

FROM EARLY ROME TO MODERN NATIONALISM

WHAT AN ANCIENT RITUAL CAN TEACH US ABOUT THE MEANING OF HOME

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This article uses the Etruscan rite, an ancient ritual associated with the foundations of Roman colonies, as a prism through which to study the way in which a collective home is created. This involves a process of cosmicization, orchestrating the elements of our experience into a meaningful unity. Parallels are drawn between the Roman foundation ritual and similar practices and beliefs from cultures around the world. Underlying them all, it is argued, are a set of fundamental principles for organizing experiences which have appeared in almost every settled agrarian society. These include a microcosmic organization of space, the organization of time in terms of 'primordial depth' (Casey 1993), the ritual establishment of 'mutuality of being' (Sahlins 2011), and the inscription of symbolic boundaries. Finally, it is suggested that while these ways of organizing experience have all but disappeared in the contemporary household, they persist as part of the affective underpinning of nationalism and help explain its contemporary resurgence.

Keywords: Etruscan Rite, Home, Household, Belonging, Nationalism, Place

A home, whether it be a household, city or country, is not just a physical location, but a centre of value and meaning which is created through a process of cosmicization – the orchestration of the diverse elements of our experience into a meaningful unity (O'Connor 2018: 11). This process is fundamentally social; we make sense of our experience collectively. Moreover, the structures through which we do so play a central role in the establishment and maintenance of human communities. This article explores one instance of the co-creation of cosmos and community: the Etruscan rite, a series of ritual actions which according to ancient writers was used by Romulus to found the city of Rome and which also took place at the foundation of Roman colonies. If we unpick the meaning of this ritual, we encounter a set of fundamental principles for the collective organization of experience, which draw on the household religion of Rome and Greece and are echoed in the traditions of many other cultures. These include a microcosmic organization of space, the organization of time in terms of 'primordial depth' (Casey 1993), the ritual establishment of 'mutuality of being' (Sahlins 2011), and the inscription of symbolic boundaries.

An examination of the Etruscan rite therefore opens a window onto wider patterns of traditional practice and belief. Rituals and observances operated to bind places, relationships and social practices into orders of significance that rendered them thick with meaning thereby turning a potentially alien world into one which was homely, familiar and secure. Modernity has been a process of 'disembedding' individuals from such closed cultural worlds and incorporating them into rationalized networks which

increasingly transcend place (Giddens 1991) and are typified by constant fluidity. But these processes do not eradicate the desire for a sense of belonging, or a stable centre from which experience can be rendered meaningful.

Much scholarship on home and place has sought to critique the idea of home as a point of stable origins and fixed identities (Massey 1995; Cresswell 2004; Nowicka 2007; Weir 2009; Duyvendak 2011; Brickell 2012). As such it reflects contemporary processes of globalization, migrancy, individualization, mediatization, and precarity, which have tended to dissolve fixed categories of identity and belonging, especially those anchored in spatial coordinates. At some level, the perception of a fixed and stable home has always been socially constructed, whether in traditional or modern societies. A more interesting question, beyond deploying this as a critique, is how the work of construction proceeds; how groups reach for and sometimes attain stable patterns of shared meaning. One of the surprising features of the past decade has been the worldwide resurgence of nationalism, at a time when economic globalization and cultural cosmopolitanism seemed to have rendered it obsolete. One reason for this development is undoubtedly a hunger for belonging on the part of individuals who feel powerless and confused in the face of economic uncertainty and rapid social change. More specifically, I would suggest that the idea of the nation offers a set of resources for the collective organization of experience, which have parallels in the household religion of traditional cultures, as embodied in the Etruscan rite. Not only do we still feel the need for a collective home; the ways in which we go about constructing one may replicate patterns of thought and behaviour which are surprisingly archaic.

