (which will be discussed at length later in the paper) in the *Ara Pacis* as well: firstly, Ryberg notes that the priest who led the sacrificial procession depicted on the *Ara Pacis* frieze is possibly the “almost obsolete”\(^{40}\) *rex sacrorum*, who was in charge of the state’s Janus worship. Thus, despite Augustus’s revival and promotion of centuries-old religious practices, Janus had already lost much of his prominence by this time. Furthermore, despite Augustus’s devotion to this traditional pantheon, the goddess Pax whom the altar honored “was almost unknown before 13 BC but central to Augustus’ later political ideology, and the word soon became synonymous with the Roman Empire at large…”\(^{41}\)

This shows both the notion of the entry of new divinities, many of whom would become widely worshipped and famous, into the Roman pantheon, as well as the precedent of an emperor promoting the worship of these not necessarily traditional Roman deities.

Above all, Augustus’s promotion of the legendary history and mythology of Rome, including Janus’s role in it, is perhaps most visible in the literature of the time. Works from the age of Augustus are notably influenced by the contemporary “perception of the cultural


\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Claridge, *Rome*, 208.
superiority of the Greeks”⁴²: From the adaptation of Greek poetic meters and formats to the widespread influence of Greek visual art, Roman literature and art owes a great debt to Greek precedents. Indeed, arguably the most famous work of literature from the Augustan period, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, has many traits inspired (or copied wholesale) from earlier Greek literature. Nevertheless, this epic provides much information about native Italian mythology, as the final six books are set in and around the later Roman heartland. The second half of the Aeneid discusses, among other topics, the history of native tribes (including the Tuscans and Latins) and local divinities. Janus holds a special role among these native Italian gods: Latinus, the native king, reveres Janus so highly that “when (he) swears a very solemn oath, he does so by *Ianus Bifrons* in company with earth, sea, stars, Apollo and Diana, the gods of the lower world, and Jupiter god of oaths.”⁴³ Vergil has incorporated this as a clear example of Janus’s integral role in the very oldest religion of Rome. In spite of his deep importance at the time the Aeneid was set, however, Janus is only explicitly named four times in the entire twelve books of the *Aeneid*: twice in book 7, once in book 8, and once in book 12.⁴⁴ In book seven, the first reference occurs in a discussion of an effigy or statue of Janus in Latinus’s palace: *Saturnusque senex Ianique bifrontis imago / vestibulo astabant, aliique ab origine reges / Martiaque ob patriam pugnando volnera passi.*⁴⁵ Here, the association of Janus with doorways and entryways (his statue stood in the vestibule of the king’s own home) and with the fabled past of Rome (as other images of ‘kings who suffered Mars’s wounds in fighting for the country’ surround that of Janus) is very clear. Indeed, the emphasis on Janus as a patron of boundaries and entryways and as a protector

⁴⁴ Henrietta Holm Warwick, *A Vergil Concordance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), 393.
of peace recurs later in book seven, when the war between the Latins (allied with Aeneas and his men) and the Rutuli begins:

Sunt geminae belli portae (sic nomine dicunt)
religione sacrae et saevi formidine Martis;
centum aerei claudunt vectes aeternaque ferri
roborae, nec custos absistit limine Ianus.\footnote{Ibid.}

Firstly, “belli portae” is a clear reference to the Janus Geminus temple, which was almost as ancient as the events of the Aeneid. Not only is this yet another means of connecting Janus with Italy’s most ancient past, but it also serves as an etiology for the tradition of opening the gates of the Janus Geminus temple during wartime. Furthermore, Janus is named as the “custos,” or steward, of this temple (and perhaps peace itself, by association) who does not depart from its boundary.” This is another example of Janus’ importance to the peace of the Roman state. The final occurrence in the Aeneid when Janus is explicitly named is in book eight, in a discussion of the earliest history of Latium:

Haec duo praeterea disiectis oppida muris,
reliquias veterumque vides monimenta virorum.
Hanc Ianus pater, hanc Saturnus condidit arcem:
Ianiculum huic, illi fuerat Saturnia nomen.\footnote{Ibid.}

This speech of Latinus to Aeneas truly emphasizes Janus’s bond with Rome’s very being: he built his citadel on the site of Rome itself. This earliest founding of a settlement is one reason why a common epithet for him (both here and elsewhere) was “Ianus Pater” or “Father Janus.” Furthermore, Latinus notes that Janus and Saturn established towns together: this is a reference to another of the key myths associated with Janus: that he sheltered Saturn after Saturn had been deposed by his son Jupiter, and the fabled Golden Age of mankind occurred when they reigned.

\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
together on the Janiculum. (This ancient hill was supposedly named for Janus, and it retains its name to this day.) This passage conveys both a sense of nostalgia for a past distant to even Latinus and Aeneas, as well as an attempt to link a hope of its renewal to contemporary Rome and Augustus.

Despite the scarcity of explicit references to Janus by name, his mythos and characteristics are present elsewhere in the poem, such as in the long speech by Jupiter to Venus in book I, in which he reassures her about Aeneas’ safety and the glorious future of Rome. This speech, in which he names future heroes and gods of the state, includes the following portion in lines 293-294: dirae ferro et compagibus artis / claudentur Belli portae... This is another reference to the opening and closing of the doors of the Janus Geminus and how in this act “the dread doors of War” would “be closed by iron and tight bonds.” Thus, by association Janus is considered powerful enough to perform this serious duty. The trend here, as it would be for years afterward, is to have Janus discussed briefly in comparison to other divinities, but when he did appear to praise his role and unique bond with the essence of Rome itself.

Perhaps the Augustan-era work with the most extensive discussion of Janus is Ovid’s Fasti. This poem, intended as a month-by-month survey of Roman religious holidays and their origins, survives only in an unfinished form (only the first six books covering January through June are extant), but Janus features heavily in these six books. Indeed, Ovid places great emphasis on Janus’s first appearance during the discussion of the celebrations on the Kalends of January (that is, January first or new year’s day): Ecce tibi faustum, Germanice, nuntiat annum / inque meo primus carmine Ianus adest.49 The very first word of this section, ecce, serves as a

48 Ibid.
49 Ovid, Fasti, 6.
dramatic shift from the introduction of the poem (which discussed Ovid’s dedication of the poem to Germanicus and the general history of the Roman calendar) to the presence of the god himself, who “announces this favorable year to you, Germanicus.” After this mention of the dedicatee, Ovid emphasizes Janus’s divine presence and power even more strongly, as shown by vocabulary such as *primus* and *adest*. The sense of reverence continues in the following lines:

*Iane biceps, anni tacite labentis origo,*
*solus de superis qui tua terga vides,*
*dexter ades ducibus, quorum secura labore*
*otia terra ferax, otia pontus habet:*
*dexter ades patribusque tuis populoque Quirini,*
et resera nutu candida templa tuo.
*prospera lux oritur: linguis animisque favete!*
*nunc dicenda bona sunt bona verba die.*

The language used here shows both great praise (such as the repetition of *dexter*) and a sense of wonder and awe at Janus’s great antiquity and singular nature. For example, the opening lines address him as “Two-faced Janus, mysterious origin of the passing year, / you who alone of all the gods see your back”, and the following lines are a prayer to him to ensure peace for the “fruitful earth and the sea” and to “be present for the senators and the people of Quirinus, and to unveil your bright temples with your command.” (his use of *pater* to mean ‘senator’ here may a deliberate reference to the traditional honorific epithet *Janus Pater*, as previously mentioned in Cato the Elder’s *De Agricultura*.) This, as well as the mention of the ancient figure Quirinus, is yet another emphasis on Janus as one of the earliest protectors and gods of Rome, and thus a fitting figure to whom to pray for a good year. The last two lines of this passage refer specifically to Janus’s role as the bringer of the New Year and how one should properly observe this occasion. Once more, the mood is one of joy and prosperity, as the Roman people are urged to “favor your tongues and spirits! Now good words must be said on a good day.” This is a

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50 Ibid.
reference to the tradition of Romans “behav[ing] as auspiciously as possible, hoping that their acts of kindness to each other and propitiation of Janus would be taken as unambiguous signs of goodwill to the gods.”

