



Chapter Title: A Complex of Times: No More Sheep on Romulus' Birthday
Chapter Author(s): MARY BEARD

Book Title: Roman Religion
Book Editor(s): Clifford Ando
Published by: Edinburgh University Press . (2003)
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r2b8s.25>

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MARY BEARD

This paper argues that one of the functions of the Roman ritual calendar – the sequence of religious festivals as they occurred throughout the year² – was to define and delineate Roman power, Roman history and Roman identity; and that it did this by evoking events from different chronological periods of the Roman past and arranging them in a meaningful sequence of time, but not a sequence defined by linear, narrative, history. I am concerned principally with the practice of Roman ritual during the late Republic and early Empire; and my argument depends on taking seriously the discussions of the various festivals preserved in the writings of contemporary Romans and Greeks – men who practised or observed the rituals. I want to stress that we should take the rituals and the preserved exegesis together – and I emphasize *together* – as an important part of a symbolic, religious discourse that continued to be meaningful in the complex urban society of Rome in the age of Cicero, Augustus, Seneca or Hadrian.

1 GENERAL APPROACH

My approach to Roman festivals is different from that normally adopted. Most work on these rituals has looked for (and found) their

[†] Originally published in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 33 (1987) 1–15.

¹ This is an extended English version of a paper first read in French at the Centenary Colloquium of the Fifth Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Paris, September 1986). Thanks are due to Keith Hopkins for his usual good humoured criticism; and to John Scheid whose invitation to the Colloquium encouraged me to think seriously for the first time about the Roman ritual calendar. Richard Hunter, M. M. Mackenzie and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill substantially improved the final form of the paper.

² This is the usual sense of the phrase 'ritual calendar' in this paper. Occasionally I use 'calendar' in the perhaps more familiar, but narrower, sense of the written tabulated version of the cycle of festivals (see below, n. 5); the context always makes it clear where this is the case.

underlying logic – their ‘meaning’, if you like – in the primitive peasant society of archaic Rome. It has tended to relate each festival to the imagined life of the poor Italian farmer, some sweaty noble savage, who worked away with his crops and herds, while solemnly carrying out all the strange and time-consuming rituals related to sowing and reaping, storing and purifying: so, for example, at the festival of the *Robigalia* in April, he sacrificed a dog at the fifth milestone outside Rome to placate the personified spirit of corn-blight (Robigo or Robigus); at the *Vinalia Rustica* in August he made offerings to Jupiter to protect the growing vines; while at the Purification of Trumpets (the *Tubilustrium*) at the end of March he ceremonially marked the beginning of the summer season of war.³ Even the work of Dumézil and his followers does not substantially change the picture. Although there is much greater sophistication in their comparative approach, which attempts to relate the pattern of Roman rituals to ritual in other Indo-European societies, the central significance of individual festivals is still seen to reside in the agricultural, political and military concerns of the primitive community.⁴

The problem with interpretations of this type is not that they are simply wrong or even implausible; after all, the ancients themselves are known to have claimed that the *Robigalia* was meant to protect the growing corn from blight.⁵ The problem is rather their implication, often unnoticed, for the study of Roman religion as a whole. For by locating the ‘meaning’ of the rituals in the primitive community of peasant farmers, the traditional approaches make it hard to understand the practice of those rituals in the complex urban society of the historical period, several centuries later.⁶

³ For the standard view on each of these festivals, see H. H. Scullard, *Festivals and ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (1981) 94–5, 108–10, 177. The image of primitive peasant life comes across clearly in C. Bailey, *CAH VIII* (1930) 435–9 and R. M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and their gods* (1969) 70–99.

⁴ Perhaps the most characteristic (and strikingly successful) of Dumézil’s studies of Roman ritual is his *Fêtes romaines d’été et d’automne* (1975), which elucidates several particularly ill-documented festivals by placing them in a broader Indo-European context. On this book, see now J. Scheid, ‘À propos de certaines fêtes d’été’, [Aion (Sezione di archeologica e storia antica)] 2 (1980) 41–53. He picks up the notion of the ‘peasant society’ underlying Dumézil’s explanatory framework and asks – pointedly – ‘which society, where and at what time?’.

⁵ See, for example, the entry in the Praenestine Calendar (dated 6–9 BC) against the day of the *Robigalia* (25 April): ‘Feriae Robigo via Claudia ad miliarium V, ne robigo frumentis noceat’ (‘Festival to Robigus at the fifth milestone on the Via Claudia, to prevent blight (*robigo*) harming the crops’). For the full inscribed entry, see A. Degraffi, *Inscriptiones Italiae XIII* (1963) 130–1, 448–9.