The Etruscan Rite

The Etruscan rite is described in a number of surviving Latin texts, including accounts of the legendary foundation of Rome by Plutarch, Ovid, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Archaeological evidence suggests that some such ceremony was indeed carried out at the foundation of ancient Italian cities, both Latin and Etruscan, as well as Roman colonies overseas (Magli 2007; Sassatelli and Govi 2010; Woodward and Woodward 2004). Excavations at Rome itself likewise indicate that there is some truth in the ancient accounts of the city's origins. Archaeologist Andrea Carandini (2011) suggests Rome was founded by a king whose name might have been Romulus in the mid-eight century BCE, in a ceremony which involved driving a plough pulled by a white bull and cow around the sacred boundaries of the new city. The foundation, however, was not a matter of laying out the future city on an empty site; it was the reorganization of an existing settlement, an aggregate of villages which composed a 'proto-city'. The archaeological evidence therefore lends support to the contention of Fustel de Coulagne (1916) that in the ancient world a city began as an amalgamation of family groups, villages or tribes. In other words, it gained the status of city not as the result of gradual growth, but through the act of foundation. According to Carandini (2011), Rome's foundation marked the inauguration of a new political and constitutional order, that of the city-state. As we shall see, the foundation ritual drew on elements of the household religion of archaic Italy and Greece, to create a sense of shared belonging in this larger 'household' of the city.

The Etruscan rite involved four principal elements: the orientation of the site, the digging of a pit called *mundus* into which the first fruits of the harvest and a clod of earth from the homeland of each settler were cast, the setting up of an altar above or beside this pit, upon which a fire was kindled which became the civic hearth, and the tracing of the first furrow around the line of the city walls. But what was the meaning of these actions? Why did the ancients undertake them at the foundation of a town?

As we shall see, the ritual embodies specific ways of organizing experience to infuse the world with meaning and create a sense of shared belonging – one which can be found in many cultures besides that of ancient Rome.

Orientation of the Site

After an augur had determined that the site of the future city was acceptable to the gods – usually through observing the flight of birds – its layout was planned around two lines named *cardo* and *decumanus*. The word *cardo* means ‘axle’ or ‘pole’; it is the line around which the sun runs its course and is therefore the axis of the universe. The *decumanus* is the line which runs from the rising to the setting of the sun (Rykwert 1976: 91). *Cardo* and *decumanus* determined the orientation of the principal streets which formed the basis of a Roman town plan. Hyginus Gromaticus, a Latin writer on land-surveying who flourished during the reign of Trajan, wrote at the beginning of his treatise: ‘Boundaries are never drawn without reference to the order of the universe, for the *decumani* are set in line with the course of the sun, while the *cardines* follow the axis of the sky’ (Rykwert 1976: 91). Varro, Hyginus and Frontinus all agreed that surveying was derived from the Etruscan discipline of augury. The layout of a Roman town thus mirrored the order of the cosmos.

Such beliefs were not unique to ancient Rome. The cosmic city, divided into four quarters reflecting the order of the world, appeared early on in Mesopotamia (Raglan 1964: 159). In ancient Babylon the circuit of the walls formed an image of the heavens, and two axis-streets, one running north-south and the other east-west, divided the city into four quarters which reflected the four quadrants of the world (Raglan 1964: 160). Hindu texts that are called the *Manasara Silpa-Sastras*, dating from the 5th or 6th centuries AD, provide ideal layouts based on cosmic principles which formed the basis for many Indian villages and towns (Patricios 1973: 315). In Japan, too, the layout of a town reflected a conception of cosmic order based on the mandala (Patricios 1973: 315). The Incan capital Cuzco was divided into four parts, reflecting the divisions of the empire, and four roads led out of it going north, south, east, and west (Raglan 1964: 160). On the Gold Coast of Africa, the Akan tribe laid out their cities in seven quarters, each belonging to one of seven matrilineal clans representing the sun, the moon, and the five known planets (Patricios 1973: 315).

It is a basic aspect of human experience that wherever we go, we establish places around which to orient both our mental world and our physical activities; centres which locate us not only in relation to our surrounding environment, but socially and emotionally (Seamon 1979). Home has been defined as ‘a central point of existence and individual identity from which you look out on the rest of the world’ (Relph 1976: 83). Hence ‘To build a house is to found a cosmos in chaos...house building signifies a world creating, world sustaining activity which calls for sacred rites’ (Bollnow 1961: 34). Just as a Roman town mirrored the order of the cosmos made visible in the movement of the sun, the inhabited space of the other pre-modern societies instanced above likewise replicated in miniature the structure of the universe. Each new foundation of a city or temple was seen as mirroring the creation, and ‘Through the paradox of ritual, every consecrated space coincides with the centre of the world’ (Eliade 1974: 20).