Thus, from the very beginning of the Fasti, Ovid gives Janus a special role.

What makes the portrayal of Janus in the Fasti so distinctive, however, is how Ovid emphasizes both Janus’s venerable ancient origins as well as his connection to the present. Indeed, shortly after the above passage in book I, Janus himself appears to Ovid as he writes the poem:

haec ego cum sumptis agitarem mente tabellis,  
lucidior visa est, quam fuit ante, domus.  
tum sacer ancipiti mirandus imagine Ianus  
bina repens oculis obtulit ora meis.  
extimui sensique metu riguisse capillos,  
et gelidum subito frigore pectus erat.  

Once again, Ovid portrays Janus here as majestic and awe-inspiring, calling him “sacred” and “marvelous.” In contrast to the previously cozy setting of Ovid’s study, Janus’s presence is also described as frightening. Ovid describes this thus: “I took fright and sensed that my hair was standing up from fear, and my breast was suddenly frozen in the cold.” Fortunately, Ovid soon learns that Janus’s intentions are benign, as the god has come to assist him with the opening of the poem, as related in lines 101-105:

disce metu posito, vates oporose dierum,  
quod petis, et voces percipe mente meas.  
me Chaos antiqui (nam sum res prisca) vocabant:  
aspice, quam longi temporis acta canam.

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52 Ovid, Fasti, 8.  
53 Ibid. 8, 10.
Janus’s first appearance to Ovid includes elements of many of his special traits: not only his profound age (he calls himself an ‘ancient thing’ whom the earliest people associated with Chaos, the original state of all creation), but also his embodiment of contradictory aspects. As Hardie observes,

His first appearance strikes wonder and fear into the poet (95-8) but he is later a god of laughter (191, cf. 129). He is a contradictory blend of the sublime and the ridiculous: coextensive with the evolution of the universe itself from chaos to order, an image whose rude material is nothing less than matter itself… supreme guardian of the cosmic order and keeper of Jupiter (126) and himself described in language appropriate for the father of the gods (119-20, 283-4); but, for all that, just a door-keeper with the stick and key entrusted to that servile office.  

Shortly after this introduction, Janus has a conversation with Ovid about his origins and nature as a god and the rites performed in his honor on New Year’s Day. Firstly, he explains how his double face is a vestige of his state as Chaos itself, and how his ability to see in all directions at once gives him power over all states (he explains in lines 117-118 that he rules “the sky, the sea, the clouds, and the earth, / all were opened and [still] close by my hand.”). Beginning in line 127, he goes on to explain the humble offerings he still receives from priests in Ovid’s time:

\[
... \text{cui cum Ceriale sacerdos} \\
\text{imponit libum mixtaque farra sale,} \\
\text{nomina ridebis: modo namque Patulcius idem} \\
\text{et modo sacrifico Clusius ore vocor.} 
\]

The aforementioned combination of ‘the sublime and the ridiculous’ is present here, as Janus himself tells Ovid that he “will laugh at the names” Patulcius and Clusius (the latter apparently etymologically related to his role as the ‘closer’ of things), whose honor is a stark contrast to the simple gifts of wheat (the metonymy used for which, ‘Ceres’, reflects his divine nature and is another example of this dichotomy) and coarse cakes. He goes on to tell Ovid about why the new

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54 Hardie, “Janus in Ovid’s Fasti,” 60.  
55 Ovid, Fasti, 10.  
56 Ibid.
year begins in midwinter (because of the solstice)\textsuperscript{57} and how he, as a “two-way channel of communication”\textsuperscript{58} with the other gods, needs to be honored on the opening day of the year just as he is the first to be invoked in formal prayer to other gods. Janus explains this in lines 173-174: “You may have access to whichever gods you wish through me, who guard the boundaries.”\textsuperscript{59}

What is noteworthy about these passages is that Ovid has attempted to explain the origins of Janus and his traditions in a systematic, rational way, and this treatment of Janus shows his “popularity among the literati and philosophers”\textsuperscript{60} who “speculated about the origins of his name and epithets, the rituals associated with his cult, the meaning of his multiplex identity, and the nature of his origins”. This tradition of scholarly interest in Janus had begun before Ovid with the works of Cato, Cicero, Varro, and various others, and would continue for centuries thereafter.

What particularly distinguishes the \textit{Fasti} from other discussions of Janus and his origins (such as Macrobius’ \textit{Saturnalia}, which will be discussed later) is its more fleshed-out poetic descriptions of so many Janus-related myths, which are lacking in the more scholarly ancient sources. One of the stories that Ovid relates is perhaps the most well-known Janus related myth: the myth of how Janus, as the first king of the Latium region, welcomed Saturn after he had fled after being deposed by his son and how the two gods ruled together during the fabled Golden Age of the world. Janus himself tells this story in great detail in lines 235-246:

\begin{quote}
hac ego Saturnum memini tellure receptum:
caelitibus regnis a love pulsus erat.
inde diu genti mansit Saturnia nomen;
dicta quoque est Latium terra, latente deo.
at bona posteritas puppem formavit in aere,
hospitis adventum testificata dei.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. 12  
\textsuperscript{58} Taylor, “Watching the Skies”, 16-17.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ovid, \textit{Fasti}, 14.  
\textsuperscript{60} Taylor, “Watching the Skies,” 2.  
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
Starting from the beginning of this passage, one can see how Ovid has used a combination of poetic and drier, more didactic-sounding language for Janus’ speech. Firstly, he liberally uses gods’ names and epithets: for example, in the first three lines he mentions Saturn and Jupiter by name, and his use of tellus to refer to the earth recalls the name of the nurturing Roman earth goddess whose image Augustus also promoted. Furthermore, the placement of “Saturnum” next to “ego” (that is, Janus) at the beginning of the passage both reinforces Janus’s own venerable position among these gods, and the fact that this “ego” occurs before any reference to Saturn, Jupiter, or any other figures perhaps recalls the tradition of invoking Janus in prayer before any other gods. In addition to gods’ names, Ovid extensively uses words and verb tenses relating to the distant past when Janus ruled the land that would become Rome. Not only are many of the verbs in this passage in the imperfect tense, but Janus also uses many words relating to memory and the distant past: to name two, memini and posteritas. In addition to this poetic way of relating the myth of Janus and Saturn, Ovid also includes several more scholarly, didactic asides in this passage. In lines 238-240, Janus explains that the name Latium supposedly came from Saturn “hiding” (latente deo) in the region after he had been expelled from Olympus, and then that the ship in which Saturn arrived in the region was thereafter depicted on the opposite side of Rome’s “ubiquitous”63 bronze coins from the profile of Janus. This passage concludes with a final etiology: that the Janiculum hill, across the Tiber from the Seven Hills of Rome proper, derives its present name from Janus, who established his citadel there. Throughout the whole

62 Ovid, Fasti, 18.
63 Taylor, Watching the Skies, 4.
passage, one can see, in addition to the trademark Augustan-era references to the Golden Age and Rome’s glories, scholarly emphasis on etymologies and the origins of ancient myth. Although Rabun Taylor notes that “these emanated mostly from a… craze for religious etiologies originating in the first century B.C.” and therefore are not necessarily wholly true, Janus’s seemingly contradictory role as both a staple of Augustan propaganda and as an archaic figure discussed mostly by scholars, which emerged at this time, is very clear.

