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## JANUS, THE PATRON OF ARCHIVES AND ARCHIVISTS?

### Abstract

**Purpose:** *In recent decades, the ancient Roman god Janus has been adopted as the patron of archival science worldwide. Despite this, there has been little exploration into why this specific deity was chosen. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the connection between Janus and the archival field, including records management.*

**Methods:** *The study begins by examining the characteristics and epithets of the Roman god Janus. It then explores how these traits relate to archival principles, archiving processes, and records management. A detailed comparative analysis is conducted to establish a coherent framework for linking Janus to the archival profession.*

**Results:** *The analysis reveals that Janus' symbolic representation—looking both to the past and the future—mirrors the fundamental role of archives and records management. This duality supports his suitability as the patron of the archival field, encompassing both historical preservation and future-oriented records management.*

**Conclusions/findings:** *The study introduces the concept of the “archival hermeneutic circle” to illustrate the continuing relevance of Janus within archival science. It also emphasizes the evolving significance of Janus as the patron of archives and records management, extending from historical contexts to modern-day practices and future developments in the 21st century.*

**Keywords:** *god Janus; patron of archives; archival hermeneutic circle; archival science; archival theory*

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## GIANO, IL PATRONO DEGLI ARCHIVI E DEGLI ARCHIVISTI?

### **Abstract**

**Scopo:** *Negli ultimi decenni, l'antico dio romano Giano è stato adottato come patrono della scienza archivistica in tutto il mondo. Nonostante ciò, si è indagato poco sul perché questa divinità specifica sia stata scelta. Questo studio mira a colmare questa lacuna analizzando la connessione tra Giano e il campo archivistico, inclusa la gestione dei documenti.*

**Metodi:** *Lo studio inizia esaminando le caratteristiche e gli epiteti del dio romano Giano. Quindi esplora come questi tratti si relazionano ai principi archivistici, ai processi di archiviazione e alla gestione dei documenti. Viene condotta un'analisi comparativa dettagliata per stabilire un quadro coerente per collegare Giano alla professione archivistica.*

**Risultati:** *L'analisi rivela che la rappresentazione simbolica di Giano, rivolta sia al passato che al futuro, rispecchia il ruolo fondamentale degli archivi e della gestione dei documenti. Questa dualità supporta la sua idoneità come patrono del campo archivistico, che comprende sia la conservazione storica che la gestione dei documenti orientata al futuro.*

**Conclusioni/risultati:** *lo studio introduce il concetto di „circolo ermeneutico archivistico“ per illustrare la continua rilevanza di Giano all'interno della scienza archivistica. Sottolinea inoltre l'importanza in evoluzione di Giano come patrono degli archivi e della gestione dei documenti, che si estende dai contesti storici alle pratiche moderne e agli sviluppi futuri nel 21° secolo.*

**Parole chiave:** *dio Giano; patrono degli archivi; circolo ermeneutico archivistico; scienza archivistica; teoria archivistica*

## JANUS, ZAŠČITNIK ARHIVOV IN ARHIVISTOV?

### **Izvleček**

**Namen:** *V zadnjih desetletjih se starorimskega boga Janusa časti kot zaščitnika arhivistike po vsem svetu. Kljub temu je zelo slabo raziskano, zakaj je bilo izbrano to specifično božanstvo. Namen te študije je odpraviti to vrzel z analizo povezave med Janusom in arhivskim področjem, vključno z upravljanjem dokumentov.*

**Metode:** *Raziskava se začne s preučevanjem značilnosti in epitetov rimskega boga Janusa. Nato raziskuje, kako so te lastnosti povezane z arhivskimi načeli, procesi arhiviranja in upravljanjem dokumentov. Izvedena je podrobna primerjalna analiza za vzpostavitev skladnega okvira za povezovanje Janusa z arhivsko stroko.*

**Rezultati:** *Analiza razkriva, da Janusova simbolična predstavitev – če pogledamo tako v preteklost kot prihodnost – odraža temeljno vlogo upravljanja arhivov in dokumentov. Ta dvojnost podpira njegovo primernost za zaščitnika arhivskega področja, ki zajema tako ohranjanje zgodovine kot v prihodnost usmerjeno upravljanje dokumentov.*