⁶ Dumézil does sometimes attempt to demonstrate the continuing significance into the historical period of the ‘original meaning’ of a festival. So, for example, he claims that it was not by chance that Mark Antony chose the *Lupercalia* (in Dumézil’s view a festival concerned with the primitive kingship of the city) to offer Caesar the royal crown; the political importance of the scene depended on the spectators knowing and understanding the original regal

This disjunction between primitive meaning and historical practice is an important factor in our inability to make sense of Roman festivals – and of Roman religion in general – during the late Republic and early Empire. How can we possibly imagine sophisticated intellectuals like Cicero or sceptical poets like Ovid leaping through bonfires in a ritual concerned with the purification of flocks and herds?⁷ Or sacrificing pregnant cows, tearing out and burning their foetuses in order to promote the fertility of the land?⁸ We know that these rituals continued to be carried out and that men of the elite continued to officiate as priests – our sources make that quite clear; and indeed Ovid more than once writes as if he had himself participated in or observed particular festivals.⁹ But we mostly remain at a complete loss about how to relate the supposed primitive agricultural significance of the rituals to the complex urban concerns of those practising the rituals in the historical period. Of course, it is precisely this sense of bafflement that goes to confirm, in traditional accounts, the emptiness of the Roman religious system during the late Republic and early Empire. It seems to be a system in which people went on performing all the old rituals – when even for the practitioners the significance of those rituals was meaningless, lost in the distant past.¹⁰

I am taking a very different approach. I do this by looking at what the ancients themselves wrote about various festivals of their ritual calendar – particularly the explanations they offered for the origin of these festivals, so-called ‘aetiologies’.¹¹ The main texts referred to were all written during the last century BC and the first and early second centuries AD: they are, most importantly, Ovid’s *Fasti*, the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and various

associations of the rite. Yet, even in this case, Dumézil admits the disjunction between his suggested religious meaning and contemporary life: ‘our information dates from an era in which we can no longer hope to obtain a complete and systematic view of rites which had long ceased to correspond to religious and social reality’. See G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman religion* (1970) 346–50 (quote, p. 350).

⁷ This particular ritual element forms part of the festival of the *Parilia* discussed below, pp. 277–78.

⁸ I refer here to the festival of the *Fordicidia* (15 April); for a brief account, see Scullard, *Festivals* 102 and Dumézil, *Archaic Roman religion* 371–4.

⁹ [Ovid] *Fast.* 4. 725 (*Parilia*); 4. 905–9 (*Robigalia*). It is, of course, quite unknowable whether Ovid ‘really’ participated in or observed these festivals.

¹⁰ Note, for example, the bafflement of R. M. Ogilvie, who writes in relation to the *Lemuria*, a ritual of the dead which involved the celebrant at midnight spitting out black beans from his mouth: ‘At first sight it is difficult to imagine Livy or Horace or Agrippa getting out of bed and solemnly going through this ritual. And yet they probably did – at least in a modified form’ (*Romans and their gods* 85).

¹¹ I refer almost exclusively in this paper to *written* aetiologies. No doubt there was also an active oral tradition; but this is now irrecoverable to us.

antiquarian and biographical works of Plutarch. Also taken into consideration are some rather later texts and various comments on individual festivals incorporated into surviving versions of the official state calendar – normally inscribed on stone, but also sometimes in manuscript form.¹²

I am not, of course, treating these aetiological stories as objective commentaries or as ‘real’ explanations of the festivals or of their origins. It would make no sense to take as literally true claims that Aeneas himself founded the *Vinalia Priora* or that Romulus established the *Consualia* in order to lure the Sabines to Rome and so make off with their womenfolk!¹³ My argument is rather that these stories are themselves symbolic and as such, are an integral part of Roman religious discourse. In other words ritual actions and the narratives which purport to explain those actions *together* form Roman religious experience and *together* construct Roman religious meanings. Roman aetiology is, in an important sense, like the native exegeses discussed by Sperber in *Rethinking Symbolism*: it ‘does not constitute the interpretation of the symbol [in this case symbolic ritual] but one of its extensions, and must itself be symbolically interpreted’.¹⁴ One obvious objection to this procedure is that the written narratives I am using are not ‘native exegesis’ in the proper sense, but rather intellectualizing ‘interpretation’. The contrast is drawn sharply by Detienne: ‘Exegesis proliferates from inside; it is a speech which nourishes the tradition of which it is a part, whereas interpretation emerges the moment there is an outside perspective, when some in society begin to question, to criticize the tradition, to distance themselves with regard to the histories of the tribe’.¹⁵ In the case of Roman rituals and their aetiologies, men such as Ovid or (even more so) the Greeks Dionysius and Plutarch might be seen as essentially marginal to Roman culture and religion. As ‘intellectuals’

¹² For full evidence of the surviving calendars, see Degraasi, *Inscriptiones Italiae*.