The second Janus myth in Book I of the *Fasti* is the legend of the Sabines and the hot spring. According to this legend, when the Sabine king Titus Tatius attacked after the traitorous Tarpeia had let his forces into Rome, Janus saved the fledgling city by causing a hot spring to erupt and burn the invading forces, as related in lines 265-276:

*et iam contigerant portam, Saturnia cuius*
*demperat oppositas invidiosa seras.*
*cum tanto veritus committere numine pugnam*
*ipse meae movi callidus artis opus,*
*oraque, qua pollens ope sum, fontana reclusi*
*sumque repentininas eiaculatus aquas;*
*ante tamen madidis subieci sulfura venis,*
*ccluderet ut Tatio fervidus umor iter.*
*cuius ut utilitas pulsis percepta Sabinis,*
*quae fuerat, tuto reddita forma loco est.*
*ara mihi posita est parvo coniuncta sacello;*
*haec adolet flammis cum strue farra solis.*

The overall structure of this episode is similar to that of the previous one; it features a mixture of poetic, artistic elements (such as the use of “reclusi” in line 269, which recalls Janus’s traditional epithet *Clusius*) as well as etiological asides (here, an explanation of the establishment of the Janus Geminus in the Roman Forum.) What is most distinctive in this passage, however, is that it covers much of the same material as book VIII of the *Aeneid*, the history of Rome “from the

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64 Ibid.
65 Ovid, *Fasti*, 20.
Latian rule of Saturn down to the triple triumph of Octavian.66 Ovid’s portrayal of these events is similar to Vergil’s in that Juno (“the jealous daughter of Saturn” in lines 265-266) is portrayed as vindictive and wrathful toward Aeneas and his heirs, but even though she pledges her support to Aeneas and Rome at the end of the *Aeneid*, in the *Fasti*’s portrayal of the Titus Tatius episode she still wishes to harm Aeneas’s descendants by opening the city gates to the invaders. Even though Janus presumably would have held this power, he notes that he did not wish to provoke “such a powerful divinity” directly, and instead caused a nearby hot spring to erupt and stop the invaders. Why Ovid used a different version of the myth than that of the *Aeneid* is unclear; perhaps he wanted to use a commonly known antagonist of early Rome to emphasize the role of Janus as one of Rome’s earliest protectors in this episode. In any case, Ovid uses this passage to further underscore Janus’s profound bond with Rome’s history.

The final Janus myth in the *Fasti* does not appear until book VI, in the passage about the celebration of the goddess Cardea, also known as Cranae, on the Kalends of June. Although Ovid admits that much knowledge of this goddess of door hinges has been lost to the ages67, he states in line 104 that “from my poem you will be certain68” of the most important details. Namely, the beautiful nymph Cranae once had the habit of telling her suitors to wait for her in empty caves and then fleeing from them. This plan fails, however, when Janus becomes enamored of her, as he uses his double face to find her when she attempts to trick him, before he gives her the power over door hinges (and thus the name ‘Cardea’), as shown in lines 119-128:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{viderat hanc Ianus visaeque cupidine captus} \\
\text{ad duram verbis mollibus usus erat.} \\
\text{nympha iubet quaeri de more remotius antrum} \\
\text{utque comes sequitur destituitque ducem.}
\end{align*}
\]

66 Hardie, “Janus in Ovid’s *Fasti,*” 51.
67 Ovid, *Fasti*, 326.
68 Ibid.
Although Ovid uses some elements of more common depictions of Janus in this passage (e.g. emphasizing Janus’s double faces and the formal, dignified language of his address to Cranae/Cardea), this passage shows a substantial departure from these other portrayals in its portrayal of Janus as passionate and openly aggressive. Instead of the calm, restrained, aloof figure seen elsewhere (including earlier in the very same poem), Janus here “is captivated by desire” from the instant he sees Cranae, and duplicitously uses his ability to see in two directions to catch her. The reasons for this apparent incongruity are unclear, but a portion of it may be due to Ovid’s tendency “to invent and vary… native material”, as well as the desire to create a dramatic story focused on Cardea for her own holiday. Since Cardea was the goddess of door hinges (and thus an appropriate companion to Janus), Ovid may have used Janus as a sort of pawn to highlight her own power and venerability. Janus does take a secondary role to Cardea in this section; even the discussion of the rape he commits “is described succinctly and with a subordinating participle”, whereas much of the rest of the section heavily emphasizes Cardea’s role as a liminal deity, a guardian of children, and an apotropaic figure. Therefore, the passage with Janus possibly was meant to be a dramatic introduction to Cardea’s unique nature and background, so Ovid could have taken liberties with Janus’s traditional image to tell the story more effectively.

69 Ibid.
Ovid’s artistic license appears again in one of his other masterworks, the *Metamorphoses*. Although most of the poem concerns Greek mythology and takes place in Greece, the final few books are set in Italy and relate native Italian myths and Roman history, much like the *Fasti*. In book 14 of the *Metamorphoses*, the setting moves from Greece and the eastern Mediterranean to Italy. Shortly thereafter, “the first native Italian story of the poem”\(^{72}\), that of Picus and Canens, takes place. This episode tells of Canens, who has “an appropriately native genealogy as the daughter of Janus and the nymph Venilia,”\(^{73}\) and her husband Picus, whom Circe transforms into a woodpecker after he scorns her advances. Even though he is in the background (indeed, he is mentioned by name only twice in the entire poem\(^{74}\)), Janus nevertheless serves as a reminder of Italy and its native lore’s importance in Augustan-era art and literature, and how “Roman myth [was] inextricably linked to the present”\(^{75}\). Since Vergil also referred to Picus as Latinus’s grandfather in the *Aeneid* (Canens, however, is “unknown outside Ovid\(^{76}\)”), this sense of Italian mythology’s richness and continuity with Greek traditions is very clear. The second mention of Janus occurs later in book 14, in a depiction of Romulus’s war with the Sabines. Contrary to Ovid’s portrayal of the same episode in the *Fasti*, however, Venus, not Janus, is the instigator of the hot spring eruption that drove off the Sabine attack. Janus is only mentioned here in the context of the location of the later Janus Geminus temple near the hot spring which erupted. Sara Myers describes this discrepancy:

In the *Fasti* Janus himself takes credit for the deed in his own version of the events which… account for the location of the temple of Janus Geminus, while in the *Metamorphoses* Venus instead calls on local nymphs for assistance. Janus’ egotism may account for his appropriation of the action in the *Fasti* or we may

\(^{72}\) Myers, “Italian myth in *Metamorphoses* 14,” 91.

\(^{73}\) Ibid. 97

\(^{74}\) “*Metamorphoses* (Kline) Index, the Ovid Collection, Univ. of Virginia E-Text Center,” accessed March 29, 2013, http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/MetindexEFGHI.htm.

\(^{75}\) Myers, “Italian myth in *Metamorphoses* 14,” 93.

\(^{76}\) Ibid. 97
attribute the difference to Ovid’s strategy of making prominent Venus’ agency at the close of the *Metamorphoses*.