**Sklepi/ugotovitve:** *Študija uvaja koncept “arhivskega hermenevtičnega kroga”, da bi ponazorila pomembnost Janusa v arhivski znanosti. Poudarja tudi razvijajoči se pomen Janusa kot zaščitnika arhivov in upravljanja z dokumenti, ki sega od zgodovinskih kontekstov do sodobnih praks in se nadaljuje tudi v 21. stoletju.*

**Ključne besede:** *bog Janus; mecen arhivov; arhivski hermenevtični krožek; arhivistika; arhivska teorija*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Archiving, like most other fields of human activity, needs a patron to protect and guide ‘their ward’ and guarantee successful development and hopeful future of the particular field. As archivists had for a long time been “patronless”, in the 20th century they set out on not a very intensive search, but a search nevertheless for a patron to claim their own. It is advisable that when it comes to patrons, their origin, status, and moral authority place them among the most respectable. That is why various social groups, as well as guilds, artisans and other craftsmen looked for their patrons among the Christian saints or, in hand with older traditions, ancient gods. This is also the case of the archival field; in rather sporadic discussions during the last century, the ancient Roman god Janus crystallized as the main candidate for the patron of the field. The lengthy controversial debate was brought to a close when the International Council on Archives (ICA), the main international body representing the archival profession, finally chose Janus’ image as the basis for its official logo some time ago.

Janus had been used before, namely in the 1980s, when first the name was used as the title of some of the International Council on Archives publication platforms, and then as the title of its comprehensive journal representing this major institution of international archiving with a global reach (a brief reflection on the journal was given, for example, by Weber, 1989. At the turn of the millennium, “Janus” journal reincarnated into its successor “Comma”). But the god has also found supporters in some other countries. In the Czech Republic, for example, his was chosen as the name of a special program used until recently for archival organization and description.

True, Janus has not been keeping an eye on archives and archivists for centuries; however, every tradition needs a beginning, let this be ours. Perhaps in the case of the appropriation of the god Janus by the archival field, it will be possible to establish a tradition that is sustainable, meaningful and enriching for this field. But why has Janus been chosen? The International Council on Archives explained the design of its logo, based on the character of the god Janus, as representing “the double perspective of the archivist, towards the past and towards the future. It also depicts the circulation of different types of information, with which archives are concerned, from the earliest forms of documents through the electronic byte”

(cf. Glossary of terms often used in ICA). Does Janus really conform to these archival specifics? Is the god Janus the best possible archival patron, as Richard Pearce-Moses (Pearce-Moses, 2007, 13), author of what is currently, in my opinion, the best terminological explanatory dictionary for the field of archives and records management (Pearce-Moses, 2005), believes? German archivists also refer to the god Janus in connection with the archival field (see the proceedings of the German Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records published as Unverhau (ed.), 2003).

Let us now take a closer look at this ancient god, a god of many layers and one of the most complex deities of the Roman pantheon; the following text will try and show how he is a suitable candidate for the patron of the archival field.

## 2. JANUS AS AN ANCIENT ROMAN GOD

Janus was one of the most prominent Roman gods and at the same time, he is one of the primordial Roman deities without a Greek equivalent. He is usually depicted as having two faces, one looking forward, one backward (occasionally he is shown with four faces, each looking towards a different cardinal direction) a characteristic sign by which we can always recognize him. The ancient Romans often called him Janus pater since he was a friendly and kind god (Saska & Groh, 1949, 220). For the biggest celebration of Janus, on New Year (Kalendae Ianuariae), people dressed festively and were even forbidden to speak evil words, their speech was supposed to be kind and noble.

According to one of his oldest epithets, Janus was the god of entrances, doors and gates, which is why he was often depicted with a key (Roscher, 1894–1897, 29; Macrobius, 2011, Book I.). After all, “janua” means the entrance door or doorway. Such patronage does not strike us as unusual today. In ancient Italy, however, the entrance, threshold, and the hearth or fireplace were considered the most important and sacred parts of a house (the goddess Vesta ruled over the hearth and fireplace); the beginnings and endings of things were just as important, and were yet another of Janus’ domains, as we shall see shortly. Janus’ two faces, as Roscher points out, is an analogy of human guardians of doors and doorways, who need to pay attention to both, those, who arrive and enter as well as those who leave (Roscher, 1894–1897, 33). At the end of the day, entrances are also places of exits and departures.