The effect of such beliefs was to give a meaningful organization to space within which each element related to every other. The physical structure of a house, village, or city; the patterns of social life within this consecrated territory; the overarching order of the cosmos – each participated in and mirrored the

others. Space is thus filled with significance, which radiates outwards from the place of habitation, the centre of everyday life. The cultural world takes on a character of massive solidity and permanence. The life of the individual is stitched into a cosmic pattern which is profoundly meaningful, and its place within both society and the universe secured.

The Digging of the *Mundus*

The next step in the foundation ritual was the digging of a circular pit called the *mundus* close to the heart of the future settlement. Here were deposited the first fruits of the harvest and clods of earth from the homeland of each settler. The original site of the *mundus* dug at the foundation of Rome is unknown. However, in the Roman Forum, beneath the *umbilicus urbis* or navel of the city, the remains survive of the *Mundus Cerialis* (Mundus of Ceres), an artificial cave devoted to the goddess of the crops (Fowler 1912). Ceres was the mother of the fruitful earth, the guardian of the seed corn, and also guardian of portals to the underworld. Her *mundus* was opened three times a year, and on these days the souls of the dead walked forth, and public business was prohibited. The *mundus* was thus a symbolic source of fertility. But it was also a gate to the underworld, sacred to the infernal gods. Settlers' depositing of earth from their homeland reflects the connection which was believed to exist between the fertility of the soil and the benevolence of the ancestors – and the deeper intuition that death was in some way the source of life, both vegetable and human, which underlays much early religion (Campbell 1970).

Archaic beliefs suggested the soul survived death, remaining attached to the place where the body had been interred, and required nourishment in the form of regular offerings. In return for wine, milk, honey, and grain the ancestors would protect and aid their descendants. The family tomb was therefore of great importance. In early Rome and Greece, it was the custom to bury the dead in the field belonging to the family (de Coulagnes 1916: 84). At one time, they may even have been buried within the house (Raglan 1964: 12). Such practices are widely attested. Among the Lio people of Indonesia, when the leader of a lineage died, it was the custom to place his body on a mat in the centre of the clan-house, where it was left to decay until only the bones remained (Howell 1995: 160). Hence the communal ancestor symbolically merged with the house, which was conceived as an animate being, and which had a sacred area at the back where offerings to the ancestors were regularly made. Likewise, the Paiwanese people of Taiwan traditionally placed their dead in a burial cave beneath the family home, where their presence was thought to ensure fertility and prosperity (Tan 2001). Village leaders among traditional peoples in Guiana are sometimes buried under the floor of the collective house (Rivière 1995: 197). Among traditional African societies the family's land is considered sacred because it is where the ancestors are buried (Pellow 1992: 192). Going further back, there is archaeological evidence of inhumation within dwelling houses from Neolithic Turkey and the Balkans (Naumov 2007), in Neolithic Syria (Guerrero et al. 2009), among the prehispanic Maya (Gillespie 2000: 469), and from pre-Hispanic Puerto Rico (Keegan 2009: 375).

Such burials reflect a belief that the prosperity of the household depends on the deceased ancestors and continues only so long as ritual relations with them are maintained. In ancient Rome, many observations associated with the ancestor cult were focused on the Lares, minor domestic deities who played a central role in the household religion. Their statues were placed on the table at meals and banquets, and given regular offerings of food, wine, and incense. At his coming-of-age a boy gave his personal amulet to the Lares before donning a toga for the first time as a symbol of manhood (Beard,

North and Price 1998: 49). When his first beard had been ritually cut it was placed in their keeping. On the night before her wedding a Roman girl surrendered her dolls, her soft balls, and her breast bands to the family Lar (Beard, North and Price 1998: 49). People prayed to the Lar when leaving on a voyage, sacrificed to it when a member of the family who was believed lost returned, and prayed to it when they settled into a new house (Dumézil 1970: 342). Families who failed to attend to the needs of their Lares could only expect ill fortune.