In other words, Ovid attributes this action to different deities to suit various contexts as needed. Whether due to his “egoism” or to emphasize his great power and status as the opener of the year, Janus has this role in the *Fasti*, whereas Venus, who has much greater connections to Greek myth, has this role in the more heavily Greek-influenced *Metamorphoses*. Although Ovid had a habit of inventing mythological characters and details for his poems, one can see how he used these figures—especially Janus—as venerable ancestors and forebears or ancillary side characters used to give meaning to other stories.

Imperially sponsored art and literature (of which the works of Ovid and Vergil were a part), and with them significant portrayals of Janus, tapered off for some years after Augustus’s death. Augustus’ successor, Tiberius, did not pursue nearly the amount of artistic, literary, and architectural sponsorship that Augustus did. Although a rededication of the Temple of Janus at the Forum Holitorium did occur in 17 C.E. during his reign, this was simply a finish to a restoration begun by Augustus, and Tiberius on the whole “was not disposed to enhance the campaigns” of his predecessors. A strong artistic and literary campaign like that under Augustus did not appear under Gaius Caligula or Claudius, the two emperors following Tiberius, but this would change under the final Julio-Claudian emperor, Nero.

As emperor, Nero began a widespread imperial artistic propaganda campaign in which Janus would play a sizeable role. Ancient sources consistently describe Nero as a shameless attention seeker, so he would naturally seek to create a similar legacy to that of Augustus, which

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77 Ibid. 106  
would involve heavy promotion of military and artistic achievements. An example of this occurred after 64 C.E., when Nero’s successful campaigns in the east prompted a ceremonial closure of the Janus Geminus temple, the first such closure in over 75 years. These coins show a frontal view of the Janus Geminus, with its bronze doors closed and covered in drapery, and the inscription on these coins features the phrase “IANUM CLUSIT”—that is, “(Nero) closed the Janus Geminus.” Despite the heavy prominence of his temple, however, Janus himself does not appear on these Neronian coins. This suggests that Nero’s artistic propaganda programs emphasized the emperor and his own deeds more than any noble past, and that by the second half of the 1st century C.E. his one major importance in the wider Roman world was his connection with his peace-indicating temple.

Despite the aniconic portrayal of the god on Nero’s coins, Janus played a major role in the so-called Apocolocyntosis, a satire written during Nero’s reign. Scholars agree that this satire was written by Seneca, Nero’s personal tutor, who had been exiled by the emperor Claudius. Therefore, this work harshly lampoons the recently deceased emperor, whom it portrays as decrepit, deformed, and simultaneously buffoonish and evil. The extant portions of the work cover Claudius’s fate after his death, when he goes to a council of the gods to plead his case for his own deification but is ultimately condemned to eternal punishment in the underworld. Although this satire is clearly meant to condemn Claudius (and to a lesser extent, praise Nero, who, it claims, *Flagrat nitidus fulgore remisso/vultus, et adfuso cervix formosa capillo* in a possible reference to Nero’s own aspirations of divinity), Janus and traditional Roman religion

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play a crucial role in the story and also help to illuminate a religious debate of the time. When
the gods begin to debate Claudius’s pending deification, Janus is first to speak:

_Is designatus erat in kal. Iulias postmeridianus consul, homo quantumvis vafer, qui semper videt ᾧμα πρόσασα καὶ ὀπίσσαο. Is multa diserte, quod in foro vivebat, dixit, quae notarius persequi non potuit, et ideo non refero, ne aliis verbis ponam, quae ab illo dicta sunt. Multa dixit de magnitudine deorum: non debere hunc vulgo dari honorem. “Olim” inquit “magna res erat deum fieri: iam Fabam minum fecistis. Itaque ne videar in personam, non in rem dicere setentiam, censeo ne quis post hunc diem deus fiat ex his, qui ἀποίρης καρπὸν ἔδοουν, aut ex his, quos alii ζεύδωρος ὑπνάρε. Qui contra hoc senatus consultum deus factus, dictus pictusve erit, eum dodi Larvis et proximo munere inter novos auctoratos ferulis vapulare placet._"\(^{83}\)

Janus’s role as the opener of all things appears right at the beginning: not only is he the first of
the gods to speak, but he also has the role of consul, an office that was traditionally associated
with Janus, as new consuls were formally sworn in on the Kalends of January.\(^{84}\) Another reason
why Janus is particularly suited for this role is that “he lived in the Forum”—that is, the Janus
Geminus stood in close proximity to the Curia. Indeed, Heinze reminds his readers of the ancient
idea of gods living “bald an ihre Heiligtümer”\(^{85}\) and being closely connected to the areas around
their sacred sites, so the Janus Geminus’s close location to political monuments in the Forum
would have held a special significance to the first-century audience of the _Apocolocyntosis._

Throughout the passage, Janus harshly denounces imperial deification, citing ‘the greatness of
the gods’ which was not appropriate ‘to be given to a common man’. He claims that although
deifications of supposedly worthier figures, such as Julius Caesar, had occurred in the past, the
honor would supposedly become worthless and diluted, and disgrace the dignity of the old gods.
In other words, Janus explicitly calls the contemporary, more unfamiliar religious concept of the
imperial cult absurd, thus demonstrating “the skepticism with which many must have regarded

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\(^{83}\) Ibid 458, 460.


\(^{85}\) R. Heinze, “_Zu Senecas Apocolocyntosis_”, _Hermes_ 61 (1926): 59. The German translates to “close to their sacred
sites.”
the Senate’s decision to deify [Claudius].” Deification of prominent Roman leaders first gained popularity during the time of Julius Caesar, due in part to the increased prominence of Egypt and Hellenistic states in Roman politics. For a subsequent Roman head of state to gain extra credibility in these regions, “In Egypt… he had to be the divine ruler; he appears as the inheritor of the Pharaohs with all their honours; to the Greeks of Egypt he is one with Zeus Giver of Freedom, is invoked in oaths, receives temples.” From the text’s references to the deifications of Augustus and Claudius, one can infer that deification was beginning to gain popularity (especially in provinces far from the city of Rome, where many temples to deified emperors were built) in the later decades of the 1st century C.E., eclipsing traditional gods and practices, and religious traditionalists found this unsettling.

Janus once again took a backseat in art and literature after Nero’s death, during the civil war of the Year of Four Emperors, and through the reigns of Vespasian and Titus. The emperor Domitian, however, wished to institute an artistic program of his own to promote himself and his government, and one of the authors who contributed to this program was the poet Statius. Many older tropes of imperial propaganda, including references and/or invocations to Janus, appear in Statius’ Silvae. In only the first ten lines of book IV, for example, Statius manages to incorporate two uses of “Caesar” and one each of “Germanicus,” “Latia,” “Roma,” “Evandrius,” and “Palatia.” This heavily “fulsome” poem extolls Domitian and the occasion of his new consulship, and even goes so far as to pray “to the laws of Latium, the curule chair, and the seven

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86 Warrior, Roman Religion: A Sourcebook, 137
hills of Rome” for the emperor. Suitably for this section of Rome’s ancient glories, Janus himself appears shortly thereafter:

\[
\text{ipse etiam immensi reparator maximus aevi} \\
\text{attollit vultus et utroque a limine grates} \\
\text{Janus agit, quem tu vicina Pace ligatum} \\
\text{omnia iussisti componere bella novique} \\
\text{in leges iurare fori. levat ecce supinas} \\
\text{hinc atque inde manus geminaque haec voce profatur.}
\]