Only later did other epithets of the god Janus evolve from this original designation, and he came to be seen as the ideal opener and closer, as well as the protector of Heaven and the Universe in general (Roscher, 1894–1897, 35). This is also the origin of the philosophical idea of Janus as a divine demiurge and organizer of the world, or even as a god of Heaven (as the Etruscans saw him, for example), a sun god and creator of the world. Some ancient Romans derived the depiction of the two-faced Janus from this very notion, along with the analogy of the rising sun opening the day and the setting sun closing the day (Macrobius, 2011, Book I, Sec. 9).

Janus' role as an opener and closer was also manifested in the crystallization of yet another epithet connected with human nature, namely the closed virgin body and its opening during the first pregnancy and childbirth. The hymen represents a cap and a woman's fertility depends on its opening. In this respect, Janus represented the god, who created, i.e., gave birth to man (Roscher, 1894–1897, 36).

Another epithet is not far from this image, Janus being the god of beginnings. The interconnection showed also on a linguistic level; the terms entrance, door, gate and beginning were conceptually related. The Latin term "initium" originally meant to enter, an entrance, and thus also to begin, a beginning, and similarly the verb "inire" meant to enter and to begin (Roscher, 1894–1897, 37). In contrast, the term "exitum", "exitus", meant an exit in the sense of the exit door, but equally in the sense of an end, goal, death, and extinction. Also the word "janua" had a figurative meaning of a beginning, introduction.

The beginnings of natural periods of time were dedicated to Janus: the beginning of the day, month, and year with Januarius being the first month. Janus was also dedicated the beginning of every work endeavour and important undertaking in public and private life (Saska & Groh, 1949, 220). Again, to modern eye, the patrocini-um of beginnings may seem a not particularly unusual domain. But for the ancient Roman, the beginning and the end were the most important parts of any one thing, or rather the most important phase in their development and entire existence, as Cicero also pointed out in characterizing the nature of the god Janus. "Also, as the beginning and the end are the most important parts of all affairs, they held that Janus is the leader in a sacrifice, the name being derived from ire ('to go'), hence the names jani for archways and januae for the front doors of secular buildings." (Cicero, 1967, Book II, Sec. 27, 67). Here, too, the very strong

position of Janus among the Roman gods and in the consciousness of Roman society was expressed.

Janus also used to be etymologically and semantically associated with the Greek term “chaos”, respectively with the verb “chaskein” and its Latin analogue “hi-are”<sup>2</sup>, as, e.g., Ovid wrote in his work *Fasti*, and as was for the first time suggested by Paul the Deacon (Ovidius, 1959, Book I, Sec. 103).<sup>3</sup>

Janus also watched over war and peace, especially their beginnings and endings. After all, the Temple of Janus in the Forum Romanum closed its gates in times of peace in the empire, and opened its gates in times of war.

Another specific and for the archival field a very remarkable epithet is Janus’ designation as the god of springs. Although his position as the god of springs is not fully confirmed, it is very likely that the ancient Romans attributed Janus the function of opening and closing springs of water (Roscher, 1894–1897, 41, 44–45). Such a determination was perhaps born from the fact that earthly water comes from Heaven, it originates there and is nourished by it (Deecke, 1876, 125). And it was Janus, who was the god of Heaven and beginnings. Janus’ connection to springs is also confirmed by the identification of the god of springs, Fontus (Fons, Fontus or Fontanus), as Janus’ son, although this is a younger Roman interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

Janus was sometimes portrayed holding the number three hundred in his right hand and the number sixty-five in his left hand (Macrobius, 2011, Book I, Sec. 9), sometimes also, especially in the Hermetic tradition, together with the depiction of Ouroboros, the serpent devouring its own tail, a symbol of time and infinity. It did express that there existed an equally important phenomenon over which Janus extended his divine power, the phenomenon of time itself: “*I sit at heaven’s gate with the gentle Hours; my office regulates the goings and the comings of Jupiter himself.*” (Ovidius, 1959, Book I, Sec. 125–127, 11).

Not only does Janus preside over time, to some extent he also controls the movement of Jupiter as the ruler of the gods. Ultimately, it is Janus who sits at the gate

2 in the original meaning of “to gape”, “to be open”.

