

A Sense of Place:

Some Historical Symbols, Myths and Rituals of “Placeness”
(2001)

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He who wanted to found a place - the Rig Veda tells us - had first to start a fire with embers taken from a peasant's hearth¹. This fire - the fire of the earth, of the peasant or of the householder - had to be round.

Then, the founder stepped eastward, making as many steps as his 'rank' or varna² allowed him. When he stopped, with stones he marked a square on the soil: the hearth for the second fire. The round and the square fires are in a relationship that conjures up the one existing between the earth and the sky. If the first fire is round, it is not because the earth is a globe, but because the line of the horizon is approximately a circle in the middle of which one stands: the visible earth is a circle. The same in all directions, a circle cannot orient. The implied meaning of that, is that nobody (no body) can gain orientation from the earth alone. He needs signs in the sky. The square fire is the fire of the sky. It is not equal in all directions: it has four corners. Between them, the two median lines draw

¹Julius Pokorny, Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch, Bern/Munich, 1948-69. Hearth: Pokorny I, 571, ker-, 'brennen' glühen, heizen'. Zweifelhaft, lat. carbo. Ahd herd, as. herth, ags. heord, 'hearth'. (Abstract: hearth would derive from the Indoeuropean root ker-, meaning 'to burn').

Hestia: Pokorny, I, 1170: ues-, 'verweilen', wohnen, übernachten'; ues-ti-s, 'Aufenthalt'. Gr. haesa ep. Aor. (stets mit nyctha verbunden) 'zubringen'. mit unerklärtem a-Vokalismus, asty, 'Stadt', astós, 'Städter', asteios, 'städtisch'. got. wisan, 'sein, bleiben'. (Abstract: The word hestia - Greek for hearth - would derive from the Indoeuropean root ues-, 'to abode', which also gave the archaic Greek word for city and town, asty, and perhaps the old Germanic word for 'to be': wisan - viz. popular Dutch: wezen).

²Pokorny, op. cit., 1161, ueru, 'Schützer, Schirmer' (Varna would come the Indoeuropean root ueru, the protector). See also Georges Dumézil, La Religion Romaine Archaique, Paris, 1966, p. 308.

perpendicular axes: a cross, whose branches indicate the cardinal points.

A cross in a circle expresses the union of earth and heaven. The Greek called such a figure temenos³, the Roman called it templum⁴. It was the original orienting device resulting from an act of foundation. Let us suppose that the templum is drawn now, exactly between the two fires: the west-east line is the inversion of the sun's path in the sky, the north-south line is the partition between earth and heaven. Like the founder's body, space knows now back and fore, up and a down. But the templum cannot be just drawn by the hand. It must be 'acted out' by the founder's body.

Indeed, the story could almost finish here: very roughly, a place has been established, or, shall we rather say that a sense of 'placeness', on earth and under the sky has been embodied? The west-east axis recalls which relationship is prior to all the others. With the two primordial fires, the two poles (the 'up' and the 'down') of any place have been, so to speak, 'thrown together'⁵. A place on

³François Anatole Bailly, Dictionnaire Grec-Français, 1904 (1899), p. 1913: temenos, 1. primitif, portion du territoire qu'on réservait au chef, enclos servant de résidence. 2. Portion du territoire avec un autel ou un temple. (1. Primitive meaning: part of the territory that was allotted to the chief, his precinct. 2. Part of the territory occupied by an altar or temple).

⁴ Pokorny, op. cit., I, 1064: temp-, 'dehnen' ziehen' spannen', Erweiterung von *ten-, tempos, Spanne, 'drehen, wenden, spinnen'. Lat tempus -oris, Schläfe (von der dünn gespannten Haut). Lat. templa, die gespannten Querhölzer auf denen die Spindeln kommen, contemplari, 'atenes blepein', tempto temptare, 'betasten, befühlen, angreifen, untersuchen, auf die Probe stellen'. (Templum comes from the hypothetical Indoeuropean root *ten- meaning 'to stretch').

⁵ Georges Dumézil, op. cit., pp. 308 - 9 "Les deux feux axiaux, qui se trouvent sur une ligne ouest-est, séparés par des distances variables selon le varna du sacrifiant, ont des missions et des signalements distincts. L'un, appelé garhapatya, ou feu du grhapati, du 'maître de maison', représente sur le terrain le sacrifiant lui-même, avec ses attaches familiales et économiques. Il est l'origine et support de tout; c'est à partir de lui que sont allumés les autres feux et, s'il s'éteint, le sacrifice ne peut être continué, alors que, si l'un des autres feux s'éteint, il peut, lui, servir à le réanimer (...). L'autre feu axial, à l'est du premier, est appelé ahavaniya ou feu des offrandes, proprement '(ignis) aspergendus', et c'est lui dont la fumée porte aux dieux les dons des hommes(...)" (Abstract: The two axial fires, the first round and the second square, were called respectively garhapatya (or fire of the grhapati, the householder), the other ahavaniya, fire of the offerings. The garhapatya was the primordial fire from whose embers the others had to be started).

the earth - Greek ge - is rooted in the deep soil - chthôn - and open to the sky - ouranos. 'To throw together' is what the Greek verb symballein means, from which our word symbol comes.