Although Statius uses honorific language and titles, such as *reparator maximus*, to refer to Janus, which is consistent with other portrayals of the god, Janus here is simply an assistant to the emperor. Statius writes “Janus, whom, bound to neighboring Peace, you [Domitian] ordered to settle every war and to swear oaths to a new forum”, which suggests that the emperor wishes to be portrayed as even more powerful than this venerable god. Janus himself then goes on to pray for the success of Domitian’s consulship:

\[
\text{salve, magne parens mundi, qui saecula mecum} \\
\text{instaurare paras, talem te cernere semper} \\
\text{mense meo tua Roma cupid; sic tempora nasi,} \\
\text{sic annos intrare decet. da gaudia fastis} \\
\text{continua; hos umeros multo sinus ambiat ostro} \\
\text{et properata tuae manibus praetexta Minervae.}
\]

Although this is merely one portion of a much longer passage, Domitian is clearly meant to be shown as superior to Janus himself, and references to “Domitian as a god [occur] ad nauseam.” Janus is no longer the mighty figure from Ovid; instead, he offers his deference to “the great father of the world” and refers to “your [i.e. Domitian’s] Rome.” (Cleverly, Statius has placed the words *meo* and *tua* next to each other in the third line of this excerpt, to show how Domitian

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90 Ibid.  
91 “Statius: Silvae IV.”  
92 Ibid.  
was now supposedly as important, if not more so, than Janus.) Although Statius incorporated traditional traits of Janus, such as his role as the guardian of peace and ruler of the passage of time, into the *Silvae*, he used these few selected elements to play up Domitian’s own importance.

The famous epigrammatist Martial also began to write under Domitian and his successor Nerva, and his works also feature Janus in the role of august ancestor of the state. Although Martial, seeking imperial patronage, did give the requisite praises to Domitian and “the gods favored by [him],” he did not do so nearly as fawningly or sycophantically as Statius did and one can see traits of traditional Republicanism and ideas of Janus in his work. Martial writes explicitly about Janus “in five poems of Books 8-11, written in 93-98, a period covering the last years of Domitian and all of Nerva’s brief reign.” These poems emphasize Janus’s role as “creator and father,” his importance to the consuls, and his importance to past and present Roman heads of state, including Nerva. The first of these five short poems is 8.2, into which Martial has incorporated several of these aforementioned elements:

*Fastorum genitor parensque Ianus*
*Victorem modo cum videret Histri,*
*Tot vultus sibi non satis putavit*
*Optavitque oculos habere plures:*
*Et lingua pariter locutus omni*
*Terrarum domino deoque rerum*
*Promisit Pyliam quater senectam.*
*Addas, Iane pater, tuam rogamus.*

The very first line praises Janus as “creator and father of the Fasti”, which clearly reinforces the importance Ovid had assigned to him in his poem written almost a century before Martial’s time.

In addition to this traditional role, Martial uses Janus as a sort of instrument to praise ‘the

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95 Taylor and Holland, “Janus and the Fasti,” 137.
96 Ibid. 138
conqueror of the Istrians’ (that is, Domitian, who campaigned against Istrian tribes during his reign): In this poem Janus ‘wished he had more eyes’ than he already had with which to view the emperor better, and promised him “four times the old age of Nestor.” The last line, like the first line, explicitly invokes Janus, whom Martial asks to “add [his] own [old age]” to the lifespan of the emperor as well. In other words, although explicit references to Janus begin and end the poem (which Martial may have used as a poetic reference Janus’s divine role), much of the rest of the poem praises the emperor, and Janus once again appears as an ornament to this effect.

A later poem, number 28 in the tenth book, contains another prayer to Janus, but this poem features no blatant imperial propaganda. Instead, this poem is more in character with traditional prayers to the god as a powerful protector of the state:

\[
\text{Annorum nitidique sator pulcherrime mundi,} \\
\text{Publica quem primum vota precesque vocant,} \\
\text{Pervius exiguos habitabas ante penates,} \\
\text{Plurima qua medium Roma terebat iter:} \\
\text{Nunc tua Caesareis cinguntur limina donis,} \\
\text{Et fora tot numeras, Iane, quot ora geris.} \\
\text{At tu, sancte pater, tanto pro munere gratus,} \\
\text{Ferrea perpetua claustra tuere sera.}\]

Martial refers to Janus as “most noble sower of the years and fertile earth” in the first line, which not only recalls Janus’s early connections to agriculture and the seasons (as shown in Cato the Elder’s work, for example), but he also affirms Janus’s role as the figure “whom prayers and pubic vows call first”. Although Martial mentions ‘the gifts of the Caesars’, thus reminding the readers of Janus’s role in imperial propaganda (which Martial himself had briefly used in poem two of book eight), this poem as a whole emphasizes the timeless aspects of Janus and his worship, as shown when Martial invokes Janus in the last two lines: “holy father, if you are grateful for such a gift, keep your iron gates closed with an eternal bolt.” This recalls the

98 Ibid.
traditional prayers to Janus for good fortune at the start of the year. As a whole, although Martial is most known today for his sarcastic, mocking poems, his respect for Janus and other “native gods” was genuine, even if emperors and other figures had used them largely for decorative propaganda purposes.

As they did after the deaths of Augustus and Nero, however, portrayals of Janus disappeared from much art and literature yet again around the turn of the 2nd century C.E. Many scholars consider the 2nd century C.E. difficult to study because later emperors did not sponsor such a great amount of art and literature as Augustus did, and much of what was produced is now lost. Along with this greater decline in the amount of visual and literary sources, the amount of visual and literary depictions of Janus declines as well. For example, excavations at Pompeii have found dozens of votive figurines, paintings, and other religious paraphernalia relating to other gods, both Greek and Egyptian, but excavators have found very few objects relating to Janus, and of these the most notable is one of Nero’s aforementioned bronze coins. Although Pompeii was destroyed before the turn of the second century, the trend visible from the excavations would continue for years to come. This change in religious practices in the Roman Empire is a complicated subject far beyond the scope of this one investigation, but the dearth of artistic representations, visual or textual, of Janus compared to those of other Greco-Roman, Egyptian, Semitic, or various gods of other backgrounds is likely related to demographic shifts within the empire, as well as the unique nature of native Italic deities. Namely,

The Roman gods had strictly defined attributes, and people called upon them according to their respective abilities. This splitting-up of divine powers legitimized a precise, specific and finicky ritualism which avoided a frenzy for the supernatural but also correspondingly excluded any cosmic view, any response to intellectual queries, especially from the time when in the second century BC

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Greek philosophy arrived to shake up the calmly legal attitude of the Roman pontiffs. So… a fundamental agnosticism dwelt side by side with a practical pietism, respectful of civic tradition. The juxtaposition of the *numina* did not constitute a rational and coherent theology. Even at the beginning it involved no kind of hierarchy. It made nothing clear about the finality of the universe or the fate of the soul after death.\(^{101}\)

As implied in the poetry of Ovid, for example, these early Italian deities, even if they had festivals or arcane rites of some sort in the present, were quite insignificant to and remote from the population of the Roman Empire as a whole. Even Janus, the most famous native Italic god “thanks to the Calends of January, which remained a popular festival in both the East and the West”\(^{102}\) apparently was eclipsed by these more foreign traditions. According to Rives, two major factors for the popularity of these new religions were their “appeals to esoteric wisdom and claims to a special relationship with the divine.”\(^{103}\)