The Lares have been described as 'ancient but obscure deities, seen by some ancient writers as the deified spirits of the dead' (Beard, North and Price 1998: 185). According to Margaret Waite, 'the Lar was originally worshipped as the spirit of the ancestor who had founded the family and still watched with devotion over the fortunes of his descendants' (1920: 241). Other scholars interpret the Lares as guardian spirits of particular places (Dumézil 1970; Fowler 1911). However, these associations naturally overlap. Given the custom of burying the dead in or near the family fields, we can imagine how the Lares might have originated as ancestor spirits and have subsequently been transformed into guardian spirits of the place where their descendants continued to live. If we view them as having originated as spirits of place, it should hardly surprise us if they became associated with a family which had long inhabited that place and buried their dead in its soil.

It is in light of these ideas that we should understand the custom of each settler casting a clod of earth from their homeland into the *mundus* at the foundation of a new city:

...religion forbade the abandoning of a place where the hearth had been fixed and the deified ancestors rested. In order to be absolved from all impiety each of them had to make use of a fiction by taking with him, in the form of a clod of earth, the sacred ground in which his ancestors were buried, and to which their manes remained attached... This rite had therefore to be carried out so that each new inhabitant might be able to say, showing the place he had adopted as his own: 'This too is the soil of my fathers, terra patrum, patria; this is my fatherland, the manes of my fathers rest here (de Coulagne 1916: 180).

In the case of Rome, Carandini suggests the earth cast into the pit may have come from the *curiae* (the neighbourhoods of the proto-city) and the surrounding rural *pagi* or townlands (2011: 54). Hence, when each settler deposited a portion of their native soil in the *mundus*, they were literally mingling the souls of their ancestors and the earth of their paternal fields. By doing so, they became one family with one set of gods, dependent on the same earth for sustenance and survival.

Just as the orientation of the city organized the spatial experience of the settlers, the ritual of the *mundus* helped organise their temporal experience. It embodied the perception, inherited from the pre-existing household religion, that the ancestors were the source of both biological fertility and cultural order, and that an ongoing communion with their spirits was necessary for these to be maintained. This connection with the past was localized in specific places – a field, a house, an altar, the corner of a room – and regularly renewed through ritual. The result was to infuse the location with a dimension of what Edward Casey, following Merleau-Ponty, calls 'primordial depth' (1993: 68); a merging of time and space in which the events of the past persist into the present in a state of mutual implication and simultaneous presence. Time thickens and takes on flesh through the medium of place; place in turn becomes the repository of a collective memory which imbues it with value and renders it

sacred. Just as the organization of space embodied in the Etruscan Rite is dense and 'closed', in the sense that each area of inhabited space mirrors the structure of the whole, so too is that of time, in which the present draws its vitality from a continual renewal of the past. The effect was to further reinforce the overwhelming solidity of the cultural order thus established.

Lighting the Civic Hearth

Once the *mundus* had been filled in, an altar was built above or beside it on which a fire was lit. This was the civic hearth of the new settlement, its religious and political centre. Here again we find elements of the household religion of the ancient world transposed to the level of the city. In every Greek and Roman house there was an altar on which lay a few lighted coals, which it was the duty of its members to keep burning. Flowers, fruit, incense, and wine were offered to the fire, and important events in the life of the household were marked with prayer and sacrifice before it. The Lares were frequently associated with the family hearth, with the terms 'hearth' and 'domestic' Lares being used interchangeably (de Coulagnes 1916: 39). Excavations in the Roman Forum have discovered an open-air fireplace on the western side of the king's house at the site later occupied by the *aedes Iarum*, from which Carandini concludes that 'early archaic hearths were already sacred to the Lares' (2011: 71). A wedding in the ancient world began at the hearth of the bride's house, where she was formally manumitted from her parents' household, and concluded with her pouring out a libation at the hearth of her husband (de Coulagnes 1916: 55). Thus, she entered communion with the domestic gods of her new home. Likewise, a short time after the birth of a child, the Roman father assembled his family and offered sacrifice at the sacred fire, after which the child was carried around it several times. These rituals derived from an ancient belief in the sacred character of the hearth, which was closely identified with the family: an extinguished hearth and an extinguished family were synonymous.