¹³ For Aeneas and the *Vinalia Priora* (a different festival from the *Vinalia Rustica* mentioned above), see [Ovid] *Fast.* 4. 879–900; Plutarch, *Roman questions* 45 (and other references collected by Degraasi, *Inscriptiones Italiae* 446–7). The story was (in Ovid’s version) that, during Aeneas’ war with Turnus, Mezentius (the Etruscan leader) promised to help Turnus, if he received a pledge in return for half of the next year’s vintage; but Aeneas turned the tables on this offer by vowing the vintage, if *he* won, to Jupiter himself. Aeneas, of course, was victorious and from that day on the Romans offered up the first fruits of the vintage at the *Vinalia* to Jupiter. For the *Consualia* and the plot to steal the Sabine women, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman antiquities* 2.31 (though there are many divergent versions, including the story told by Dionysius himself that the festival was founded by Evander: 1. 33. 2).

¹⁴ D. Sperber, *Rethinking symbolism* (1975) 17–50 (quote, p. 48).

¹⁵ See M. Detienne, ‘Rethinking mythology’ in M. Izard and P. Smith (eds.), *Between belief and transgression* (1982) 43–52 (quote p. 48). Detienne is particularly concerned with intellectuals in the Greek world, but the terms of his analysis could equally well be applied to Rome.

and, in some cases, as 'foreigners' they offered a commentary on Roman ritual from an independent external standpoint; their writing did not form an integral part of traditional symbolic religious discourse.

The force of this objection depends on seeing a clear division between 'traditional' Roman religion and the 'foreign' or 'intellectual', as represented by the literary Greco-Roman culture of the late Republic and early Principate. Such a division is not inherently implausible, but it tends to oversimplify the complex amalgam that constituted Roman religion throughout the historical period. In the history of Roman religion there is no easy distinction to be made between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. It is, in fact, a mark of the religious system of Rome that, from its earliest period, it constantly incorporated Greek and other ostensibly foreign elements; and, in an increasingly Hellenized world, it generated new (often 'intellectual') religious perspectives – most of which have a claim to be seen as internal rather than external to 'native' traditions. In my view, there is no reason necessarily to regard the illiterate (and, for us, mute) peasant as a truer representative of the Romanness of Roman religion than Hellenized Roman intellectuals or Roman Greeks. Moreover, by taking the writing of Ovid, Dionysius and Plutarch on religious festivals as internal religious exegesis, rather than marginal commentary, we can arrive at new and useful results in an area of notorious difficulty.¹⁶

2 THE *PARILIA*: THE TEXTS

For most of this paper I shall consider just one theme that seems to me particularly important in understanding the practice of Roman ritual: the theme of time and history. I shall approach this theme first by analysing some examples of the written accounts and aetiologies of Roman ritual that I have been referring to. In this section (2), I shall present my chosen texts; in the following sections (3–7) I shall draw out their various implications, offering an analysis of the function and operation of Roman ritual.

All the chosen texts refer to the festival of the *Parilia*, which took place each year on 21 April. There were, no doubt, many variant forms of the ritual – but if we follow the account of Ovid (who had himself, he claims, taken part in the ritual) the festival traditionally

¹⁶ For Rome's traditional tendency to incorporate religious forms from outside, see J. A. North, 'Conservatism and change in Roman religion', *PBSR* n.s. 30 (1976) 1–12.

proceeded – at least in the countryside – something like this: the celebrant (let us imagine him – as usual – to be a shepherd!) would first clean out his sheep-pens and decorate them with branches and festoons; he would then light a bonfire and scatter onto it sulphur – so that the smoke fumigated the sheep; offerings of cake and milk were then brought and a prayer was said to the deity Pales – asking for protection for the flocks; the shepherd finally washed himself in dew, drank milk and leapt through the still burning bonfire. The urban form of the festival must have differed in various respects, but it probably contained a number of the same elements, modified for the urban context.¹⁷

There have been many modern interpretations of this festival. The standard textbook answer is to see the ritual as a festival of purification of flocks and herds – a festival which at some point (as we shall see in the following passages) became identified as the anniversary of the foundation of Rome. In fact to this very day 21 April is still celebrated as the birthday of Rome.¹⁸

The first passage that concerns us is an extract from Plutarch's *Life of Romulus*. Plutarch is describing the foundation of the city of Rome and discussing the general consensus on the precise date of that foundation. For him, at least in this context, the first association of the festival of the *Parilia* is as a marker of the anniversary of the birthday of the city. It is only in second place that he mentions the *Parilia* as a pastoral festival, associated with a time before the foundation of the city.

Text 1

Now it is agreed that the city was founded on the twenty-first of April, and this day the Romans celebrate with a festival, calling it the birthday of their country. And at first, as it is said, they sacrificed no living creature at that festival, but thought they ought to keep it pure and without stain of blood, since it commemorated the birth of their country. However, even before the founding of the city, they had a pastoral festival on that day, and called it *Parilia*.¹⁹

The same two elements occur in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' account of the festival. Again, Dionysius is concerned with the foundation of Rome; but for him the relationship between the anniver-

¹⁷ See [Ovid] *Fast.* 4. 721–862 (lines 783–806 quoted below). In addition to the major texts reprinted in this article, see the citations on the *Parilia* collected by Degraffi, *Inscriptiones Italiae* 443–5.

