

## Chapter 5

# The division of space: temples, sanctuaries and other sacred places

Just as the city extended its control to time, so also it defined and controlled space. You could say that the city arranged the division of space between men and gods.

## 1 INAUGURATED PLACES: THE *TEMPLUM*

The space occupied by the city was 'liberated and pronounced to be designated' (*liberatus et effatus*). In the course of this operation, carried out by augurs, places destined to be appropriated by the city and its functions were freed from all divine constraints. Such was the case for the ancient territory of Rome (*ager Romanus antiquus*), the city itself (*urbs*) and the *templum*. These spaces could then be 'inaugurated' (*inaugurare*), meaning that they were defined with the approval of the auspices (on this concept, see below). Inauguration – or the definition of a space by the city with Jupiter's approval – was required for all public activities, or rather for all public decisions: *comitia*, sessions of the Senate, judicial activities, places of cult activity, places where auspices were taken. Certain priests, such as the *flamines maiores*, the *rex sacrorum* and the *salii* were also inaugurated. A place approved by the auspices was a *templum*. According to Paul Diaconus, it was 'defined and closed in such a way that it was open on one side only, with its corners solidly fixed in the ground' (Summary of Festus, *De uerborum significatione*, p. 146, ed. Lindsay). Inaugurated spaces, which were in principle quadrangular, were marked by a bronze star (Festus, *De uerborum significatione*, p. 470, ed. Lindsay) and bore the description *augustus*,

'august'. Like priests who had been inaugurated, these *templa* could later be 'exaugurated', that is to say disengaged from their intended purpose on behalf of the community that had been sanctioned by the auspices.

A *templum* in the Roman sense of the term was neither a building nor a sacred place. For a *templum* to become sacred, it had to be wholly or partly consecrated. As many temples (in our sense) were built within *templa* or even covering their exact area, these were also called *templa*, and in this way the term gradually acquired the current meaning of a religious building.

## 2 THE *POMERIUM*, A SPECIAL BOUNDARY

A second boundary separated the city of Rome (*urbs*) from its territory (*ager*): the *pomerium*. This boundary was established by the official foundation rite of the city. It was therefore a feature only of Rome and of ancient towns in Latium and the Roman colonies, and it is not correct to use the term for Roman towns of the imperial period (nor, of course, did any without any formal Roman status (*peregrini*) possess a *pomerium*).

A passage of Varro describes the operation of foundation:

Many founded towns in Latium by the Etruscan rite; that is, with a team of cattle, a bull and a cow on the inside, they ran a furrow around with a plough . . . that they might be fortified by a ditch and a wall. The place where they had ploughed up the earth they called a *fossa*, 'ditch', and the earth thrown inside it they called a *murus* 'wall'. The *orbis*, 'circle', which was made behind this was the beginning of the *urbs*, 'city'; because the circle was *post-murum*, 'behind the wall', it was called a *post-moerium*; it sets the limits for the taking of the auspices for the city. Stone markers of the *pomerium* stand both around Aricia and around Rome.

Varro, *On the Latin Language*, 5.143

Towns were positioned inside their *pomerium*, and its line ran inside a ditch and a rampart of earth. As André Magdelain

has shown, the *urbs* was not itself a *templum*, even though the *pomerium* constituted the limit for urban auspices: the purpose of the *pomerium* was to mark and preserve the integrity of the ground set aside for the town's auspices, and to distinguish it from outside territory where the city's auspices could not legitimately be taken. But in order to take the auspices within the city, a *templum* had first to be marked out within this special, privileged space.

To preserve the integrity of the space within the *pomerium*, it was forbidden to place any tombs there; and the army, that is to say soldiers bearing arms, were not allowed to enter it (except during a triumph), no doubt because they were defiled by warfare, or rather because the *pomerium* marked out a sphere of different, civic (in our sense 'civilian') existence. It follows that the *comitia centuriata*, which was the assembly of citizens in their military capacity, could only be held outside the *pomerium*. The pomerial line constituted the boundary between the *imperium domi* (civic power, within the city) and the *imperium militiae* (full power vested in the armies, in other words outside Roman territory). Deities that presided over activities involving death and destruction, such as Mars and Vulcan, could not be given sanctuaries inside the *pomerium*. That did not prevent some places connected with the cults of such deities from surviving within the *pomerium* – trapped, as it were, by the later extension of the city boundaries. For example, the Volcanal in the Forum remained on the spot that it had occupied in the archaic period, but when a new temple to Vulcan was founded, this was positioned on the Campus Martius, on the other side of the *pomerium*.