The goddess of the hearth was Vesta (in Rome) or Hestia (in Greece). Because she presided over the hearth she was strongly associated with the home. Diodorus Siculus writes: 'they say Hestia discovered how to build houses, and because of this benefaction of hers practically all men have established her shrine in every home, according her honours and sacrifices' (1939, V: 1, 68). After the defeat of the Titans, she obtained from Zeus 'as her sacred place the central point of every house, the hearth' and 'there is no story of Hestia's ever having taken a husband or ever having been removed from her fixed abode' (Kerényi 1951: 91-92). One derivation of 'Vesta/Hestia' is from the Indo-European root **wes-*, meaning 'to live in, to occupy' (Rykwert 1976: 104). According to de Coulagnes the hearth 'is the symbol of a sedentary life...When they establish the hearth, it is with the thought and hope that it will always remain in the same spot' (1916: 78).

As is well known, the temple of Vesta in the Roman Forum contained a perpetual fire tended by twelve virgin priestesses. The fire of Vesta was linked to origins, familial and social ties, rootedness and belonging. According to Georges Dumézil it is homologous to the 'fire of the master of the house' (*garhaptaya*) in Vedic religion. The first of three fires lit when offering sacrifice, this represented the sacrificer himself with all his familial and economic ties. 'In short, it expresses the rooted quality, the earthly authenticity of the man who addresses the gods' (Dumézil 1970: 313). Likewise, the *ignis Vestae* was 'the hearth of Rome, and hence one of the guarantees of the city's being rooted in earth, of its permanence in history' (Dumézil 1970: 315). These associations suggest why the fire of Vesta, along with the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol and the Salian Shields, was seen as the guarantor of the continuance of Rome and of its favour with the gods. Indeed, the temple of Vesta was the last Pagan

temple where public worship was offered in the city, being closed only in 394 A.D. by order of the emperor Theodosius.

As the analogy with Vedic religion suggests, the association of the hearth with stability and rootedness extends far beyond the classical world. For Joseph Rykwert, 'the very notion of home seems to have grown up around the hearth' (1991: 51). The sacred character of the hearth has been attested in almost every pre-modern society (Raglan 1964). Moreover, among peoples as diverse as Iroquois, the Ashanti, and the Herero, a sacred fire provided the symbolic centre not just of the household, but of a kingdom or tribal confederacy (Monroe and Williamson 1993; Raglan 1964). Likewise, in the ancient world Vesta or Hestia had a shrine not only in every household but at the centre of every city. The poet Bacchylides addressed her in her role as the goddess of the public hearth in the town of Larissa: 'Gold-throned Hestia, you who increase the great prosperity of the glorious Agathokleadaí, those men of wealth, as you sit in mid-city by the fragrant Peneios in the glens of sheep-rearing Thessalia' (1992: Fragment 14b). Ancient kings derived their authority from their position as priests of the public hearth (de Coulagnes 1916: 231). At Rome, the king's house (*regia*) shared an enclosure with the temple of Vesta (Carandini 2011: 66). This suggests that here, as in the Greek cities, the civic hearth was originally the domestic hearth of the king. When the monarchy was overthrown the hearth remained the political centre of the community.

Despite her virginity, the cult of Vesta was also connected to the fertility of the earth, the fecundity of the citizens, and the health and safety of their flocks. 'The Roman vestals were not only responsible for guarding the hearth, the undying flame, but also for keeping a phallus in their temple. The significance of the flame on their hearth must therefore, in at least one of its aspects, lie in its link with the foundation, generation, and continuance of the race' (Beard, North and Price 1998: 53). An association between the civic hearth and fertility is also suggested by the stories told about several founders of towns in the region of Latium, who were born of a virgin impregnated either by a spark or a phallus which sprang from the hearth. One version of the story of Romulus and Remus tells how the twins were conceived when a handmaid of the daughter of the Alban king Tarchetius was forced to have intercourse with a phallus which rose out of the hearth of the king's house and remained there for many days. Likewise, Caeculus, the founder of the Latin city of Praeneste, was conceived when a slave girl was impregnated by a spark from the hearth (Rykwert 1976: 156). This association between fire and fertility is a widespread one. We need only recall Sir James Frazer's account of 'the fire-festivals of Europe' in *The Golden Bough*, where he gives many examples of the custom of lighting bonfires and leaping over them at certain times of the year to ensure the fertility of crops, trees, animals and people (1993: 609-650).