¹⁸ See, for example, Scullard, *Festivals* 103–5 and G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* ed. 2 (1912) 199–201. On the identity of the god (or goddess) Pales, see G. Dumézil, *Idées romaines* (1969) 273–87.

¹⁹ Plutarch, *Romulus* 12. 1–2.

sary celebrations of the city and the festival of flocks and herds is rather more problematic.

Text 2

This day the Romans celebrate every year even down to my own time as one of their greatest festivals and call it the *Parilia*. On this day, which comes in the beginning of Spring, the husbandmen and herdsmen offer up a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the increase of their cattle. But whether they had celebrated this day in even earlier times as a day of rejoicing and for that reason looked upon it as the most suitable for the founding of the city, or whether, because it marked the beginning of the building of the city, they should honour on it the gods who are propitious to shepherds, I cannot say for certain.²⁰

Ovid's account of the *Parilia* (text 3) is much more complex; after describing the practice of the festival, with its bonfires, shepherds' prayers and flame-leaping, he offers a great variety of explanations for the ritual. He picks out particularly the elements of fire and water – the washing of the hands in dew and the lighting of bonfires – and focusses his explanations first on those opposing elements. Only in second place does he turn to 'mythological' explanations for the origin of the rite; and he alludes finally to the role of the festival as the anniversary of the foundation of Rome (a theme fully developed in the passage immediately following that printed below).

Text 3

I have set forth the custom; it remains for me to tell its origin. The multitude of explanations creates a doubt and thwarts me at the outset. Devouring fire purges all things and melts the dross from out the metals; therefore it purges the shepherd and the sheep. Or are we to suppose that, because all things are composed of opposite principles, fire and water – those two discordant deities – therefore our fathers did conjoin these elements and thought meet to touch the body with fire and sprinkled water? Or did they deem these two important because they contain the source of life, the exile loses them, and by them the bride is made a wife? Some suppose (though I can hardly do so) that the allusion is to Phaethon and Deucalion's flood. Some people also say that when shepherds were knocking stones together, a spark suddenly leaped forth; the first indeed was lost, but the second was caught in straw; is that the reason of the flame at the *Parilia*? Or is the custom rather based on the piety of Aeneas, whom, even in the hour of defeat, the fire allowed to pass unscathed? Or is it haply nearer the truth that, when Rome was founded, orders were given to transfer the household gods to the new houses and to the cottages they were about to abandon, and that they and their cattle leaped through the flames? Which happens even to the present time on the birthday of Rome.²¹

²⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman antiquities* 1.88.3.

²¹ [Ovid] *Fast.* 4. 783–806. For the complex narrative of the foundation of Rome under Romulus, see 807–62.

The final passage (*text 4*) is much later; it is taken from Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* – a work of the late second or early third century AD, which depicted in (originally) thirty books the dinner-time discussion of twenty-nine learned men on a variety of academic and antiquarian topics. This passage is not an aetiology of the festival, but simply a passing reference to it: the banqueters are in the middle of their dinner when suddenly they hear outside the noise of a public procession, which turns out to be associated with the festival of 21 April. The important point to note is the change in the festival's name: when the emperor Hadrian chose the day of the festival to found his temple of the Fortune of Rome, what used to be called the *Parilia* became the *Romaia*.

Text 4

It so happened that it was the festival of the *Parilia*, as it used to be called, though it is now called the Roman Festival, instituted in honour of the Fortune of Rome, when her temple was erected by that best and most enlightened of emperors, Hadrian. That day is celebrated annually as especially glorious by all the residents of Rome and by all who happen to be staying in the city.²²

3 THE VARIETY OF EXPLANATIONS

My first point is, to some extent, an aside. It represents a first, immediate reaction to the texts as presented. One of the most striking aspects of these ancient accounts is the sheer variety, the sheer range of explanations on offer – from the symbolic clash of discordant elements to the circumstantial events surrounding the foundation of Rome. Of course, it is precisely this feature – this whole series of diverse explanations – that has led most people to undervalue these accounts and to dismiss them as ever more fanciful intellectualizing speculation. This is, no doubt, partly because the traditional aim of the historian in writing narrative or political history has been to provide the single best account of the events under consideration and to dismiss divergent or conflicting evidence as in some sense inferior. But other types of history – particularly in the fields of religion or culture – can incorporate divergence as a positive advantage. In the case of the *Parilia*, for example, the wide variety of different explanations offered by our ancient sources is an indication of the strongly evocative power of the festival itself: it had no single meaning; it

²² Athenaeus 8. 36re–f. For the background to the Hadrianic developments reported in this passage, see J. Beaujeu, *La religion romaine à l'apogée de l'Empire* 1 (1955) 128–36.

constantly generated new and changing stories and interpretations. Indeed, as I shall argue in greater detail below, the continued resonance of such festivals in Roman society during the historical period depended on this wide dispersion of their meaning; on the festivals' capacity to be constantly reinterpreted and re-understood.