Most symbols for a place combine an intimation of rootedness in the deep soil with a hint of openness to heavens, an image which can almost literally be inversed in openness to the deep soil, rootedness in the sky. One such symbol is the powerful tree, whose trunk conquers the height and unfolds a crown of endlessly ramifying branches which are like roots in the sky. Sucked by the earthly roots, the juices of the deep soil climb through the trunk and imbibe the sky. Or inversely: the 'roots of the sky' collect the sky's powers and bring them down to earth, so two opposed flows cross themselves, so to speak in the trunk, 'symbolizing' a double dependency between earth and heaven.

The straight climbing smoke column of the sacrificial fire, that conveys the smell of libations to the gods is an immaterial tree and another symbol for a founded place. Abel's sacrifice was blessed with a straight column because it was agreeable to God. His brother's column could not rise, and the envious Cain killed Abel. The Hebrew tradition made of the cursed sacrificer the founder of cities and of agriculture, so to found a city and to domesticate nature (both actions are expressed, in Greek, by the verb oikodomeo, to tame, to domesticate or break a land open for building or planting) is always a precarious enterprise, threatened by the world's essential contingencies.

In the gentile traditions in change, cities were to be founded by certified founders and the brother that died was the one who had failed to perform the rite. While Yahweh was prayed for his grace, the gentile gods were acted upon by precise rituals.

Yet - the Rig Veda goes on - the earth-sky relationship, though complete, is not stable in itself. It is exposed to internal and external dangers: the north wind or an enemy from the south, or inner dissention between brethren. Weather⁶ and war⁷: it is to that double danger that Hobbes still referred to with the word 'warre', the war of all against all, which settles in grim times (in the dies mali), "like bad weather," says Hobbes⁸.

So, after the first sacrifice on the sky's square fire, the founder steps back at mid axis and then goes as many steps to the right as he has gone backwards. He starts a third fire which, according to tradition, must be 'shapeless' and is generally vaguely reminiscent of a crescent. It is the fire of the weatherward, of Ares⁹ and of Mars¹⁰.

With that last act of orientation, space has not only a back and a fore, up and down, but right and left. Right and left are fundamentally asymmetrical¹¹. The right (south) is warded, so your right side

⁶Pokorny, op. cit., I, 81, ff.: au(e)-, ae(i)-, ue-, 'wehen, blasen, hauchen'. Gr. aos. ue-dro-, vermutlich in anord. verdr, 'Wind, Luft, Wetter', as. wedar, 'Witterung, böses Wetter' (The word weather - German Wetter - supposedly comes from the Indoeuropean root au(e)-, meaning 'to blow', from which 'wind' also derives).

⁷Pokorny, op. cit., I, p. 1133: ueis, 'drehen' auch bes. für flechtbare Ruten, daraus gebundene Besen und dgl. ; uoiso-, Rute. Aisl vichr', Wirbelwind (*uesura-, lit. viesulas ds., russ. vichat'), 'erschüttern, bewegen'. (The word 'war' supposedly comes from the Indoeuropean root ueis, meaning 'to whip'. Though not deriving from the same root, the words weather and war both express the same idea: to whip, wipe violently, shake, disrupt a balance - see also the root of Gr. polemos, same meaning).

⁸Marshall Sahlins, Stone Age Economics, Chicago, New York: Aldine-Atherton, 1972.

⁹Pokorny, op. cit., I, p. 337: eres-, 'zürnt, will übel, benimmt sich gewalttätig', 'ist neidisch'. Arès= Gott der Rache. (Pokorny suggests that the name of the Greek war god Arès's could come from the Indoeuropean root eres-, meaning to act violently or be envious. Arès is so the god of vengeance. The proximity to arèn, the lamb, of course suggests also an association with the sacrifice).

¹⁰Pokorny, op. cit., I, p. 1175: uet-, 'jährig', in Ableitungen auch für jährige, junge Tiere. Gr. fetos, heuer. Viteliú, Italia, woraus durch unilat.-gr. Vermittlung lat. Italia, eigentlich 'das Land der Itali (junge Rinder)', nach dem Stiergott Mars. (As to the Italian war god, he is originally the Mediterranean bull god. The "bull" associates to Italy via the Indoeuropean root uet-, which gave Gr. fetos, from this year (viz. the new lambs) and Lat. vitellus, calf. Italy is the land of the vitelli. A sacrificial association is not excluded).