More specifically, some Greek and other “oriental” religions, such as those of Orpheus or Pythagoras, offered their adherents a new, mysterious and awe-inspiring way of looking at the world based on “esoteric traditions reportedly handed down from the distant past or imported from an exotic foreign culture.”\(^{104}\) (Since Janus was certainly a very well-known god, especially within Italy, he would not have held the same novelty as these new figures.) Also, these religions promised personal, intimate relationships with their gods or divinities.\(^{105}\) A notable example of this is Christianity, which gained popularity not only for its promise of a god close and devoted to all people, but also for its promise of a blissful afterlife for the righteous, which was a far cry from the impersonal, non-omnipotent spirits of old Italy. In other words, these Greek, Egyptian,

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102 Ibid. The celebration of Janus on the Kalends of January may be comparable to the celebration of Christmas today in that both holidays often were or are observed by those not necessarily practicing the religion.
103 Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 158.
104 Ibid. 159
105 Ibid. 165
and other eastern traditions often held more appeal for citizens of the Roman Empire than the equally ancient native Italic cults, due to their rich and powerful clergy, who had thousands of years of theological tradition behind them, [and] a theology intimately bound up with a cosmology which Greek philosophy and astrology often helped to legitimize, even to rationalize… The traditionalism of the eastern cults mingled with a remarkable faculty for adaptation to the great ideological currents and to the science of their time.¹⁰⁶

These religions simultaneously offered venerable tradition and relevance in the contemporary world, which the old traditions of Italy, and by association Janus, seemingly failed to provide.

By no means did Janus vanish from public memory entirely during the second century C.E. In addition to the yearly festivals and token prayers to Janus, Juvenal, whose works were published during the 120s C.E., writes extensively of old Roman religion, including Janus. For example, among his other attacks on women’s vanity, shallowness, and pettiness in his sixth satire, he tells of a woman who calls upon Janus in prayer not for the benefit of her family or the state, but so her lover might win a musical competition:

*quaedam de numero Lamiarum ac nominis Appi et farre et vino Ianum Vestamque rogabat, an Capitolinam deberet Pollio quercum sperare et fidibus promittere, quid faceret plus aegrotante viro, medicis quid tristibus erga filiolum? stetit ante aram nec turpe putavit pro cithara velare caput dictataque verba pertulit, ut mos est, et aperta palluit agna.* ¹⁰⁷

Indeed, Juvenal claims that this woman shamelessly “stood before the altar and did not consider it shameful to veil her head for a harpist” (as musicians and performers were often foreigners and people of lower classes looked down upon by elites). Although she did sacrifice to the venerable

god Janus, she did so with disreputable motives. Juvenal finishes this episode by addressing Janus directly:

\[
\text{dic mihi nunc quaeso, die, antiquissime divom,} \\
\text{respondes his, Iane pater? magna otia caeli;} \\
\text{non est, quod video, non est quod agatur aput vos.} \\
\text{haec de comoedis te consulit, illa tragoedum} \\
\text{commendare volet, varicosus fiet haruspex.}^{108}
\]

Juvenal makes his disgust with contemporary Roman society and his “preference for his native Italian gods” quite clear: not only does he call Janus by traditional terms such as ‘father Janus’ and ‘most ancient of the gods,’ but he also suggests that matters about which people like the matron in the previous passage pray to him are below his dignity. She prays to Janus not “according to his ability,” as Turcan says, but merely as one of several potential gods who may listen to her offer. Although Juvenal’s works are clearly satire and should not be read as pure, objective truth, one can infer that Romans of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E. (especially the upper, traditional classes of which this woman was a member) still knew that Janus was once a powerful, widely venerated figure and paid him respects—however superficially—as such.

Another use of Janus in art occurred under Hadrian, who commissioned coins with his image on them. During his nearly twenty-year reign, Hadrian commissioned “large and varied coinage.”

For generations,

coins were used by...emperors—who were well aware that that the imperial gold and silver issues penetrated to every corner of the Roman world—in order to stress their personal interests and predilections. This was especially true of Hadrian... because of his own innate curiosity, and because of his desire to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[108] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
elevate the provinces into entities enjoying their own pride, their own rights, their local spirits and traditions.\textsuperscript{111}

In addition to Hadrian’s own interest in regional customs, another factor that caused him to issue such a large variety of coins was his desire to offer vows and pay homage to the gods to ensure his safety when he was away from Rome for long periods of time. These coins featured many Greek and Roman gods, including Janus. Although Janus had appeared on Roman coins for centuries, Hadrian’s coins depicted him in a completely new way. As opposed to the traditional head and toga-clad upper torso image, Janus’s full, half-nude body appears on Hadrian’s coins.\textsuperscript{112} Aside from his traditional staff and double (more rarely, quadruple) face, Janus appears like a Greek god. (A likely reason for this is Hadrian’s personal passion for Greek culture.) Other information on the coin implies other information about Janus’s status in the Roman world in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E. Specifically, Janus is not identified by name (as he was on Nero’s coins, for example); the text common to all these coins reads “S\textsuperscript{•}C\textsuperscript{•}C\textsuperscript{•}O\textsuperscript{•}S\textsuperscript{•}III\textsuperscript{113}”, in reference to Hadrian’s third consulship when he commissioned these coins. This suggests that the image and basic aspects of Janus were known empire-wide, even in regions far away from Italy and even though his popular appeal in Italy had been largely eclipsed by that of other gods. Furthermore, as well as Hadrian’s well-known philhellenism, another reason that Janus is depicted in a traditionally Greek fashion on these coins may be that other divinities (including non-Greek ones) were often depicted in a Hellenizing fashion, so such a portrayal of Janus may have been a way to use a visual language more familiar to much of the empire. In any case, Hadrian’s coins show that Janus was still well-known as a symbol of the empire and Italian history, even if he was no longer worshipped nearly as frequently as other gods.

\textsuperscript{111} Michael Grant, Art in the Roman Empire (London: Routledge, 1995), 106.
\textsuperscript{112} Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae V2: Herakles-Kenchrias (Et Addenda Epona, Galateia, Helios (In Peripheria Orientali), Helios/Usil, (Zürich: Artemis Verlag Zürich und München), 422.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
These trends continued under Commodus some decades later. Firstly, Commodus issued numerous coins and medallions depicting Janus, who was depicted variously as “erect and holding a sceptre”\textsuperscript{114}, the same format as on Hadrian’s coins, and also as the more traditional double-faced bust image.\textsuperscript{115} These coins, however, differed from those of Hadrian in that they prominently featured the inscribed name “COMMODIUS ANTONINUS”\textsuperscript{116}, which show Commodus’s own self-importance and use of Janus for his own purposes, similarly to what Nero had done over a century before. A much different portrayal of Janus during the reign of Commodus would later emerge, however. Although few primary literary sources about this era have survived, as previously mentioned, the \textit{Historia Augusta} contains the following passage about omens supposedly preceding the death of Commodus: \textit{Ianus geminus sua sponte apertus est, et Anubis simulacrum marmoreum moveri visum est. Herculis signum aeneum sudavit in Minucia per plures dies}.\textsuperscript{117}

Although the \textit{Historia Augusta} is extremely problematic as a historical text (the identity of its author or authors, and even the date when it was written, are still debated) and its contents should not be taken at face value, the text still provides some information about religion and religious attitudes of the time. Firstly, in addition to the monuments to traditional Greco-Roman divinities such as Janus and Hercules, fine statues and monuments for foreign gods (such as the Egyptian Anubis) had become part of the Roman city fabric by the turn of the third century. (These foreign gods often eclipsed native ones—notably Janus—in popularity.) In addition, the fact that the Janus Geminus “opened of its own will” is perhaps a deliberate reference by the author(s) of the \textit{Vita Commodi} to the traditional opening of the temple’s gates at the beginning

\textsuperscript{114}Syme, “Problems about Janus,” 210.
\textsuperscript{115}\textit{Lexicon Iconographum Mythologiae Classicae}, 422.
\textsuperscript{116}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117}Susan H. Ballou and Hermann Peter, ed. \textit{Historia Augusta} (Loeb Classical Library: 1921).
of war—a poetic foreshadowing of the decades of instability that would follow Commodus’s death.