3 On this topic: Roscher, 1894–1897, 43; see also Green, 2004, 75; as well as others, such as Frazer (1929, 100): “*Ovid seems to accept the absurd derivation of the name Janus which is recorded by Festus, or rather his abbreviator Paulus Diaconus, who in his turn probably took it over from the learned grammarian Verrius Flaccus.*”; also Capdeville, 1973, 399.

4 Fritz Böhm’s interpretation in Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft 1909, 2839 (Roscher, 1884–1890, 1496).

of Heaven and decides who gets access to Heaven and the gods. If a Roman wanted his prayers to any deity answered, it was appropriate to first call upon Janus to open the way of prayer to him: *“Next I asked, ‘Why, Janus, while I propitiate other divinities, do I bring incense and wine first of all to thee?’ Quoth he, ‘It is that through me, who guard the thresholds, you may have access to whatever gods you please.’”* (Ovidius, 1959, Book I, Sec. 171–174, 15).

Many features of Janus’ nature show that he is in transition, there is a certain movement and change associated with him. He was also considered the ruler of journeys, which is why he was depicted not only with a key, but also with a staff (Macrobius, 2011, Book I, Sec. 9). But above all, one distinctive sign stands out, the fact that he stands on the transition line, on the edge. Whether it be the dividing line between day and night, entry and exit, beginning and end, the transition from old to new, from non-being to being, the change of the ending year into the new one, etc., it is always some kind of a dividing line or edge separating different things that at the same time often constitute polar opposites. All of this is expressed in the extremely peculiar depiction of this powerful two-faced god, whose faces not only look in opposite directions but sometimes also look very different; it is this difference, this otherness that can once again express the polarity, the opposite phenomena, sections or spheres whose transition line the god Janus guards. He does not only guard the line, he sanctifies it, or rather: The supreme importance, even sacredness, of such lines, changes or turning points was reflected in the very fact that they were endowed with their own divine guardian. The peculiarity of Janus’ essence, consisting in his being on the transition line, in expressing and sanctifying these lines, edges, transformations, especially of limit positions (creation/extinction, beginning/end, day/night, entry/exit, etc.), is shown in another of his specific abilities: *“But what god am I to say thou art, Janus of double shape? for Greece hath no divinity like thee. The reason, too, unfold why alone of all the heavenly ones thou dost see both back and front.”* (Ovidius, 1959, Book I, Sec. 89–92, 9).

Janus was knowledgeable of things past and at the same time could foresee things future, which is related to his power over time itself, as demonstrated above. Indeed, Macrobius, a Neoplatonic philosopher at the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries, sees this as one of the possible reasons why Janus is depicted with

two faces looking in opposite directions (Macrobius, 2011, Book I, Sec. 9, 4, 93). In any case, however, this is a transition that occupies a special position in the domain of archives, historians, creators and managers of sources. It is the divide between the past and the future, the line between what happened and what is coming. It is the question of why and in what sense Janus should also take on the position of the patron of archives and archivists.

### **3. JANUS AS THE GOD OF ARCHIVES, ARCHIVISTS AND RECORDS MANAGERS**

So why can the god Janus be a suitable candidate for the god and patron of archives, archivists and the whole archival industry?

Janus is the god of beginnings, and in a specific sense as shown above, he probably watched over water springs, being the father of Fontus, the god of springs. Similarly, the work of archivists and historians should begin with the springs, i.e., the primary beginnings of the past in the sense of the first source traces, the original imprints of events and deeds in material and not solely written documents. Archives are the primordial waters of these primary sources of history. Archival records, as the leading representatives of historical sources, stand in a way at the beginning of history in the sense of creating our ideas about the past, of making history and its construction.

A source in general marks the beginning of something, it marks something from which something else follows, from which it “springs”, on which it is built and without which it would not be possible at all. History would not be possible without source traces, nor, of course, without their interpreters.

However, it is not only historical work, which is supposed to be based on sources. Any quality intellectual performance must have a strong foundation and thus also be built on quality sources of information, this time not specifically on historical sources, but sources of information in various respects. Archives then play a key role as a repository of a large and diverse range of information sources that can be used in an unexpectedly wide range of contexts.