¹¹Rodney Needham, ed., Right and Left: Essays on Symbolic Classification, Chicago, 1973.

is protected. When the third fire was lighted, the Roman said “fas est,” it has been pronounced (favorable). By contraction, the expression became fastus, favorable. Is it not logical to think that the right (side)¹², warranted by an oral pronouncement, is the forerunner of the ‘right’ in the sense of French ‘le droit’ or Spanish ‘el derecho’ (but also of the law, lat. lex)? If we take that origin serious, before any written law, there is an oral meaning of the right as ‘the settled side of life’. Historically and, as I will argue, philosophically, the ‘fas est’ is prior to the ‘scriptum est’ and cannot be reduced to it.

If the main axis were a rope on which the founder progresses like a rope-dancer, the fire of the right would be his pendulum.

The left is left¹³ unprotected, it has no ward. From there blows Aquilon, the Northwind, winter announces itself¹⁴, danger looms, perhaps in the form of a storm, of an enemy, the unpredictable.

So life in a founded place has two sides: the protected right, side of rectitude, order and continuity, of settled things about which one ‘came to terms’, and the unprotected left, side of danger, bad omens, the threat of rupture and discontinuity. Apart from heraldics, sinister (from one of the Latin words for left, the other being laevus) has lost the denotation and kept the connotation. But the left is also the side of the heart: the unpredictable ‘torridity’ of passions, weighing the cool

¹²Pokorny, op. cit., I, p. 854: reg-, ‘gerade, gerade richten, lenken, strecken, aufrichten (auch unterstützend, helfend)’. (‘Right’ has its origin in the Indoeuropean root reg-, meaning ‘straight’, to ‘stretch’, but also to ‘support’. Because of a frequent transformation of r into l, it is possible that the Indoeuropean roots reg- and leg- (whence lex, ‘law’) are originally one).

¹³Greek laios, lat. laevus: Pokorny, op. cit. I, p. 652: laiuo-, links; ursprünglich krumm?; vielleicht Sinn von ‘verkrümmt’, schwach (unbeholfen?, verlassen?); cf angels. lyft, schwach, mndl. ‘luft’, ‘lucht’, link, ofries. luf, ‘schlaf, müde’. (The word ‘left’- Gr. laios, Lat. laevus - could derive from the Indoeuropean root laiuo-, left but perhaps originally ‘distorted’, ‘weak’, ‘abandoned’).

¹⁴Pokorny, op. cit. I, p. 79: udro-s, ‘Wassertier’. Quelle, Brunnen. Slav. voda, Gr. hydor, lat. unda. Got. wato (vgl. mit Lat. unda) wahrscheinlich Got. wintrus, aisl vetr, ags. winter, als ‘nasse Jahreszeit’ (The word ‘winter’ would come from the Indoeuropean root udro-s, meaning originally an aquatic animal; the name of the ‘wet season’ would also derive from the same root as ‘water’. Why not?).

reason of the shady right (keep in mind that, in a valley, the north is the coveted sunny side, and think that in Latin, torridus expresses extreme warmth or extreme dry coldness). So, the bilaterality of left and right also reflects the basic tension of time: regularity and rupture, equinamity and tension, German Zeit and English tide (from a root meaning regularity) and time (tension and rupture), following the double root of the Indoeuropean words for ‘time’. With that, the newly founded place has time, a history begins. Mars, the ward of the right, god of the weather and of war is also, internally, the keeper of social stability. He summarizes the two dimensions of time that account for history: the repetition of the same and the emergence of the unexpected, security and danger. As the personification of bad weather and war (as Mars proper), he has an answer to trouble makers (and he more than often starts stories of his own). As Quirinus (the name comes from quiris, ‘common man’, member of the *co-viria), he keeps internal peace, eventually sacrificing (like Romulus, who also took the name Quirinus) the brother that breaks the rule. Quirinus, sometimes called the internal Mars or the peacekeeper is the god of the rules of good habits and cohabitation, the protector of custom, the keeper of customary ways, corresponding, in the Greek and the vedic traditions, to the keeper of the èthos and of the dharmā. His designation as ‘the common man’ (the vedic grhapati), speaks about the oral, prelegal meanings of any ‘right’ that is settled by the ‘coming to terms’ of common men.