4 THE ARGUMENT: A SUMMARY

I want now to concentrate on the particular aspect of ritual that relates to time and history (or better *Roman* time and *Roman* history). I shall sketch the main outline of my argument first, before returning to the texts associated with the *Parilia* to develop more fully the different points and to draw out the general implications.

My central thesis is that the Roman ritual calendar together with its exegetical texts (and no doubt also its exegetical oral tradition) offered one important way of 'imaging' Roman history, even imaging Rome itself. By 'imaging Rome' I mean that the festivals of the ritual calendar, together with the aetiological narratives associated with each, offered to the Roman participants, year by year, a series of tableaux, evoking different elements of Roman religion and history. That is, each festival, with all its different associations, presented and represented a picture of Romanness – linking the past with the present, and bringing together apparently diverse aspects of the Roman religious and cultural tradition. In a sense, the ritual calendar as a whole can be seen as a conceptual pageant of Rome and of what it was to be Roman.

This pageant did not present a fixed, unchanging view of Roman-ness. Like a modern carnival procession – with its jostling and juxtaposition of banners, its changing order and hierarchy, its different appearance from one moment to the next, as people join in or drop out from the main line – it incorporated new, changing, divergent images of what Rome was. It could do this because there was no main narrative thread linking one festival and the next. Unlike the Protestant ritual calendar – which year by year reenacts from one festival to another the narrative of the life of Christ, in a sequence which can hardly admit change – the Roman festal year generated new associations and meanings outside any overriding annual storyline.

The essential opposition here is between a calendar (such as the Protestant) whose meaning is dominated by the syntagmatic links between its various rituals, and a calendar (such as the Roman) in which meaning is largely constructed by paradigmatic association.

Drawn from theories of linguistic analysis, 'syntagmatic meaning' is the sense held by a unit of language in a linear sequence. 'In its place in a syntagma, any unit acquires its value simply in opposition to what precedes or what follows, or both.' 'Paradigmatic meaning', on the other hand, invests linguistic units with significance, not through their position in any particular sequence, but through all the associations of opposition or similarity that they evoke in the mind. So, for example, in the catch-phrase 'the cat sat on the mat', the word 'cat' evokes associations with 'dog', 'tiger', 'bat', 'cab' and many more. As Saussure put it, 'any term acts as the centre of a constellation, from which connected terms radiate *ad infinitum*'. It was precisely the Roman calendar's reliance on building up associations and images on a paradigmatic model outside any determining narrative that gave the individual festival a fluid meaning in relation to the others in the sequence. In short, the stress on the paradigm over the syntagm allowed the incorporation into the calendar of new stories, new aetiologies – and so also new *meanings* – for the festivals.²³

This brief summary needs some amplification. In the following sections (5 and 6) I present two elaborations on my theme in particular relation to the texts printed above. These elaborations – the first on the idea of the historical pageant, the second on the paradigmatic emphasis of the Roman ritual calendar – are not straightforward proofs of my argument; they are rather developments from it, which add depth and weight to my brief summary.

5 THE HISTORICAL PAGEANT

The first elaboration concerns the historical pageant. We can start here from the texts on the *Parilia*. One striking feature of these texts is their stress on the historical time and historical circumstances of the origin of the festival. The accounts of Plutarch (*text 1*) and of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*text 2*) illustrate this – and its possible complexity – very clearly. At its most straightforward level, the cel-

²³ See F. de Saussure, *Course in general linguistics* (tr. R. Harris, 1983, 121–5 (quotes pp. 121 and 124)). The Roman ritual calendar is not, of course, entirely without syntagmatic meaning. There are for example, clear relationships between festivals following one another at particular intervals in the Roman calendar: pairs of festivals, separated by one day, appear often to be complementary (the *Cerealia* of 19 April concerned with crops, the *Parilia* of 21 April concerned with herds; the *Vestalia* of 9 June concerned with the fire of the hearth, the *Matralia* of 11 June with the light of the dawn); while similarly those separated by three days sometimes suggest the same underlying preoccupation from slightly different points of view (the *Consualia* of 21 August and *Opiconsivia* of 25 August; the *Consualia* of 15 December and *Opalia* of 19 December – all concerned with the use and storage of crops). See further, Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus* 437; Dumézil, *Fêtes* 22.

celebration of the *Parilia* evoked for both writers the moment of the foundation of Rome by Romulus. But there were other associations too, as both writers recognized that the history of the festival extended back beyond Romulus' foundation. The *Parilia*, in other words, evoked not only the traditional Romulean foundation of the city, but also that limbo time before Rome was a city but when (by a mythological paradox) many of Rome's customs already existed.²⁴