The hearth was also, naturally, associated with the cooking and sharing of food. In Roman homes the first portion of food and the first draught of wine at every meal were offered to the fire on the family altar. The marriage ceremony ended with the sharing of a cake or loaf before the sacred fire in the groom's house. The principal ceremony of civic worship was a common meal partaken of by all the citizens. Such meals were universal in Greece and common in Italy (de Coulagnes 1916: 205). In Rome tables were spread in the streets at major festivals, while the Senate held a sacred meal in the Capitol on certain days. At the festival called Fornacalia the thirty *curiae* into which the city was divided each organized a common meal (Fowler 1911). Besides large-scale feasts, in Greek communities men chosen by the city were required to eat together daily within the enclosure of the prytaneum which held the civic hearth; if this were omitted the city would lose the favour of the Gods. The shared meal is one of the most ancient symbols of communion, the repository of an immense socializing power which makes

friends and companions out of strangers (Simmel 1997). In many cultures the sharing of a hearth defines membership of the household group (Ariés and Duby 1988; Carsten 1995; Janowski 1995). In the words of the French anthropologist Maurice Bloch, 'eating together is not a mere reflection of common substance, it is also a mechanism that creates it' (1999: 142). Hence by eating together the citizens of the ancient city in effect declared that they were members of a single, enlarged household or family.

Behind all these customs and beliefs is an equation between the life of the household or city and that of the fire in the hearth. Fire came to be identified with a vital force which sustained communal life. It is easy to imagine how this identification came about. Fire appears like a living thing which needs to be fed. Lighting the hearth was one of the first acts in establishing a household, and once established it was difficult to move. Moreover, it provided both the physical centre of the household and the focal point around which cooking, eating and hospitality took place. The hearth also allows for communication with the chthonic realm, a belief traced by modern ethnologists in a variety of European cultures (Lecouteux 2013). Hence the association in Roman times of the hearth with the Lares and in later European folklore with those household spirits which represented a diminished survival of the ancestral cult (Grimm 1882; Leach 1972; Lecouteux 2013). This homology between household, hearth and ancestors made it a visible manifestation of that 'mutuality of being' which Sahlins (2011) sees as the defining feature of kinship. The lighting of the civic hearth, in turn, reflected the unification of diverse family and clan groups into a single community.

Underlying this mutuality of being is participation – the perception of consubstantiality between objects and people which are conceptually distinct (Lévy-Bruhl 1975). According to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, among traditional peoples the elements of experience are less subject to watertight division into logical categories than is the case among moderns. This underpins various magical beliefs; it also results in a feeling that the individual is consubstantial with the group to which they belong, including both the mythical ancestors and those recently deceased (Lévy-Bruhl 1975: 75–6). I suggest that one effect of this experience of participation was to create a dense and 'closed' organization of the field of everyday relationships, analogous to the organization of time and space which we have already seen embodied in the Etruscan Rite. Participation involves a merging of identities within the group, and a corresponding distancing from outsiders; moreover, it involves a saturation of each member of the household, as well as their physical dwelling and the land on which it is built, in a shared vital force which is identified with their common life. The result is that just as each area of inhabited space replicates the structure of the cosmos, and each portion of time is penetrated by the past, so too each member of a household shares in a common being. This experience of participation was transposed, through the ritual of lighting the common hearth, from the household to the city.

The First Furrow

According to Joseph Rykwert, the most important part of the foundation ceremony was the cutting of the *sulcus primigenius*, the first furrow, around the future boundary of the town (1976: 65). This was the culmination of the ritual, the act which defined and constituted the city. A plough, yoked to a white cow and bull, was driven counter-clockwise around the site by the founder, and whenever it reached the place marked out for a future gate it was lifted and carried over. It was this carrying (*portare*) which provided the root of *porta*, a gate (Rykwert 1976: 65). Openings were thereby left in the sacred boundary of the city through which profane traffic might come and go. Behind the founder came his

followers, who picked up the clods of dirt raised by the ploughshare and piled them on the inside of the furrow to mark the future line of the city wall. The act of driving the first furrow constituted the town as an *urbs*; a civic, political, and religious unit which was more than the sum of the individuals who composed it.