We now tend to understand rights as faculties warranted by law rather than by custom. This is relatively new. MacIntyre¹⁵, for instance, shows that this was hardly the case before the 15th century, and that, previous to our century, this ‘literate’ and legalistic meaning of the word right was restricted to Europe, a judgement confirmed by the OED. The asymmetry of left and right in founding rituals allows us to make the people the subject of ‘rights’ and to understand these as the

¹⁵MacIntyre, Alasdair, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame,

security arising from ‘having come to terms’.

In the act of foundation, the union of earth and heaven, which is the essence of orientation passes through the body. Ge (orgas in archaic Greek) and ouranos are made one by the soma (body)¹⁶. In Rome, city founders relied on certified technicians, augurs¹⁷, and haruspices, who generally were Etruscans. The Etruscan haruspex practiced the most extreme form of condensing earth and the sky. He incorporated them into his flesh by the contemplation of an ideal templum in the sky and by its projection into the landscape¹⁸ and then, he ‘expectorated’ both, united into the image of the city to come. Founding was an act of marriage and birth. The organ of that union, gestation and birth was the liver. The haruspium is a form of divination from the inspection of a liver (the root from which ‘harus’ comes means inwards, see German Garn). The haruspex expelled his own liver and read, on its rugose surface, the contours of the new landscape resulting from the union of earth and heaven. This - and not just earthly topography - was the landscape in which the city had to be found. Since it resulted from things of several realms (chthonian, epichthonian, that is earthly, and celestial), ‘thrown together’¹⁹, this landscape can be

1981.

¹⁶Joseph Rykwert, “Uranopolis or Somapolis?,” in RES, 17/18, 1989.

¹⁷Ivan Illich, H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness, Dallas: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1985, p. 13: “...neither the vocation of a founder nor a mandate from the oracle at Delphi nor even the actual settlement of a site suffices to make a locality into a town. The intervention of a recognized seer is required, an augur who creates space at the site discovered by the founder. The social creation of space is called in-auguration.”

¹⁸Bernd Jäger, “Horizontality and Verticality. A Phenomenological Exploration into Lived Space,” in Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology, Ed. E. Giorgi, 1971, pp. 212 - 235.

Bernd Jäger, “Imagination and Inhabitation: From Nietzsche via Heidegger to Freud,” in E. Murray, ed., Imagination and Phenomenological Psychology, Duquesne Univ. Press, 1987.

¹⁹Ivan Illich, Im Weinberg des Textes. Als das Schriftbild der Moderne entstand, Frankfurt a.M.: Luchterhand, 1991, p. 35: “Für unsere Generation, die mit Freud und Jung großgeworden ist, ist es fast unmöglich zu begreifen, was das Symbol bedeutet hat. Das griechische Wort symbal(l)ein bedeutet ‘zusammenbringen, -werfen oder -setzen’. Es kann die Nahrung meinen, die die Teilnehmer zum Mahl am festlichen Tisch mitbringen. Es ist etwags Zusammengefaßtes, dinglich Bedeutsames, das erst in der Spätantike zum semeion, Zeichen, wird.” (Our generation can hardly understand what the symbol has meant. It comes from a Greek word meaning ‘to throw together’ and evoked something concrete, resulting of an act of composition - think of a meal. Only in Late Antiquity did the word come to mean semeion,

called ‘symbolic’. Since it united the topographic features with the cosmos, the landscape in which the founder operated - and that resulted from his operations - can also be called topocosmic, a word coined by Bourdieu²⁰. It was not a ‘map’, a ‘plan’ or a ‘blueprint’, but a somatic image of a place in a cosmos and, as we will now see, of a cosmos in a place: it was, we could say, both a topocosm and a cosmotope. The *templum* (heaven and earth, united) is shorthand for this topocosm-cosmotope. Among other indications, it defines the perpendicular directions (Latin regiones) to be given to the new city’s main streets.

One year after Rome’s foundation, Romulus offered the gods the first-fruits of the city: wheat, fruits, flowers, the newborns of all the herds. He ‘threw them together’ into a hole in the center of Rome, a natural or an excavated cove. This cove was called the mundus. *Mundus*, here, does not mean the world. The word comes from the Indoeuropean root meu²¹ (or, perhaps from mei²²?) and its basic meaning is clean, or orderly. In French, this sense survives in immonde, unclean, not worth of belonging to the *mundus*, doomed to elimination, to be thrown away beyond the city limit. In Spanish, we have the word *inmundicias*, things to be swept away. A similar kinship exists in Greek:

‘sign’).

²⁰Pierre Bourdieu, “La maison ou le monde renversé,” in *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique*, Genève: Droz, 1972. Defines the Berber house of South Morocco as a topocosmos: a place in a cosmos or a placed (oriented) cosmos, or still a “monde renversé.”