The god Janus presides over time itself. And time is the base nutrient of history. From the perspective of historical sciences, time is not something tangible, on the contrary, it is something very difficult to grasp, as St. Augustine laconically put it:

*“What, then, is time? If no one ask of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not.”* (Augustinus, 1943, Book XI, Sec. 14, 285). History, however, could not happen in timelessness. The phenomenon of time, analysed countless times from various perspectives, has naturally become an attractive phenomenon in historical science. Fernand Braudel used the assumption of time passing at different speeds or rates to develop the famous concept of “longue durée” – “long duration”.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the “surface history of events” most often studied by historical science, Braudel pointed to the duration of collective destinies, movements of the whole, particularly reflected in the history of structures, economic systems, states, societies, cultures, techniques of warfare, etc. But for him the imaginary highest plane was the virtually immobile history of man in his relationship to the environment, whose movement can hardly be captured. Yet Braudel’s time is primarily “objective” time, understood from the position of its “external” existence. Later in the 20th century, however, historians also began to examine time as a “subjective” phenomenon, that is, time as experienced by people, historical actors. How does time pass for a prisoner in a long-term sentence? How does it unfold for a 15th century peasant in his ever-recurring agricultural cycle? Time is therefore not only the medium in which history unfolds and moves; it is also the proper subject of reflection for historians, archival thinkers and other scholarly movements. It became an important phenomenon for the development of the methodology of historical and archival science. The god Janus also watches over this time in its various facets and functions.

The most characteristic of Janus’ signs, by which he can be instantly recognized, i.e., his gaze looking in opposite directions, expresses several levels relevant to the archival field. This is where Herbert E. Angel sought the roots of why Janus could be considered the patron not only of archives, but also of intermediate records depositories and records centers (Angel, 1968, 5). Fifty years ago, he pointed out that this expresses the characteristic feature of intermediate records depositories and records centers, which also turn the gaze in two different directions: on the one hand, they look towards offices, from which “living” records come, and on the other hand, they turn towards archives, where some of these records eventually end up for permanent preservation.

5 The concept of the *longue durée* has its roots in Braudel, 1949. The seminal essay is Braudel, 1958.

After all, Janus' probably most significant epithet, namely his patronage of borderline things, of the transitions and transformations (day and night, east and west, entry and exit, coming and going, things past and future) resonates very well in contemporary archival sector. It is currently in a situation of a fundamental transition between the paper and digital worlds, which is gradually and in an increasingly more dynamic way reflected in the whole sector<sup>6</sup>.

In the end, Janus, who "sees all that is behind, all that is in front", Janus, who has knowledge of things past and the ability to foresee things future, appears before us. Although it may not be obvious at first glance, one of the most distinctive attributes of the archivist's profession is the simultaneous straddling of the past and the future, a feature that appears in multiple archival activities. This is most evident in the archival appraisal of records, in which the archivist selects a part of the emerging documentation, and thus potential source traces, for permanent preservation in the archives, and at the same time designates another part for irreversible destruction. A phenomenon, it might seem, obvious and even vague to some. But that would be a big mistake!

Our access to the past is not without restrictions. The historian or anyone else is always somehow limited in their approach. One such limitation beyond which they cannot go is the range of sources available to them. They can expand them to a certain extent, especially with the help of diverse and changing interpretative keys, but they will always have to move in a field defined by what has survived from the traces of the past. Archives and archivists who carry out archival appraisal of records are those key actors defining the milestones in this field. On its way to understanding the past, the future is always forced to view it through the filter that archives have applied to the body of emerging records and information in the process of radical destruction of documentary wealth in the course of archival appraisal of records.

It is at this point that we begin to find the justification as to why the archive and the archivist stand at the boundary between the past and the future, and why Janus can be an extremely suitable and useful patron. In the course of archival appraisal of records, the archivist becomes, figuratively speaking, a kind of oracle

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6 The reflection of the consecration of the god Janus in the phenomenon of the transition from the world of paper to the world of the digital has been highlighted by Pearce-Moses (2007, 13, 20).

turned to the future and looking back not only to their present, but even further into the past, to the time of the creation of the source traces they are facing and with which they must deal in a certain and irreversible manner. They try to anticipate what of the past will be of interest to the future. It is actually the present looking into the future, returning from there to the present and even further into the past. How are we to understand this?