Once the first furrow had been deepened and widened to make a foundation for the city walls, the boundary stones which had marked the course to be taken by the plough were thrown in. These stones were regarded as non-figurative images of Terminus, the Roman god of boundaries (Carandini 2011). The *pomoerium* was thereafter established as a boundary between the sacred and the profane. Only the deities of the city and its inhabitants were allowed inside it, foreign gods being consigned to temples outside the walls, and only within its limits could the auspices of the city be taken (Fowler 1911). An ancient law prescribed the death penalty for anyone who committed the sacrilege of climbing over the city's walls (Rykwert 1976: 134). Romulus allegedly killed his brother Remus for the crime of leaping over the ditch cast up at the site of the planned wall of Rome. Moreover, the boundary was ritually reinforced on a regular basis. On at least two occasions during the year the boundaries of Rome were lustrated by the dance of the Salian brothers, while at the festival of the Lupercalia a party of young men ran around the ancient limits of the city on the Palatine Hill (Beard, North and Price 1998: 47).

Here again, we can trace the roots of the foundation ritual to archaic conceptions embedded in the household religion of antiquity. In ancient Italy, each field was surrounded by an enclosure – a band of uncultivated soil a few feet wide – which separated it completely from the domains of other families. Just as the family fields were sanctified by long habitation and the presence of the ancestral *manes* in their soil, so these boundaries were holy and were not to be disturbed without suffering the most severe penalties. In the early Roman period, the setting up of a boundary stone was accompanied by a ritual which involved anointing the stone and crowning it with wreathes of grass and flowers before sacrificing an animal in the ditch as an offering to Terminus. When the sacrifice had been burnt completely in the fire, the stone was placed carefully on the relics (Rykwert 1976: 117). The festival of Terminus took place on the 23rd of February and both individual families and the city of Rome held rituals on that date which reaffirmed the boundaries of their land. A lustration or ritual purification of the boundaries of the farm also took place in May, when the crops were ripening (Fowler 1911). The Roman King Numa Pompilius decreed that whoever ploughed up a boundary stone would be cursed, and Etruscan law gives in great detail the curses pronounced by the gods on those who dare remove boundaries (de Coulagnes 1916: 88).

A belief in the sacred nature of boundaries was by no means confined to classical Greece and Rome. Dumézil derives the worship of Terminus from the cult of an ancient Indo-European god who was the patron of the fair apportionment of goods in society, and an aspect of the supreme god associated with justice and the law (1970: 201). Parallels to the cult of Terminus can be found among Hindus, Etruscans, Sabines, and Greeks as well as other cultures (de Coulagnes 1916: 88). Customs designed to mark the threshold of a house and protect it from evil influences are almost universal (Davidson 1993; Trumbull 1896). Towns and villages have likewise ritually demarcated their boundaries, from the 'beating of the bounds' still carried out in some rural English villages (Davidson 1993, 8) to the religious processions around the administrative territory of local market towns in traditional China (Tuan 1979: 169). Arnold van Gennep (1992), for example, gives multiple instances of the use of charms to mark the boundaries between villages and tribes in Africa.

The sacred character of a city's boundaries was at least as important as their practical value as a means of physical defence. The boundaries constituted the city as a distinct entity; drawing them was an act of creation, bringing cosmos out of chaos. They offered security through defining the city as a limited and familiar space. In this respect it is significant that the Latin word *condere*, 'to found', literally means 'to hide' (Carandini 2011: 54). The foundation ritual established the city as a space closed off and shielded from the outside world. Likewise, the ceremonies of household worship were deeply private. Dumézil understands *penus*, from whence the Penates took their name, to mean 'the most intimate part, the center' (1970: 353) of the home. The Greeks always placed their domestic hearth in an enclosure, which protected it from the contact, or even the gaze, of outsiders, while the Romans concealed it in the interior of the house. Symbolic boundaries are important because they mark out qualitatively different areas of space (O'Connor 2018: 142). As in the case of the Roman *pomerium*, they mark the area within as sacred. But why sacred? Because it has been cosmicized, transformed from chaos into order. As Lecouteux writes, 'The house...forms a protective cocoon, one that is sacred and magical, with its own organization' (2013: 48). Boundaries act to define and thereby protect a localized context of social action within which experience takes on coherence and meaning. Cultural order is always fragile, and the effort to give meaning to experience is helped if it can be delimited and rendered manageable. The city walls raised on the foundation of the first furrow gave their inhabitants ontological as well as practical security.