²¹Pokorny, op. cit., I, p. 741: meu-, mu-, feucht, moderig, unreine Flüssigkeit (auch Harn), beschmutzen, aber auch: waschen, reiningen. Mu-n-dos in der Bedeutung von ‘gewaschen’, auch lat. mundus, ‘schmuck, sauber, rein, nett’, Subst. ‘Putz der Frauen’, Weltordnung, Weltall (nach Gr. *kosmos*). Holl., niederd. mooi, Gr.: kosmos. (Pokorny hypothesizes that the Latin word mundus and the Greek word kosmos both have their origin in the Indoeuropean root meu-, which in turn acquired its meaning of ‘clean’ through a strange inversion. Pok. thinks that the root meu- meant originally humid, dirty liquid, and even urine and that the inversion occurred thanks to the notion of ‘washing’. Dirty things are in need to be washed and so the root came to stand for ‘washed things’. Ingenious, isn’t it? Yet look at the following note: it seems to me that an etymology of the kom-moini- type is not to be excluded, think of kosmos).

²²Pokorny, op. cit., I, p. 710: mei-, ‘wechseln, tauschen’, daraus Tauschgabe, daher gemeinsam; moi-ni-, Leistung, kom-moini-, gemeinsam, osk. múínikad-, umbr. muneklu, ‘munus, Sporteln’. (In the hypothetical ‘Ursprache’ called Indogermanisch by the old German philologists, it is possible that there was a root, mei-, meaning more or less ‘to exchange gifts’. Why not think that the word *kosmos* could derive from the idea of an order resulting from gifts and counter-gifts and have so the same origin as ‘common’ (hypothetical Indoeuropean kom-moini-), and ‘the commons’? Could it be? Isn’t it a nicer hypothesis than the previous

kosmos; the derived adjective kosmetikos meant clean or orderly long before it became kosmikos.

The mundus was the city's secret navel, a notion still alive in classical times in the umbilicus, the point or origin of the decumanus and the kardo, the two perpendicular lines, one broadly west-east, the other north-south with which all land survey started.

Three times a year, each time during a day, the mundus remained open: mundus patet²³. When mundus patet, Pandora's box is open. It is prudent to shut oneself up. No contract, no council, no public debates, no war can happen these days. Festus, a writer of the 2d or 3rd century A.D. tells us:

Cato, in his Commentaries on civil law, explains so this name: the mundus derives its name from the mundus (vault of the sky)²⁴ which is above us; indeed, so I heard from those who went into it, it has a shape similar to that of the other mundus²⁵.

For him, the mundus was already a semeion of the world. Things can be classified by dualities: hot and cold things, masculine and feminine, dry and wet, luminous and dark, high and low, right and left, living and dead. These dualities of things 'thrown together' reflect or 'symbolize' the world's fundamental dualities. So, if a place is in the world, the world is contained by every place. Pupils of Louis Dumont would find here matter for a reflection on their master's concept of inversion, which allows the part to contain the whole to which it belongs²⁶. The place has now a center and a cosmic order: a hierarchy.

This account speaks of one ideal type of founding ritual, whose characteristics are often common

one?).

²³Georges Dumézil, La Religion Romaine Archaïque, op. cit., p. 345.

²⁴Actually, etymology suggests the opposite derivation.

²⁵Georges Dumézil, op. cit., p. 345.

²⁶Louis Dumont, Homo hierarchicus. Essai sur le système des castes, Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

to the Indian and to the Mediterranean world, particularly in the Etruscan-Roman realm²⁷. Yet, even within the Mediterranean domain, the sequences of foundation proper to a particular tradition are not necessarily followed identically by another. It might be that here the mundus is caved or discovered first and the town limit traced then (as in Rome) or the reverse. And the templum, which we already mentioned as 'shorthand' for the union of earth and heaven established by the two first fires is generally traced after the 'expectoration' of the haruspex's liver. At that point, a lamb - whose liver substitutes for the sacrificer's - is slaughtered²⁸. In Rome, this sacrifice was preceded by the contemplation and the consideration²⁹.