Much of the third century C.E. was a time of political, economic, and social instability for the Roman Empire and is thus now known as the ‘Crisis of the Third Century.’ The state faced enemies on much of its borders, and any of the dozens of emperors during this period (as many as six in a single year) needed to control the restive military and opportunistic usurpers in the provinces. This was also a time of great social change and upheaval (largely because of the continued instability): for example, during this period, Christianity grew exponentially and thus added to the woes of the Roman state. While many scholars now agree that the scale of imperial persecution of Christians has been exaggerated, many followers nevertheless did die brutally as martyrs, and two major points driving these Roman persecutions were that Christian monotheism required its followers to eschew all Roman state practices associated with paganism, and the mass preaching that occurred, especially among already mistrusted foreigners and lower classes. Christian antipathy toward traditional Roman polytheism, including Janus, is visible in many of the faith’s early works, such as those of the late 4th century poet Prudentius. One of the stories related in his Peristephanon concerns the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence, who recites the following prayer as he is martyred:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \textit{fiat fidelis Romulus,} \\
& \textit{et ipse iam credat Numa.} \\
& \textit{confundit error Troicus} \\
& \textit{adhuc Catonum curiam,} \\
& \textit{veneratus occultis focis} \\
& \textit{Phrygium penates exules.} \\
& \textit{Ianum bifrontem et Sterculum} \\
& \textit{colit senatus (horreo} \\
& \textit{tot monstra patrum dicere) } \\
& \textit{et festa Saturni senis.} \\
& \textit{absterge, Christe, hoc dedecus,}
\end{align*}
\]
Lawrence’s disgust toward Roman paganism is very evident in this poem: he calls it a “Trojan mistake” that “confuses the Senate,” whom he claims “worships two-faced Janus, Sterculus (an obscure agricultural god relating to manure, sometimes invoked by Christians to discredit paganism\textsuperscript{119}) and senile Saturn.” His dying wish is for Jesus Christ to “cleanse this shame, and send Gabriel so that the false blindness of Iulus may know the true god.” Lawrence here is maintaining his loyalty to Rome. In spite of his rejection of paganism, he does not wish for the Roman state to be destroyed, but rather for it to be enlightened and converted to Christianity. Also, all of the pagan gods he names are ancient, mostly Italic deities, whom Prudentius perhaps mentions to remind the readers of Rome’s ancient past, while he attributes negative qualities such as dirtiness and senility to them. (The criticisms of Janus are less harsh than those of Sterculus and Saturn—he is called by the epithet ‘bifrons,’ which had been used for generations in a non-derogatory fashion. Therefore, Prudentius and other early Christians appear to have held Janus in higher regard than other pagan gods, perhaps due to his noble, stately nature removed from the other, more ‘sinful’ gods of antiquity.) In any case, since Lawrence was one of the most beloved saints in Rome even before his death in 258 C.E.,\textsuperscript{120} his martyrdom would have further galvanized support for Christianity and heightened criticism of traditional Roman religion.

Another trend that developed during the third century was literature set at Greek banquets where the characters would discuss history, religion, and learning, similarly to Plato’s 

\textit{Symposium}. One of the earliest of these works is the \textit{Deipnosophists}, by the author Athenaeus of


\textsuperscript{120} Ibid. 360.
Naucratis, a former Greek town in modern-day Egypt. Despite the heavily Hellenized origin and format inspired by Plato’s *Symposium*, these works often feature lengthy discussions about uniquely Roman or Italian topics, as this passage shows:

And Dracon of Corcyra tells us this in his treatise *On Precious Stones*, where his words are—"But it is said that Janus had two faces, the one looking forwards and the other backwards; and that it is from him that the mountain Janus and the river Janus are both named, because he used to live on the mountain. And they say that he was the first inventor of garlands, and boats, and ships; and was also the first person who coined brazen money. And on this account many cities in Greece, and many in Italy and Sicily, place on their coins a head with two faces, and on the obverse a boat, or a garland, or a ship. And they say that he married his sister Camese, and had a son named Aethex, and a daughter Olistene. And he, aiming at a more extended power and renown, sailed over to Italy, and settled on a mountain near Rome, which was called Janiculum from his name."\(^{121}\)

One of the most visible elements of this passage that distinguishes it from earlier etiological discussions of Janus and his worship is the heavy inclusion of Greek elements. Not only is the author of the entire book ethnically and culturally Greek, but the source cited in this passage (Dracon of Corcyra) is clearly Greek as well. This attests to the long-standing association of Greek culture with antiquity, erudition, and learning, which authors naturally would have wanted to utilize even if the subject of their literature was not originally Greek. Moreover, although elements of this description of Janus and his origins are consistent with earlier Italian sources (e.g. the god’s association with the Janiculum, his pioneering use of bronze money, and his frequent depiction on coins), Athenaeus ascribes several traits to Janus worship that have not appeared in earlier works, such as his taking his sister Camese as a consort and fathering children with her. Although other sources (such as Macrobius’ *Saturnalia*, which will be discussed later) mention Janus ruling Latium alongside a figure named Camese, the reference to Camese as Janus’ sister and their children Aethex and Olistene is unique to the *Deipnosophists*. Aethex and

\(^{121}\) Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, trans. C.D Yonge (1854).
Olistene are Greek-sounding names, so this fact, combined with the likely anachronistic mention of Janus appearing on Sicilian and Greek coins, shows a blending of Greek and Roman traditions under this new antiquarianism. Indeed, the Greek and earlier Roman pasts truly are ‘antique’ and so distant that the speaker seems to confuse otherwise disparate Greek and early Italian traditions. Even though the characters may converse in detached, academic-sounding fashions and inaccurately blend Greek and Roman elements, the *Deipnosophists* and similar works set at intellectual banquets contain a heavy sense of nostalgia and longing for a distant past, for which Janus was a fitting representative.