The archivist, when considering what part of the immeasurable whole of records production to preserve permanently and what part to destroy, always – consciously or unconsciously – moves into the future and asks what materials the future time will probably be interested in (being fully aware of the tricky and deceptive nature of such an intention). Such records will then be prioritised for permanent preservation. The concept of the archivist as a backward-looking oracle, the fact that they appraise and select records, that they designate many of them for irreversible destruction, and that in doing so they also take into account the search for and presumed interest of future generations in the selected part of the archival material – all of this entitles us to the following statement: The future age will be forced to learn about the past based, among other things, on what the past age thought about “its” future. We are actually standing in front of an imaginary *archival hermeneutic circle*. On the one hand, the future will always be dependent on the past, as it will only have at its disposal those archival records that were chosen by a past time, by past archivists. On the other hand, however, these “past” archivists are essentially tied to the future in the constitution of the source heritage and the archival appraisal of records, in that they are always transported into the future at the moment of deciding what they will permanently preserve for the needs of future generations, what part of the immeasurable whole of records production they will permanently preserve and what part they will designate for destruction. Their decision-making is very often, perhaps usually, based on the answer – naturally always only hypothetical – to the question: What will the future era be interested in from the archival heritage of the past?

Both members of this circle are intertwined and bound together. The future, in that its own relating to the past, and therefore the constitution of its own history and thus of itself, is dependent on the past, not only in the otherwise quite vague position of claiming that it always builds on and from the past, but equally in the

fact that the past will preserve for the future only a fraction of the source material through which the future will access the past. But especially in the sense that the future, in its understanding of the past, of history and thus of itself, is dependent on the form and character of the link and understanding by which the past related to this future in the specific case of archival appraisal of records. However, relation and dependence also apply in the opposite direction. The archivist, i.e., the past (looking at it now from the perspective of a future relationship to archival materials), is dependent on the future in their act of selecting records, precisely because they will always inquire about what materials the future will want to have available and will base their decision on the result of this inquiry. Moreover, it will always be the case that at the same time the assumption of future interest can never, in principle, be verified and confirmed in advance by the archivist. It will always be a mere hypothesis on the part of them selecting and appraising records, which can certainly be based on various more or less plausible assumptions about the future development of the world and history.

Thus, in the archival domain a specific form of an *open historicity* is constituted, essentially unfolding and growing out of the presented archival hermeneutic circle rooted in mutual conditioning and dependence on the one hand of the person constituting a key part of the source testimony about the past on the assumption of a certain form of future interest in a certain part of this source material, on the other hand, the dependence of the future on the idea of its own past. This was reflected in the special case in the phenomenon of archival appraisal and selection of records, i.e., in what the past preserved for the future as the source material. Although the archival hermeneutic circle is in some respects closed, namely in its inability to go beyond the mutual dependence and conditionality of its two key factors and in the impossibility of renouncing each other and detaching from each other, it is nevertheless in their dialectical relationship that the specific form of historicity in the formation of source wealth, archival thinking and actual practice, which is essentially open, originates. We understand this historicity as a certain form of an existential link not only between the thinking of the present, or rather future time moving towards the past, but also vice versa between the thinking of the present time (past time) moving towards the future. This historicity is open precisely because the present, in the specific situation of the constitution of

the source material essentially bound to the past, can and should ask questions of the future time, even if with only hypothetical answers, also because the present should open not only to the past, from which it selects a certain minimal part for permanent preservation, but should also maintain a living relationship of questioning and dialogue with the future.

Finally, this historical and future openness also refers to one of the significant moments tied to the god Janus. The two gates of the Temple of Janus in Rome remained open when Rome was at war, and were closed in times of peace, indeed rare moments in Roman history. According to Macrobius (2011), this custom was probably the result of a mythical war between the Sabines and the Romans over the abduction of Sabine virgins by the Romans. Macrobius (2011) tells of the custom of closing the Gates of Janus as follows: *“In the war with the Sabines over their kidnapped maidens, the enemy were attacking the city-gate at the base of the Viminal – later called ‘Janus Gate’, from the outcome of this story – and the Romans were hurrying to close it. No sooner was it closed than it opened again of its own accord. After this happened two more times and they were unable to close the gate, a mass of armed men stood guard at its threshold, and while fierce fighting was going on in another part of the city, a rumor suddenly circulated that our men had been routed by Tatius. At that, the Romans who were guarding the entry fled in terror, and it is said that just as the Sabines were about to burst through the open gate, a great torrent of boiling water erupted from Janus’ temple and poured through the gate, killing many companies of combatants who were either scalded by the burning water or swallowed up by the swift whirlpool. It was therefore decided that since the god had sallied forth to help the city, the doors of his temple would be left unbarred in time of war.”* (Macrobius, 2011, Book I, Sec. 9, 17, 99–101).