In several accounts of the *Parilia*, the evocation of the misty early history of the city serves to link present day (Augustan) Rome with its paraded forebears – the honourable, incorruptible men of Rome's Golden Age. That certainly is one reading of Ovid's lengthy description (following *text 3*) of the foundation of Rome and of Tibullus' brief allusions to the *Parilia* in Poem 2.5. By focusing on Pales (along with Pan) as the principal deities of the primitive community of Rome, Tibullus imbues with the primitive virtues of piety and simplicity his *contemporary* celebrants of the *Parilia* – countrymen who, even in the age of Augustus, under happy omens, drank deep of their wine and leapt through the flames of the *Parilia*'s bonfires.²⁵ But the images of the pageant can offer subversive readings too. The display of the heroes of the early city can also point up the distance (rather than the closeness) between Augustan and Romulean Rome. So, for example, Ovid's readers could find a tension between the practice of their own day and their, perhaps quaint, primitive antecedents – a tension whose comic effects served only to deflate Augustus' paraded links with the Romulean past. The evocation of early history in the exegesis of Roman ritual was not, in other words, simply a means of legitimating contemporary claims to authority; it could also undermine those claims. In that subversive potential, no doubt, part of its strength lay.²⁶

Other festivals and their exegesis evoke other times. Some, like the *Parilia*, take us back to the myth-history of earliest Rome.²⁷ Others

²⁴ This limbo time is clearly evoked by the activities of the Arcadian king Evander in *Aeneid* 8 – a Roman *avant la lettre*, who performed already 'Roman' cult (that of Hercules at the *Ara Maxima*, for example) on the site of Rome before the city's foundation by Romulus. (See also n. 27 on the *Lupercalia*.)

²⁵ Tib. 2.5.28, 87–90, with F. Cairns, *Tibullus* (1979) 79–86 (though Cairns' suggestion that the poem effectively incorporates two descriptions of the *Parilia* seems wrong; we are dealing rather with a reference to the primitive deity Pales (28), followed by a brief description of the contemporary *Parilia* (87–90)).

²⁶ I am grateful to Andrew Wallace-Hadrill for raising this point.

²⁷ Note, for example, Ovid's explanations of the *Lupercalia* (*Fast.* 2.267–452) which take the reader back to the time of the mythical king Evander, before the foundation of the city, and to the youthful exploits of Romulus and Remus (cf. Plutarch, *Romulus* 21.4–8; Val. Max. 2.2.9). Similarly the *Consualia* and *Vinalia* (n. 13, above).

present more recent time. So, for example, Ovid's treatment of the *Carmentalia* (unlike the *Parilia*) locates its origin in the third century BC; he tells of the protest of Roman women who refused to bear children until their traditional right to drive in carriages – recently removed from them – was returned; the Senate, whose hand was thus forced, gave them back their rights and instituted a festival of the goddess Carmenta (a deity who protected childbirth) in order to help the birthrate.²⁸

More recent time still could be evoked by the days in the calendar which marked the anniversary and the celebration of the foundation of particular temples. We know no details of the rituals which took place on these occasions; but each anniversary must surely have called to mind the narrative history of the temple's foundation. So, for example, the annual celebrations of the Temple of *Fortuna Huiusque Diei* in the Campus Martius must have involved recollection of Rome's victory at the battle of Vercellae in 101 BC and the vow made in the midst of that battle by Q. Lutatius Catulus that he would dedicate such a temple at Rome, if the gods granted victory to the Romans. In fact, one of the commonest circumstances for the foundation of a temple was just such a vow by a Roman general in the midst of battle, fulfilled by the building of a temple – often financed by the spoils – after the victory. It was almost as if the days marking the anniversaries of temples acted as a recurrent public reminder of Rome's past successes – recent or far distant.²⁹

By the time of the early Empire, of course, festival days gained a new type of association – in the life, career and successes of the emperor, his family and his predecessors on the throne. Important events in the life of Caesar or of Augustus, say, became incorporated into the calendar both on days without any particular previous ritual significance and also on days of the old traditional festivals. So, for example, the day of the *Parilia* became associated under Caesar with games to commemorate the announcement of Caesar's victory at

²⁸ [Ovid] *Fast.* 1.617–36 (referring to the *Carmentalia* of 15 January); see also, for a similar explanation, Plutarch, *Roman questions* 56. For other aetiologies (including the story that the festival was founded by – perhaps – Romulus, after his capture of Fidenae), see Degraffi, *Inscriptiones Italiae* 394–6, 398. For a brief review of the problems of the interpretation of the festival, see Scullard, *Festivals* 62–4. A similar middle Republican aetiology is found for the *Lesser Quinquatrus* (13 June; Scullard, *Festivals* 152–3) – according to which the festival was established after a strike of flute-players in 311 BC (see [Livy] 9.30.5–10; [Ovid] *Fast.* 6.649–710).

