



[Ovid, Fasti I.1-26](#)

Dedication to Caesar Germanicus

Name of the author: Ovid

Date: 1 CE to 8 CE

Place: Rome and Tomis

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Literary genre: Poetry

Title of work: Fasti

Reference:

I.1-26

Commentary:

The *Fasti*, Ovid's commentary on the Roman calendar and its festivities, opens with this dedication to Caesar Germanicus, the adopted heir of Tiberius, and grandson of Augustus. The dedicatee has been the source of much discussion among interpreters, as in the *Tristia* (II.549-552) Ovid claims that it is in fact the Princeps, Augustus, to whom he dedicates the work, and that his writing of the poem (which he claims was to be twelve books long, rather than the six that we possess) was interrupted by his exile in 8 CE. Most scholars, however, believe that this is merely apologetic exaggeration, and that the confusion over the dedication is due to a revision of the *Fasti* made while Ovid was exiled in Torus (see John Miller, *Style, Structure, and Time*, p. 167). Augustus died in 14 CE, and it is commonly thought that Ovid changed the dedicatee upon his demise. Various interpretations of the *Fasti* see the poem as being significantly influenced by the poet's exile, either through the updating of its encomium (e.g. Geraldine Herbert-Brown, *Ovid and the Fasti*), or as at certain points critical of Augustus's regime and the brutalities of Rome's past (e.g. Carol Newlands, *Playing with Time*, p. 6, 9, 13, 18). For Newlands, the opening dedication is a clear example of later revision, especially given that the second book begins with a dedication to Augustus (II.3-18). The Roman calendar, as Mary Beard has argued, was something of great political significance, through which Roman national identity was constructed and disseminated among the people (Mary Beard, "A Complex of Times," p. 1-15). Augustus's restoration of temples and religious cults (referred to in this passage at verse 13) went hand in hand with his self-placement into the calendar next to Roman deities – veneration of the imperial family, therefore, became an integral part of Roman identity (see Carol Newlands, *Playing with Time*, p. 12).

The invocation to Caesar Germanicus is split into two parts, first recognising his status as the heir to the imperial throne (3-14), and then praising his literary and civic skills (15-26). Ovid likely saw Germanicus as an appropriate face for his message, and re-dedicated the poem after Augustus's death to address the changing political situation in Rome and perhaps partly to woo Augustus's widow, Livia, and Germanicus in an attempt to seek his return to Rome from exile (Steven Green, *Ovid, Fasti I*, p. 17). It was probably Germanicus's appointment as consul in 12 CE that alerted Ovid to his growing success and popularity as a speaker in the law courts, and therefore to the advantage of being in favour with the prince. Ovid's epistle to Suillius Rufus, *Ex Ponto* 4.8 (15-16 CE), promises to sing of Germanicus's accomplishments through poetic verse, and vows (*votum*) to the prince as a deity; this opening passage of the *Fasti*, therefore, appears to fulfil this promise. The portrayal of Germanicus as both a human patron and a divine protector of poetry in verses 5-6 effectively assigns him a role usually held by the Muses or Apollo (the latter of whom is compared with the young prince in verse 20), which mirrors Virgil's description of Octavian in his first *Georgic* (40-42) (Steven Green, *Ovid, Fasti I*, p. 33, 41). Verse 17 furthers this divine association by opening the plea for Germanicus's favour with the imperative form *da*, which Steven Green points out is commonly used in the openings of prayers (Steven Green, *Ovid, Fasti I*, p. 40). The religious overtones of the passage are extremely apparent, with verses 7 and 8 strongly alluding through the use of the term *sacra* to the public elements of state religious practice. Verse 9, moreover, evokes with the phrase *festas domestica vobis* ("festivals pertaining to your house") the festival days that were added to the Roman calendar by Julius Caesar and Augustus, asserting Germanicus's connection to the imperial house of Augustus through references to his *pater* (father), *avus* (grandfather), and *frater* (brother) (10-12), who in reality were his uncle (Tiberius), his



adoptive grandfather (Augustus), and his cousin (Drusus)! Steven Green argues that Ovid intends here to “gloss over” the fact that the early part of the first century CE saw several anxious adoptions into the imperial family, and states absolutely that the success of Augustus and Tiberius will naturally be transferred to the young heirs (Germanicus and Drusus) (Steven Green, *Ovid, Fasti I*, p. 36).

Ovid claims that he will not expound Caesar’s military victories, but rather his religious achievements, which we can understand as all the instalments of sacred spaces made by the Julian family (13-14). The juxtaposition of war and religion here seems to praise the Principate’s revival of religious practice and yearn for peace over conflict (this minimising of war is highlighted in Augustan iconography by Paul Zanker, *Images in the Age of Augustus*, p. 110-114). However, there remains the fact here that a great number of the religious festival days that Ovid records in the *Fasti* are based on military triumphs.

Keywords in the original language:

- [ara](#)
- [civicus](#)
- [deus](#)
- [domesticus](#)
- [honor](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [altar](#)
- [calendar](#)
- [family](#)
- [festival](#)
- [Imperial family](#)
- [Roman religion](#)
- [war](#)

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