Nevertheless, Christianity became the dominant religion in the Roman Empire in the following century. Beginning under the emperor Constantine, who declared Christianity a protected religion in the Edict of Milan issued early in his reign, established Christian communities and their leaders were able to gain influence and new converts in the city of Rome and elsewhere, especially among the lower classes and foreigners. Old pagan families and the senatorial classes soon realized that their traditional way of life was being irreversibly transformed, and while some elites embraced Christianity (such as the mid-fourth century Junius Bassus, whose marble sarcophagus in the Vatican is a masterwork of Paleochristian art), others redoubled their efforts to remain personally pagan and preserve the works of their pagan ancestors. By the turn of the fifth century, this had contributed to a sort of artistic and historical renaissance:

Tatsächlich stand die Literatur im <<Symmachus-Kreis>> hoch im Kurs. Man schrieb Briefe und Gedichte, diskutierte über kulturgeschichtliche, religionsphilosophische und literarische Fragen und bemühte sich um die Sammlung und Verbreitung der Klassiker. Viele Texte sind uns nur deswegen
Perhaps the most famous example of late Roman, antiquarian-oriented literature is Macrobius’ *Saturnalia*. This story, another example of banquet-based literature, tells of the meeting of several wealthy pagans for a Saturnalia celebration. As in the *Deipnosophists* from almost a century earlier, much of the characters’ dialogue concerns historical, religious, and etiological matters. During one such discussion of early Italian history, Janus has a large role:

*Regionem istam, quae nunc vocatur Italia, regno Ianus optinuit, qui, ut Hyginus Protarchum Trallianum secutus tradit, cum Camese aequo indigena terram hanc ita participata potest invasit, ut regio Camesene, oppidum Ianiculum vocaretur. Post ad Ianum solum regnum redactum est, qui creditur geminam faciem praetulisse, ut quae ante quaeque post tergum essent intueretur: quod procul dubio ad prudentiam regis sollertiamque referendum est, qui et praeterita nosset et futura prospereret, sicut Antevorta et Postvorta, divinitatis scilicet aptissimae comites, apud Romanos coluntur. Hic igitur Ianus, cum Saturnum classe pervectum excepisset hospitio et ab eo edoctus peritiam ruris ferum illum et rudem ante fruges cognitas victum in melius redegisset, regni eum societate muneravit.*

Like that of the *Deipnosophists*, the *Saturnalia’s* treatment of Janus includes his early co-reign of Latium and the Janiculum with Camese at first and later with Saturn, and theories about the origins of some of his various mythological traits (such as how he gained his second face after Camese’s death), but this discussion includes much fewer Greek elements, likely because Macrobius was a native Italian. This suggests that even several hundred years into the Empire, regional religious differences still existed. Furthermore, even though these Roman traditionalists are celebrating the festival of Saturn (to whom Janus is inexorably linked in Roman mythology),

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122 Alexander Demandt, *Geschichte der Spätantike* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck oHG, 2008), 264. The German translates to “Literature was truly of high importance in Symmachus’ circle. People wrote letters and poems, discussed matters of cultural history, religious philosophy, and literature, and busied themselves with the collection and propagation of the classics. Many texts have only remained because in the duties of late Roman senators they were transferred from scrolls to books.” Thus, late antique scholarship is crucial to the study of earlier Greek and Roman society not only because of its role in preserving older sources, but also for its own secondary commentaries and responses to these older works.

the ancient Golden Age the holiday commemorates—and by association, Janus—are suggested to be very distant and remote from the current occasion. This anecdote takes the form of a dry passage from a history text, even though it is related in casual conversation, and since Macrobius was active as a writer around the turn of the fifth century C.E., shortly after the emperor Theodosius had made Christianity the state religion, one cannot help but consider this text as part of the end of an era. Polytheism certainly survived after Theodosius’s decree, but large-scale worship of ancient deities and celebrations such as the one in the text would vanish forever.

Even though his worship (as well as that of all other pagan gods) was banned by Theodosius, Janus appeared in other works of late Roman literature. The poet Claudian, in his *De Consulatu Stilichonis*, claims that, thanks to Stilicho’s deeds as consul, *cecidit Maurus, Germania cessit, et Ianum pax alta ligat*.124 Since Stilicho became consul after the outlawing of public pagan worship, the reference to “deep peace bind(ing) Janus”(that is, the gates of the Janus Geminus) shows that Janus had not only survived in folk memory, but also that the Christian establishment of the late imperial period apparently saw him as less of a threat than other pagan gods. Several factors contributed to this. One should keep in mind that “Christians were at the same time also Romans. Common education and values meant that the mental universe they inhabited was just the same as that of other Contemporary Romans; only then… were they Christians125,” so they maintained much of the same traits and habits as their pagan neighbors. As long as the ‘sinful’ and ‘decadent’ nature of traditional culture was not emphasized, the Christians were content to maintain these traditions. Indeed, some early Christian writers, who otherwise showed deep disgust with traditional polytheism, mentioned that Janus had a special role in Christian legend because the gates of the Janus Geminus

124 Claudian, *De Consulatu Stilichonis*, ed. Maurice Platnaeur (London and New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1922.)
supposedly closed themselves at the moment of Christ’s birth. Moreover, many of the
strongest criticisms early Christians had for polytheism concerned “the apparently human
characteristics of traditional deities,” especially the “immorality of the myths attached to
them.” Perhaps since Janus was seen both as largely separate from the rest of these ‘immoral’
gods and as part of Rome’s earliest origins, early Christian thinkers, polemicists, and leaders felt
more sympathetically toward him. Indeed, even Claudian, writing only a short period of time
after Theodosius’s decrees, included references to Janus’s religious rites in state-sponsored
literature.

Perhaps Janus’s own distance from popular Roman religion in the imperial period and his
comparatively sporadic appearances in imperial-era art and literature as a predominantly wise,
aloof figure bound to Rome’s distant past and the ‘Golden Age’ of the world—in other words, an
embodiment of pre-Christian Rome’s virtues and accomplishments—may have made him more
sympathetic to Christians in the late empire (as discussed above) and ensured his own survival in
later culture and knowledge. Janus often appeared in medieval psalters and books of hours as a
symbol of the month of January, and the classical mythology-influenced Carmina Burana of
the 13th century references Janus ‘making the year round’ in one section. Both of these
examples show Janus’s continuing presence in European folk memory even after the fall of the
Roman Empire. Furthermore, with the widespread revival of classicism in the Renaissance, even
the Vatican itself began to use Janus in the art it sponsored. Some clergymen, including Giles of

128 Ibid.
129 “Book of Hours, Use of Sarum, Fol. 001r.” Bodelian Library, University of Oxford. ARTstor
(Auct.D.inf.2.11_roll173B_frame1). ARTStor contains many other examples of Janus on medieval manuscripts; this
is only one of them.
augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost13/CarminaBurana/bur_cam1.html.
Viterbo during the papacy of Julius II, “preached that the god of Etruria, Janus, was also the god of the Vatican and the pagan twin of Moses and St. Peter” due to Janus’s ancient presence in the area (as the Janiculum is located just south of the Vatican Hill) and his role as one the earliest ancestors of Rome. Janus’s importance to the Vatican manifested itself again in the 1770s when the extensive museums were built, and *The Triumph of History over Time*, an allegorical fresco on the ceiling of the Vatican library, features Janus himself pointing the way to the door of the new museum. Janus’s post-antique presence in art occurred outside the Vatican as well: one example out of many is with Peter Paul Rubens, who produced a number of sketches of classical-inspired double-faced heads, as well as a painting of the opening of the Janus Geminus. These post-classical works depict Janus as a venerable protector of the state and government, an ancient ancestor and creator, or as the bringer of transitions and new opportunities.

This all shows that the trends begun in antiquity of depicting Janus in these ways have continued for centuries, and Janus’ singular nature has allowed him to maintain this presence in lore and tradition even when other gods more widely worshipped in antiquity have fallen into obscurity. In brief, although ancient sources show Janus as an austere yet powerful god bound to the origins of Rome (and various leaders emphasized this role of his in their own propaganda campaigns), by the time of the high empire he had largely disappeared from popular devotion, with the exception of various intellectuals who compiled etiologies about him. Nevertheless, it was his simultaneous connection to Rome’s glorious nature and relative isolation from the supposed sinfulness of other pagan gods that endeared him to early Christians. As is fitting to a

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god of paradoxes and contrasts, his preservation in post-antique folklore perhaps owes much to his distance from popular worship.
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