The town still lacks something before it can be declared fully founded: a limit. Ivan Illich,

²⁷ Ivan Illich, *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*, Dallas: The Dallas Institute for Humanities and Culture, 1985, pp. 19, 20 (note 11): "It would be a grave mistake to generalize from Etruscan foundation rituals as though they were the model according to which dwelling space is ritually created by all cultures. The rituals described here should be seen as only one ideal type through which social space can be brought into existence and maintained. In certain African traditions, beautifully described by Zahan, I have the impression that social space is cultivated as the result of the personal experience of initiation. The initiatory way into the sacred woods and the ritual discovery of one's one 'inner experience' are expressed in the community building of house and village. This example might be seen as the inverse of the Roman procedure, through which the templum, made visible in the city, comes to be experienced as an inner reality. Lebeuf reports from the Congo a "creation of space" that is the result of heaven and earth growing together, as the right and left part of the house are carefully built so as to rise, inch by inch in harmony with each other. Roumeguere describes the distinct stages of an initiation ritual, in each of which a new revelation of the body's significance associates the young man or woman with a different sphere of outside realities. Niagoran stresses even more than Zahan that some African dwelling-spaces are the result of each generation's initiation and therefore are time-bound. They are constantly in the process of decaying and must be reconstituted. Nicolas reports that the sacrificial victim is "split" to "make" new space. The space-creating spirit is ever at work as a zigzag line, representing the motion of water, word, and dance. See Griaule 12, 18 ff. on the "Nummo pairs of twins, who are water." Space seems never to be 'sealed off'." Dominique Zahan, *Religion, Spiritualité et Pensée Africaines*, Paris: Payot, 1970. J.P. Lebeuf, *L'habitation des Fali*, Paris: Hachette, 1961. J. Roumeguere-Eberhardt, "La notion de vie: base de la structure sociale Venda," in *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 27, fasc. 11, Paris, 1957. G. Bouah Niagoran, "La division du temps et le calendrier rituel des peuples lagunaires de la Côte d'Ivoire," in *Travaux et Mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie* 68, Paris, 1964. G. Nicolas, "Essai sur les structures fondamentales de l'espace dans la cosmologie Hausa," in *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 36, Paris, 1966. Marcel Griaule, *Dieu d'Eau: Entretiens avec Ogotemeli*, Paris: Fayard, 1966. Translated into English as *Conversations with Ogotemeli: an Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

²⁸ Clay models of the liver, with inscriptions in Etruscan letters have been discovered. They were presumably used in lieu of the liver of a sacrificed animal. Illustration in Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, op. cit., p. 56.

²⁹ Ivan Illich, *ibid.*, p. 13: "The augur is specially gifted: he can see heavenly bodies that are invisible to ordinary mortals. He sees the city's templum in the sky. This term is part of the technical vocabulary of his trade. The *templum* is a polygonal shape that hovers over the site found by the founder and that is visible only to the augur as he celebrates the inauguration. The flight of birds, a trail of clouds, the liver of a sacrificed animal can assist the augur in the *contemplatio*, the act in which he projects the figure seen in the sky onto the landscape chosen by the god. In this *con-templatio* the heavenly *templum* takes its this-worldly outline. But *contemplatio* is not enough. The outline of the *templum* cannot settle upon the earth unless it is properly *con-sidered*, aligned with the stars (*sidus*). *Con-sideratio* follows *con-templatio*. *Con-sideratio* aligns the *cardo* (the axes) of the *templum* with the city's "star." The *cardo* was

recalling Rykwert's commentaries of Titus Livus³⁰, describes so the tracing of the furrow that determined Rome's extension and defined its topographic shape:

For this ceremony two white oxens are hitched to a bronze plow, the cow on the inside, drawing the plow counterclockwise, thus engraving the templum into the soil. The furrow creates a sacred circle. Like the walls that will rise on it, it is under the protection of the gods. Crossing this furrow is a sacrilege. To keep this circle open, the plowman lifts the plow when he reaches the spots where the city gates will be. He carries (portat) the plow to create a porta, a doorway. Unlike the furrows and walls guarded by the immortals, the threshold and gate will be under civil law. At the porta, domi (dwelling space) and foras (whatever lies beyond the threshold) meet; the door can swing open or be closed.

Benveniste remarks that there is a profound asymmetry between the two terms in Indoeuropean languages; they belong to unrelated sets of words. They are so distant from one another that they cannot even be called antithetical. Domi refers to in-dwelling, while foras refers to whatever else is shut out.

Only when the founder has plowed the sulcus primogenitus (furrow) around the future town perimeter does its interior become space that can be trodden and only then is the arcane celestial templum rooted in the landscape. The drawing of the sulcus is in many ways similar to a wedding. The furrow is symbolic of a hierogamy, of a sacred marriage of heaven and earth. The sulcus primogenitus carries this meaning in a special way. By plowing a furrow around the future town, the founder makes inner space tangible, excludes outer space by

originally a "hinge" with an explicit, concrete, masculine-feminine symbolism."

³⁰ Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World*, London: Faber and Faber, 1976.

setting a limit to it, and weds the two spaces where the walls will rise later³¹.