Conclusion

In *The Tradition of Household Spirits*, Claude Lecouteux examines the fragments of old household rituals which survived until recently in rural Europe, and suggests they reflect 'a set of homogenous beliefs whose origins are lost in the dawn of time' (2013: 2). Building and foundation rituals; the conception of the house as both microcosm and living being; domestic spirits and their association with the ancestors of the household; the dedication of a specific corner to communication with the spirits and the dead; the significance of the hearth; rituals for protecting the boundaries of the home – all these are not merely consistent from one end of Europe to another, but as Lecouteux demonstrates, the evidence for them goes back to the early Middle Ages. As we have seen, however, these beliefs and practices can be traced back even further, to the archaic household religion of classical antiquity on which the Etruscan Rite was based. Moreover, analogues can be found in other cultures around the world, persisting in some places to the present day.

These beliefs and practices embody basic ways of organizing experience which seem to have appeared in almost every settled agrarian society. First, the microcosmic organization of space in which each inhabited area – city, village, or house – is seen as replicating the order of the cosmos. Second, the perception of time as primordial depth (Casey 1993). Place becomes the repository of a collective memory which blurs temporal distinctions, and the people and events of the past continue to saturate the present. Third, the organization of social relationships in terms of 'mutuality of being' (Sahlins 2011), through the concept of a shared vitality which infuses each member of the household or community and is symbolized in the hearth fire, the collective meal, and the worship of household spirits. Fourth, the sacralization of space through the inscription of boundaries, which define and protect an area of inhabited space which has been cosmicized and assimilated to the cultural order.

The effect of these ways of organizing experience was to construct an order of meaning at once dense and closed, permanent and massive in its solidity. Moreover, this was not an external order, but one

constructed and renewed by the members of the household or community through their participation in periodic rituals as well as the routines of everyday life. One result was to create a powerful sense of belonging among those who shared such a cosmicized space. However, such an order of meaning required a considerable degree of both temporal stability and social closure. Without these, it became progressively more difficult for the illusion of its coincidence with the structure of the cosmos and the immemorial past to be preserved. Hence, it tended to dissolve wherever the transition from a traditional and agrarian to a modern and industrial society took place. In contemporary society, there can be no pretence that a given household represents anything other than an unstable combination of individual preference and contingency. The organization of time in terms of temporal depth has become increasingly difficult for a mobile population with weakened ties to place who may change accommodation many times in their lives, while the only traces of ancestor worship in the contemporary home are a handful of family pictures and souvenirs. Mutuality of being has retreated to the confines of the nuclear family – itself increasingly unstable – and even there it is weakened by the individualization of family life in terms of entertainment, eating patterns and routines. The physical boundaries of the home retain some faint trace of their sacred quality, but their importance is lessened as we spend more and more time immersed in a flow of digitalized information which transcends space.

However, the modes of organizing experience I have traced continue to exert an influence in the contemporary world – perhaps most importantly through the phenomenon of nationalism. National boundaries are still sacred lines which serve to mark out and preserve qualitatively different areas of space and the cultural orders associated with them. What is the chant of ‘build the wall’ but a magical incantation aimed at preserving a particular order of experience and the identity which goes with it? It has frequently been pointed out that Donald Trump’s proposed border wall would have little practical effect on immigration – but neither did the ceremonial gates and posts around African villages serve any defensive purpose. The citizens of a nation likewise experience a mutuality of being which is particularly strong during moments of collective effervescence such as a World Cup match, a military campaign, a royal wedding or an election. Nationalism also depends on the organization of time as primordial depth; the national territory is imbued with collective memory and events from the distant past are experienced as having emotional valence and practical relevance for the present. Finally, while it is difficult today for a nation to consciously project its particular way of life onto the structure of the cosmos as a universal norm, it is possible even in a globalized world for many of its citizens to unconsciously take their shared values as natural and unquestioned. I believe the persistence within nationalism of these archaic ways of ordering experience provides a clue to its enduring appeal and contemporary resurgence, at a time when many have argued that economic integration and cultural globalization should render it irrelevant. As a political programme, nationalist projects may crash head-first into the economic imperatives of an interconnected world, but as a means of giving the world meaning and generating a sense of belonging, it has few rivals. Much of the current sense of dislocation and crisis is the result of this disjunction between the dominant economic and technological forces and the efforts of social groups to construct shared systems of meaning – between a structurally-imposed homelessness and an enduring hunger for belonging.

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