



## Res Gestae Divi Augusti, chapter 13

See Augustus, *Res Gestae divi Augusti* (General Background) for the historical context of the *Res Gestae*.

**Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):** Eulogy / Panegyric / Elogium.

**Original Location/Place:** Rome, Ancyra, Antioch in Pisidia, Apollonia, Sardis.

**Date:** 14 CE

**Language:** Latin, Greek

**Category:** Roman

**Commentary:** Chapter 13 marks a significant point in the *Res Gestae*: the culmination of Augustus's efforts to bring peace to the Roman world, and the symbolic statement of a new era in Rome's history that his rule has produced. The chapter describes the so-called 'Gates of Janus,' which according to earliest history of Rome, stood open when Rome was at war. These 'gates' were in fact a shrine (to *Ianus Geminus*), consisting of two sets of double-doors connected by flanking walls, which stood in the north-eastern corner of the Roman Forum, near the Senate House (Platner and Ashby, *Dictionary*, p. 278-80). When Rome was properly at peace on land and at sea (the *terra marique* given in the text), the gates of this 'passage-way' shrine were symbolically closed.

The antiquity of this tradition may, according to Ronald Syme, be a further instance of Augustus reviving a 'spurious' religious custom in order to fit with his political ideology and message, which might explain the detailed attention that it receives in this chapter, as well as its deliberate placement after the discussion of the Altar of Augustan Peace (Syme, *Problems about Janus*, p. 188). However, both Livy and Pliny the Elder attributed the custom to the second King of Rome, Numa Pompilius, whom they credit with the shrine's foundation (Livy, *History of Rome* 1.19.2; Pliny, *Natural History*, 34.33). This would certainly fit with Augustus's preoccupation with reviving old ancestral practices (*maiores nostri*), and the return to more strict religious observance as a route to stability and security. The closure of the gates had been achieved only twice before (*bis omnino clausum fuisse*), once under Numa, after which the gates remained closed for 43 years, and once after the end of the First Punic War in 253 BCE (they were, however, opened again that same year). In this chapter, the closure of the gates is more firmly allied with military success in the statement 'peace had been achieved by victories' (*esset parva victoriis pax*), which speaks in some degree to the ideology of *Pax Romana* itself; this was not just 'peace', but 'peace as a result of military victory' (Rich, *Augustus, war and peace*, p. 329-57). This reference to military conquest is omitted in the Greek version of the text, playing down Augustus's role as a conqueror in a similar way to the phrasing of the heading of the Greek version of the text, which also avoided the overt statement of world dominance found in the Latin (see Vanotti, *Il testo greco*, p. 313; *Res Gestae divi Augusti*, Heading). It is also worth noting the interesting use of the word 'imperium' here, where it is used to refer to a geographical entity: the whole *empire* of the Roman people (*per totum imperium populi Romani*). This is at odds with its usage elsewhere in the *Res Gestae*; *imperium* is given in the context of the rods that symbolise magisterial authority (1.2), in describing consular power (8.3), and as the political supremacy of the Roman people (26.1, 30.1), yet here it is used in a territorial fashion. Richardson states that this was a new development in its usage particular to the Augustan age. It came to express the idea of an area over which Rome exerted control, rather than the measure of control itself (Richardson, *Imperium Romanum*, p. 141-42).

The most important ideological message of the closure of the Gates of Janus is that their closure under Augustus marks the beginning of a new political era, marked by his assertion that such a feat had been achieved only twice before his birth (*priusquam nasceretur*). This direct statement of a new age is visible most clearly in the Greek text, where Alison Cooley has noted the use of *ai?n* (????) instead of the more temporal *chronos* (??????), (*Res Gestae*, p. 158), in what Trevor Luke has determined as a "significant schematization of time" (Luke, *Ushering in a New Republic*, p. 253). This, of course, echoes the prophecy made by Jupiter to Venus in the *Aeneid*, in which the closure of the gates is linked to the birth of a 'Caesar,' of Trojan origins (*Aeneid* I.286: '*nascetur pulchra Troianus origine*'). Augustus himself promoted the favourable prophecy of his birth, even publishing an edict containing details of his horoscope in 11 CE (Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 56.25.5), and issuing coins in Rome and the provinces containing his zodiacal symbol, the Capricorn (Cooley, *Res Gestae* p. 159). After years of civil war, it is not surprising that Augustus was so successful in communicating this message of new beginnings; he had brought the bloodshed to an end, restored the religious and political traditions of the Republic and confirmed peace throughout Roman territory. His leadership surely marked the inauguration of a more prosperous, peaceful and



successful era.

The final line of chapter 13 has caused some debate; it stated that under Augustus, the Gates of Janus were closed three times (*ter me principe senatus claudendum esse censuit*). Ronald Ridley and Ronald Syme have both argued that this sentence is deliberately ambiguous, to mask the fact that although the senate decreed the closure of the gates three times, they were actually closed only twice, once to mark the end of the war against Marc Antony and Cleopatra (29 BCE) and at the end of the Cantabrian War in 25 BCE (Ridley, *Emperor's Retrospect*, p. 114-5; Syme, *Problems about Janus*, p. 188-204). A third instance appears to be mentioned by Suetonius (*Augustus* 22.1), but there is no clear evidence as to the exact circumstances, and the date of 2 BCE given by Orosius (*History against the Pagans* 6.22.1, 22.5) is impossible given the on-going military campaigns on the Rhine and Danube (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 160). Although various suggestions have been made as to when this third closure may have occurred – between the end of the German war in 8/7 BCE and 1 BCE when Gaius set out for Macedonia, or to coincide with the dedication of the Altar of Augustan Peace – it is difficult to identify exactly when the third instance of the Gates closure took place. In this final line of chapter 13, Augustus refers to himself as *princeps* – the ‘first man’. This was a word loaded with Republican sentiment, and had been used to describe certain key individuals, most notably the Republic’s founder Lucius Brutus, yet it was adopted by Augustus to explain and define his leading role in the state (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 160). His position as the ‘first’ man depended in part on the legal powers he had taken, but more importantly on his *auctoritas* (authority); it was the combination of this influential quality with the Republican overtones of the title and the act described here in chapter 13 that gave Augustus such a vital and successful hold over Rome. By closing the Gates of Janus Augustus intrinsically linked Peace with Victory in an innovative way that both defined a new system of government and associated his own career as *princeps* with the periods of peace of Rome’s earliest history.

Keywords in the original language:

- Janus
- clausus
- imperium
- populus romanus
- terra
- mare
- pax
- victoria
- urbs
- princeps
- senatus
- ????
- ????????
- ????????
- ??
- ????????
- ????????
- ????????

Thematic keywords:

- Augustus
- peace
- Pax Romana
- imperium
- conquest
- temple of Janus
- door

**Bibliographical references:** Augustus, Brunt, Peter A., Moore, John M., *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: the achievements of the divine Augustus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967)

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Text

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Before the crossing of the Rubicon, Caesar met with an image of *patria*.

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