²⁹ For Catulus' vow, see Plutarch, *Marius* 26. For a similar example, note the foundation of the Temple of Bellona in the Circus Flaminius, vowed in 296 BC by Appius Claudius Caecus ([Livy] 10.19.17).

Munda;³⁰ while 17 March, the day of the traditional *Liberalia*, was also marked in the calendars as the anniversary of the victory itself in Spain. This did not necessarily wipe out the previous associations of the day, but it did at least offer an alternative. Performing the *Liberalia*, 'thinking' the *Liberalia*, gained a new layer of historical evocation.³¹

The cumulation of all these different associations throughout the year, developed and elaborated in written and oral exegesis, is what constitutes the pageant of the Roman calendar. As the year progressed a whole series of different images was conjured up from different stages of Rome's history, from the era of myth to the present day, overlapping one with another in 'ritual time'.

6 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PARADIGM

The second elaboration concerns the generation of new ritual meanings in the ritual calendar and the gradually shifting focus of the evocation of individual festivals. I have already mentioned the Caesarian associations acquired by both the *Parilia* and the *Liberalia*, in addition to their traditional meanings. The *Parilia*, in fact, provides further important illustration of the way individual festivals could shift in their major centre of significance.

I have already suggested that the great list of explanations provided by Ovid (*text* 3) was important for our understanding of how the festival continued to have resonance at Rome through changing historical and social circumstances. In my view, it is the continuing capacity to generate stories and aetiologies that is crucial for the continuance of a festival. Some of these stories will necessarily be marginal and idiosyncratic – one person's way of making the ritual make sense for themselves. But other versions and other stories will gain widespread acceptance; and as new stories take over from old, so the 'meaning' of the ritual changes. It is a complicated process; but it is essentially the way in which apparently static ritual forms

³⁰ See [Cassius] Dio, *Histories* 43.42.3 (although note that these games appear quickly to have fallen out of use; cf. *Histories* 45.6.4). Beaujeu, *La religion romaine* 131 suggests that Caesar, like Hadrian later, was rather attempting to turn the festival into an 'official' festival of the anniversary of Rome.

³¹ For the *Liberalia* marked in calendars as the anniversary of Munda, see Degrassi, *Inscriptiones Italiae* 426 with Appian, *Civil war* 2.106.442 and [Cassius] Dio, *Histories* 43.44.6. The traditional associations of the *Liberalia* were as a festival of Liber Pater (who became equated with the Greek Dionysus); it was also the day on which Roman boys traditionally 'came of age'. See, briefly, Scullard, *Festivals* 91–2.

manage to continue to be meaningful when the society within which they are practised has radically changed.

Ovid's list, of course, seems a bit absurd. He gives too many explanations at once; no one individual at Rome could ever have thought all that at the same time, in the way we have to read it. There is, moreover, as they are juxtaposed, a certain tension between the different styles of exegesis – the attempts to delineate a 'physical' explanation (in terms of elemental opposition) lying somewhat uneasily beside the appeals to Greco-Roman myth-history (whether Phaethon and Deucalion, Aeneas or Romulus).³² But if we keep in mind the theoretical importance of Ovid's profusion of explanations and turn to the other passages cited, it is possible to see a shift of focus in the festival of the *Parilia* taking place through historical time.

There are two main explanations of the festival offered by the texts – on the one hand, that it is a festival of herds and flocks, and on the other that it is a commemoration of the birthday of Rome. Plutarch implies a chronological development here – with an early pastoral festival becoming subsequently associated with the foundation of the city; Dionysius queries the relationship between the two – not knowing which came first. I would like to suggest, at the risk of oversimplification, that Plutarch's symbolic narrative is (no doubt quite fortuitously) historical: that is, an early pastoral festival of the primitive Roman community became actively reinterpreted in the increasingly urban society of Rome into a festival of the city and its origin.³³ By the time of Hadrian (as recorded by Athenaeus) the association of the day with the anniversary of Rome had become so strong that the name of the festival had been changed from *Parilia* to *Romaia*; and new celebrations (connected with Hadrian's foundation of the Temple of Rome) marked the day out definitively as the *Natalis* (birthday) of the city.³⁴

³² For 'tension' between different styles of Roman religious discourse, see M. Beard, 'Cicero and divination: the formation of a Latin discourse', *JRS* 76 (1986) 33–46. There is, of course, no reason to assume (as has often been done) that Ovid and his sophisticated contemporaries would have 'really believed' the 'scientific', 'rationalising' explanations, and would have effectively dismissed the 'mythological' exegesis as primitive mumbo-jumbo. The point is that the two forms could, if awkwardly, exist side by side.

³³ I must stress here the *fortuitous* coincidence between Plutarch's symbolic narrative and my 'historical' reconstruction. I am not in any sense going back on my primary contention that these exegeses are an integral part of Roman religious experience, not external explanations of it.