The open Gates of Janus for archives, archivists and records managers are not naturally meant to symbolize war. The Janus of the archives, Janus as the guardian of time and the one of the old gods who “sees all that is behind, all that is in front”, brings a different openness. It is the openness of the ability to see backwards along the time line to times past and forwards to times yet to come. It expresses the art of dialogue with the past epochs and their people, as well as with the future time, on which the essential openness of the man of the present

moment and his open relationship to an authentic and true understanding of the past and to his own attitude of trying to preserve the best for the future, that is, to be a good and responsible testator, can be built. Leaving the war aside, will the gates of the Temple of Janus remain open...?

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## Summary

*In recent decades, archival science all over the world has adopted the ancient Roman god Janus as its patron. So far, there have been very sporadic and brief reflections on why this particular god was chosen. This study aims to provide the very first more detailed comprehensive analysis of the specific significance of the ancient god Janus as the patron of the archival field in the past, its present form and future development in the 21st century and his taking on the position of the patron of records management.*

*In the first step, the study presents the characteristics and epithets of the ancient Roman god Janus. Janus was one of the most prominent Roman gods and at the same time, he is one of the primordial Roman deities without a Greek equivalent. His characteristic visual sign is his double face looking in the opposite direc-*

tions. Janus was, among other things, the god of entrances, doors and gates. He was seen as the ideal opener and closer, also as the protector of heaven and the universe in general. Janus was the patron saint of all beginnings and very probably also of water springs. The peculiarity of Janus' essence also lies in his being on the transition line, in expressing and sanctifying these lines, edges, transformations, especially of limit positions (creation/extinction, beginning/end, day/night, entrance/exit). The god Janus was knowledgeable of things past and at the same time he could foresee things future. This was also related to Janus' power over time itself.

In the second step, the study looks at the epithets of the god Janus and their relating characteristics and specifics in the field of archives and archiving, and also partly records management. Janus was the god of beginnings, and in a specific sense, he probably watched over water springs, being the father of Fontus, the god of springs. The work of archivists and historians alike builds on such springs, i.e. sources as the primary beginnings of the past in the sense of the first source traces. Archives are the primordial waters of these primary sources of history. Furthermore, Janus is in control of time itself, the very medium in which history itself unfolds and moves. The patronage of the god Janus over borderline things, over divides and edges also resonates in contemporary archiving in a principled divide between the paper-based and the digital worlds.

The most significant visual sign of the god Janus, his gaze looking in two opposite directions, points to several fundamental levels for the archival field. Archival science is also oriented towards the past in its care of archival and historical sources on the one hand, on the other however, it also looks to the future, as it is the archives that decide which of today's "living" records will become archives. Crucial, in a slightly differently modelled context, is the characteristic ability of the god Janus, who has knowledge of things past and the ability to foresee things future. One of the most distinctive attributes of the archivist's profession is the simultaneous straddling of the past and the future, a feature that is present in multiple archival activities. This is most evident in the archival appraisal of records, in which the archivist selects a part of the emerging documentation, and thus potential source traces, for permanent preservation in the archives, and at the same time designates another part for irreversible destruction. An archivist,

*when considering what part of the immeasurable body of records production to preserve permanently and what part to destroy, looks into the future and asks what materials the future time will probably be interested in. Such records will then be prioritised for permanent preservation. Allegorically speaking, we are faced with the concept of an archivist as a kind of backward-looking oracle. At the same time, this key role of archivists has the consequence that future times will be forced to learn about the past based, among other things, on what the past age thought about “its” future. The author calls this motif the “archival hermeneutic circle”, which he elaborates further in the study.*

*Based on its analyses and arguments, the study concludes that the god Janus can be accepted as the patron of archives, archiving, and partly also of records management.*

***Typology: 1.01 Original Scientific Article***