The founding of the greatest of all gentile cities did not go without another fratricide. Yet, contrary to Genesis, the Roman religion culpabilized the murdered brother. Following René Girard³², only the biblical tradition takes side with the victim. Rome is on the murderer's side. Romulus's act was seen as a peace-bringing murder performed by the first citizen, Romulus as Quirinus, the common man who was also the 'inner Mars'.

With its limit, the place has now an inside and an outside. The inside is the ager effatus (effatus: same origin as fas). Outside the wall is the pomerium and then the open land (rus). The city is now fully founded. Square is the wall, square the houses: they are oriented, founded. On the contrary, a round building is the presence of the unfounded in the founded space: records of the time before the foundation. So the tholos³³ and the several skias³⁴ in Athens' center, and, in Rome, Vesta's round temple on the forum³⁵. A round, not orientable building is a hut (Greek skia), not a house. It has generally no threshold, no windows but a simple hole and an opening (Greek eschara) in the roof for the climbing smoke column and the dead's souls³⁶.

But the story still does not end here. The city - the founded place: stead, asty - is the abode of the living. What is the place of the dead? In the neolithic 'cities' of Palestina and Anatolia, seven or eight millenniums before the Christian era, this was in the hut and then the house, under a heavy stone. But already in the settlement of Hacilar, from the sixth millennium, the dead were expelled at

³¹ Ivan Illich, *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*, op. cit., p. 14, 15. See also, Émile Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des Institutions Indoeuropéennes*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969, 2 vol..

³² René Girard, *La Violence et le Sacré*, Paris: Grasset, 1972.

³³ Pokorny, op. cit., I, p. 265: *dhuek-*, *dhuk-*, *dheuk-*, dunkelfarbig, verborgen, geheimnisvoll, trüb, geistig schwach. Gr. *tholos*, Schlamm, Schmutz, bes. von trüben Wasser, der dunkle Saft des Tintefisches' (got. *dwals*).

Bailly, op. cit., p. 940: *tholos*, édifice en voûte; coupole, bâtie dans la cour, où l'on conservait les provisions. A Athènes, la Rotonde, édifice à voûte où mangeaient les prytanes. (The *tholos* was a round building recalling "the time before the foundation." It had some of the "natural" characteristics of a cave (wetness, darkness).

³⁴ Bailly, op. cit., p. 1760: Ombre (shadow). Also hut, round building.

³⁵ Illustration in Joseph Rykwert, *The idea of a town*, op. cit., p. 109.

³⁶ Mircea Eliade, "Architecture sacrée et symbolisme," in Damian/Raynaud, ed., *Les Symboles du Lieu, L'habitation de L'homme*,

the periphery of the livings' domain. Hacilar had the first cemetery ever documented in a sedentary place.

In Rome, the law of the twelve tables stipulated that no dead must be buried within the city's limits, and similar dispositions existed in the Greek poleis. With the exception, sometimes of the founding hero, the dead must be buried outside. The tomb marks both the end of human life and the ultimate limit of the city's domain (of the fields, outside the wall). In the stone(s) or the wooden pole recording a dead's abode, the temporal and the spatial limit of earthly existence coincide.

Above Ithaca, the *Odyssey* tells us, there was a hermaios lophos, a heap of stones. The Greek god Hermes has been defined as an iconic representation of the hermaios lophos. It is also the personification of one of the most primitive ritual gestures of the Mediterranean world: the act of throwing stones on a grave, or simply on the spot where blood had been shed. Jean Servier³⁷ reports that Algeria's Berbers, the Kabyles, still do it, shouting "la," "well done!" while throwing their stones. Historians call this gesture lithoboly. Sometimes, etymology illuminates deep phenomenological contexts. So is it with the Indoeuropean root from which Hermes comes. Following Pokorny, this root is uer³⁸, It has given most Indoeuropean languages terms meaning 'mount', 'eminence', 'protuberance' or 'turgidity', as for instance the not very palatable 'wart'. The Greek words herma and hermaios, meaning heap, mound are 'uer' words. Many linguists have

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³⁷ Jean Servier, "Hermès Africain: les origines communes, les limites du visible et de l'invisible," in *Eranos Jahrbuch* 49 (1980), pp. 199-257. Servier reports that in all North Africa, the mound resulting from the lithobolic gesture (the "African Hermes" on local tombs) is called *horm*. Though I am not at all competent for research on semitic languages, I checked in a Hebrew dictionary and found that, be it by coincidence or by borrowing, the Indoeuropean and the Semitic root that originally refers to the heap of stones on a tomb strangely seem to coincide phonetically. In the Bible, we find it several times under the forms *hor*, *horeb*, *hora*, meaning each time a mound. The most striking example is from Deuteronomy (5, 1-5), the passage where Moses received the tables of the law on mount Horeb.