³⁴ In attempting to reconcile the account of Athenaeus with the archaeological evidence for the new temple, I follow here the narrative of the Hadrianic developments suggested by Beaujeu (*La religion romaine* 128–33): that the first *formal* celebration of Rome's birthday on 21 April (a celebration of a *Romaia* that is, rather than just a *Parilia*) probably took place in

That shift is enormous and must be understood in relation to two particular factors. First, there is an important dynamic towards change in ritual meaning provided by the exegetical texts I have been discussing. The constant story-telling, questioning, interpretation and reinterpretation around Roman festivals prevents the significance of the festival from becoming fixed. Only when the story-telling stopped would the dead hand of orthodoxy lock the meaning of the ritual into the concerns of one moment of Roman history. Second, as I suggested above, such a vast shift depends on the very limited importance of the syntagmatic axis in the Roman ritual calendar. If, as in the Protestant Christian church, the calendar incorporated a single narrative story running throughout the year, no one festival could undergo such a vast change – at least not without upsetting the whole story.³⁵ Because in the Roman calendar meaning is so strongly located in the paradigm, substantial shifts in the focus of individual festivals are possible. New aspects of the present (or the past) can be incorporated (or discarded) at will. The *Parilia* is just one example of this. Right through the calendar the apparently easy incorporation, in the early principate, of new associations with the imperial power – the celebration of the birthday of emperors, the anniversaries of their military successes – provides yet further indication of the adaptability of the Roman ritual year, and hence its astonishing powers of survival.³⁶

7 CONCLUSION: REPRESENTATIONS OF TIME

My main argument in this paper has been that one important aspect of the ritual calendar at Rome (and of the exegesis that went with it)

121 AD; that the decision was taken at that time to found a temple of Venus and Rome (or Fortune of Rome or just Temple of the City, as it is variously called), whose foundation day thus fell on 21 April (although it was not completed till some years later); that in later years the celebrations of 21 April combined the commemoration of the birthday of the city and (as a further symbolic marker) the commemoration of the foundation of the temple. One must remember, of course, that the specific association of the day of the *Parilia* with the birthday of Rome long predated Hadrian; the earliest surviving (Republican) calendar of the city marks the day as '*Parilia: Roma condita*' (*Parilia: Rome founded*); see Degraffi, *Inscriptiones Italiae* 443.

³⁵ The Protestant church has, of course, other ways of incorporating changes into its festal year. A different political ideology, for example, can be assimilated by providing prominent positions for political leaders in the enactment of ritual or by carrying out rituals in locations normally associated with the political establishment.

³⁶ The incorporation of 'imperial' festivals into the traditional calendar is not necessarily as 'innocent' a process as my analysis may suggest. In part, we are no doubt dealing with a seamless web, 'naturally' assimilating the new political order; in part, we may imagine a consciously ideological use of existing tradition by Caesar, Augustus and their followers.

was its capacity to project Rome and Roman history, and to adapt the image projected. The calendar was one way (and a changing way) of representing 'Roman time'. It was not, of course, the only way. Consider for a moment the Rome of Augustus – and compare the image of Rome constructed by the calendar with that of the narrative of Livy's history or of the famous map of the Roman empire started by Agrippa, finished by Augustus and publicly displayed in the city.³⁷ All these cultural forms were about Rome and Romanness – but they operated in different ways. Agrippa's map projected Rome in terms of place and empire. It was principally a synchronic view of Rome – Rome and its empire were there, as if they had been there for ever.³⁸ Livy's narrative, by contrast, offered a diachronic view of Rome: once upon a time Rome was nothing – but gradually year by year, book by book through Livy's narrative, we see it developing into a splendid imperial power. The ritual calendar and the exegesis that went with it was different from either of these, neither a diachronic nor a synchronic image of Rome. It offered a pageant of what it was to be Roman, which existed in 'ritual time', in time whose sequence had collapsed into an overlapping series of stories. In brief it constituted a perfect image of 'Romanness': to perform the rituals through the year – whether you were a poor peasant or a sophisticated Roman intellectual – was to discover and rediscover that Romanness.³⁹

³⁷ For a full (but dull) account of this exciting document, see O. A. W. Dilke, *Greek and Roman maps* (1985) 41–53. The map is there treated in entirely utilitarian terms; only at the end of the account (p. 53) is there a hint of anything more: 'Also the full extent of the Roman Empire could be seen at a glance'.

³⁸ I say this image was *principally* synchronic, for of course it also allowed speculation on the (diachronic) narrative history of the growth of the Roman world.

³⁹ For other discussions of the importance of calendars in cognitive systems, see P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice* (1977) 96–109 and the various papers collected in *Systèmes de pensée en Afrique noire* 7 (1984) (special issue on 'Calendriers d'Afrique').