³⁸ Pokorny, op. cit. II, Gr *herma*: 1150, 1151, 1152. Pok. I, p. 1151: uer-, erweitert uer-d-, uer-s-, 'erhöhte Stelle (im Gelände oder in der Haut), *ursu-*, 'hoch'. *uer-s*, Lat. *verruca*, Warze (bei Cato auch *locus editus et asper*). Gr. *herma*, 'Stütze, Riff, Hügel'. Unsicher: Greek *rhion*, 'Berghöhe, Vorgebirge' (**urison*?) und aisl. *risi*, Riese. (Pok. sees the origin both of the name Hermes and the word horizon in the Indoeuropean root *uer-*, suggesting a mound, a top, a protuberance or even a wart. From that root derive also, apparently, the English verbs to "raise" and to "rise." What Pokorny cannot treat is the strange homophony of the Indoeuropean root *uer-* and the Semitic root *hor*, *hor-*, (for instance, in North Africa, "horm" means as much as "hermaios lophos," a heap of stone), which I am not able to explain).

hypothetized that from the same root comes also Greek horizeo, I divide, for the crest of a mountain divides the landscape in two parts. From that comes 'horizon', the line dividing the visible and the (still) invisible part of the landscape.

The horizon was the limit of 'our world', including the city and the countryside (polis and agros). As far as local people's perception is concerned, it was the world's limit³⁹ and every trespassing was the motive of rites of passage⁴⁰. Tombs were on that line. Temporal and spatial expression of liminality, they were also on a topographic limit, close to, or on the horizon: the most conspicuous mark of the temporal limitation of life was also the origin of spatial boundaries. All practical delimitation were derived from tombs through a kind of primitive trigonometry⁴¹: landmarks and milestones were defined by their distance to three tombs. In an age still deprived of formal census practices, lithoboly, which defined the first fix points of a country, was the originary limit tracing gesture.

So, a town had a center, an enclosure and a broad periphery. The passage from the outside to the inside and vice-versa occurred through four doors. Thresholds, like walls were sacred, the nature of sacredness being the passage between two radically heterogeneous kinds of space: the inside and the outside. Yet remember: if the latter was protected by the gods, the first was under the protection of civil law⁴². Beyond the horizon began the others' world, which was not 'sacred' proper, but taboo. The word 'taboo' refers to the opposition of a 'we' and 'the others'⁴³.

Oscar Koschorke differentiates between four broad moments of the history of the horizon:

1. Horizon and world limit coincide in the dwellers' perception. To trespass the horizon is

³⁹ Albrecht Koschorke, *Die Geschichte des Horizonts. Grenze und Grenzüberschreitung in literarischen Landschaftsbildern*, Munich: Suhrkamp, 1990.

⁴⁰ Arnold van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage: Etude Systématique des Rites*, Paris, 1909.

⁴¹ A. Seidenberg, "The Ritual Origin of Geometry," in *Arch. Hist. Exact Sciences I* (1962), pp. 488 - 527.

⁴² Ivan Illich, *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*, op. cit..

⁴³ Jean Robert, *Raum und Geschichte*, Kurseinheit 2, Hagen: FernUniversität, 1998.

equivalent with leaving 'our' world and penetrating into the others' world.

2. Horizon and world limit cease to coincide. The Odissea speaks of the beginning of this moment in archaic Greece.

3. Any horizon is a challenge to trespass, a syndrom characteristic of the times of 'great discoveries'.

4. The aporia of the horizon: every limit having been transgressed, the perception of the horizon wanes. No wonder if the dead, whose tombs belonged to the horizon have no longer a place: no more mysterious presences among the living, they are radically negated⁴⁴. Following Koschorke, the succession of these four moments summarizes the peculiar dynamism of the West and shapes its history⁴⁵.

What meaning can still have the word 'place' - as opposed to abstract, 'cartesian' space - in late Western culture, that is in modernity? Has our time become placeless, as it is limitless, centerless, horizonless and deprived of the presence of the dead? And what kind of earth, of body, of heaven are we left with, when the very elements making of a place a topocosm and of the body a soma in a topocosm have abandoned us? How can we recover some sense of placeness beyond the demise of all that, which made a place? We are here to explore Jerry Brown's idea that friendship can make us recover a sense of placeness.

⁴⁴ Borst, Arno, Mönche am Bodensee 610-1525, Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1978. "Among all the groups that suffer from discrimination, the dead are the worst off, since their very existence is negated."

⁴⁵ Albrecht Koschorke, Die Geschichte des Horizonts, op. cit..