At first sight, it seems that certain deities of foreign origin, such as Apollo (although he may well have been a warrior god initially), Hercules, Diana, Juno Regina and Aesculapius, may also have been relegated beyond the line of the *pomerium*. Was the pomerial space reserved for strictly Roman deities? The question is complex and much debated. The ambiguity of any such rule is illustrated by the fact that the Greek Castor and Pollux had their temple right in the middle of the Forum

and the Great Mother was up on the Palatine. In any case, under the Empire, the rule no longer applied – even if it had earlier. The whole question was certainly more complex than Georg Wissowa (who proposed a sharp division between foreign and native deities) believed, and we cannot be certain that under the Republic deities of foreign origin were excluded from the *pomerium*. It was rather the hostile nature of the deities that really mattered – functional hostility such as that of Apollo or Hercules, or at any rate behaviour considered to be hostile to the Romans. Thus, at the beginning of the common era, Isis was banished from the area of the *pomerium* to more than a thousand paces beyond it because she had been the patron goddess of Egypt, the enemy of Octavian and the Romans.

The *pomerium*, as it is recorded in Roman myth, ran around the Palatine; under the Republic it corresponded more or less with the line marked out by the Servian wall of the city (established by the king Servius Tullius). The *pomerium* was directly linked to Roman imperial territory, because any general who had increased the latter also had the right of extending the *pomerium*. That was done several times during the Republic and Empire, and the *pomerium* ended up by incorporating a large part of the Campus Martius as well as the Aventine Hill.

### 3 SACRED SPACES

The space of the city and of its territory was divided between gods and men into spaces that were sacred and spaces that were not. There were two types of sacred spaces: those that men had dedicated to the gods and constructed for them; and those that the gods had somehow chosen and arranged for themselves, which men simply recognised rather than created.

#### 3.1 *Sacred places and objects*

There were many kinds of sacred places constructed by men. They ranged from simple religious precincts equipped with

an altar all the way to grand temples surrounded by colonnades that dominated a site with an altar and possibly also secondary buildings. In the eyes of the city, or from the public point of view, only spaces or buildings that had been legally consecrated were sacred. An altar or temple that had not been consecrated in the regular fashion, that is by a magistrate with *imperium* or a person legally charged to do so, was not sacred, but profane.

This does not mean that unofficial altars and chapels dedicated by private individuals in public spaces were systematically destroyed by the authorities. In general, such private dedications were tolerated, even though they did not enjoy the juridical status conferred by a regular consecration. That same principle also applied to all offerings made by private individuals in public sanctuaries. They could be placed in the public space, but if they were in the way they were summarily removed, for from a legal point of view they were not sacred. It is worth noting, however, that if there were too many such objects or if they had been damaged, they were usually buried within the sanctuary as if, after all, they were recognised as possessing an inalienability of the same type as that of sacred objects or, at a private level, of objects known as *religiosi*: they were protected and could not be alienated. They fell into the same category as tombs or places struck by lightning. Initially, the categories of *sacer* and *religiosus* were valid only in Rome itself and the territory of Rome. Only after the Social War were they extended to the whole of Italy. Though, in fact, in legal terms, even public dedications there were considered not 'sacred', but 'as if sacred' or 'as if religious' (*pro sacro, pro religioso*).

### 3.2 Consecration

Consecration was a complex operation. It was only possible on Roman territory that had been 'liberated and pronounced to be designated', and possibly inaugurated. After an official decision to proceed to a consecration (known as a *constitutio*), the space concerned was purified, the limits of

the construction were marked, and the first stone was laid. Tacitus provides a good description of all this in his account of the purification and designation (by the sacrifice of a pig, a ram and a bull, called a *suouetaurilia*) of the site of the Capitoline temple, which had been destroyed by fire during the civil war of AD 69:

On the twenty-first of June (AD 70), under a cloudless sky, the area that was dedicated to the temple was surrounded with fillets and garlands; soldiers who had auspicious names entered the enclosure, carrying boughs of good omen; then the Vestals, accompanied by boys and girls whose fathers and mothers were living, sprinkled the area with water drawn from fountains and streams. Next, Helvidius Priscus, the praetor, guided by the pontifex Plautius Aelianus, purified the area with the sacrifice of the *suouetaurilia*, and placed the vitals of the victims on an altar of turf; and then, after he had prayed to Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, and the gods who protect the empire to prosper this undertaking and by their divine assistance to raise again their home which the man's piety had begun, he touched the fillets with which the foundation stone was wound and the ropes entwined; at the same time the rest of the magistrates, the priests, senators and knights, and a great part of the people, putting forth their strength in one enthusiastic and joyful effort, dragged the huge stone to its place. A shower of gold and silver and of virgin ores, never smelted in any furnace, but in their natural state, was thrown everywhere into the foundations.

Tacitus, *Histories*, 4.53

Once the construction was completed, it was dedicated or consecrated. The dedicant took hold of the door-jamb (or in the case of an altar, touched it) and, following the dictation of a pontiff, pronounced the dedicatory formula (*lex dedicationis*) which transferred both the building and the space from public property to the property of the gods: they were now sacred. The *lex dedicationis* also laid down a

number of stipulations relating to the forms of the cult. Frequently, the dedicants would take as their model the *lex* pronounced on the occasion of the dedication of the altar of Diana on the Aventine (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 4.26; *ILS*, 4907).

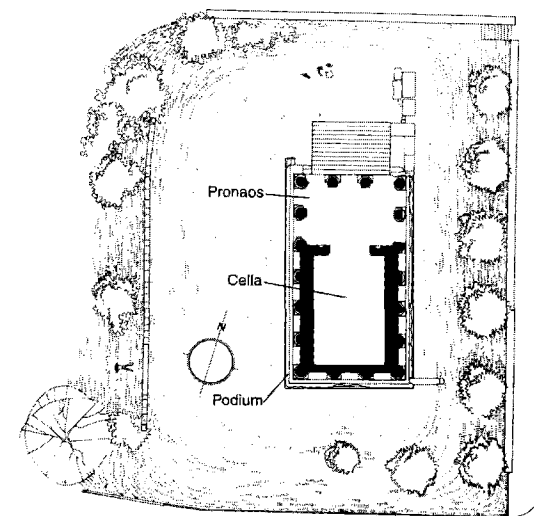
### 3.3 Terminology

Cult sites bore a variety of names, some of which are hard to understand. We have already noticed the ambiguity of the term *templum*, which designated sometimes an inaugurated space, sometimes a building, generally an inaugurated one. *Aedes* referred to a building in which a deity resided, and may be translated as 'temple'; *aedes* makes no reference to the status of the place where it is built and can also refer to non-inaugurated cult sites such as the *aedes* of Vesta. Most temples were of a quadrangular design but some, such as the sanctuary of Vesta, that of Hercules *oliuarius* in the Forum Boarium, and the Pantheon, were round.

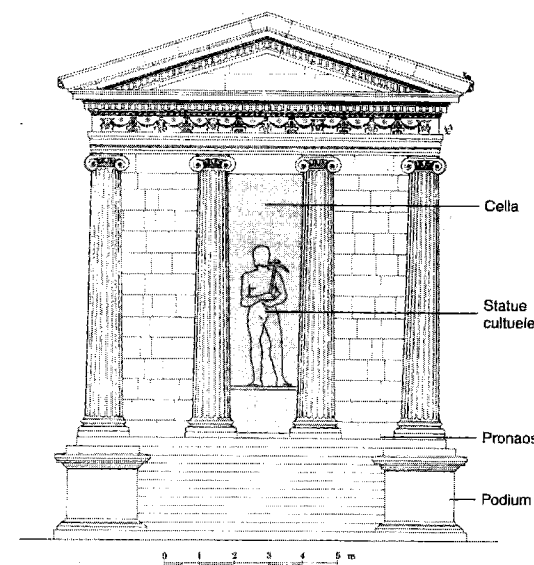
*Delubrum* was the word for the paved area linked to a temple, a precinct surrounded by colonnades, or a temple. *Fanum* had a generic meaning and referred to either a cult site or a temple; though it was not a term frequently used. A *sacellum* was in principle a roofless consecrated place (an open area containing an altar; an altar outside a chapel or placed before a niche), whereas a *sacrarium* was a building in which sacred objects were stored.

### 3.4 The layout of cult places

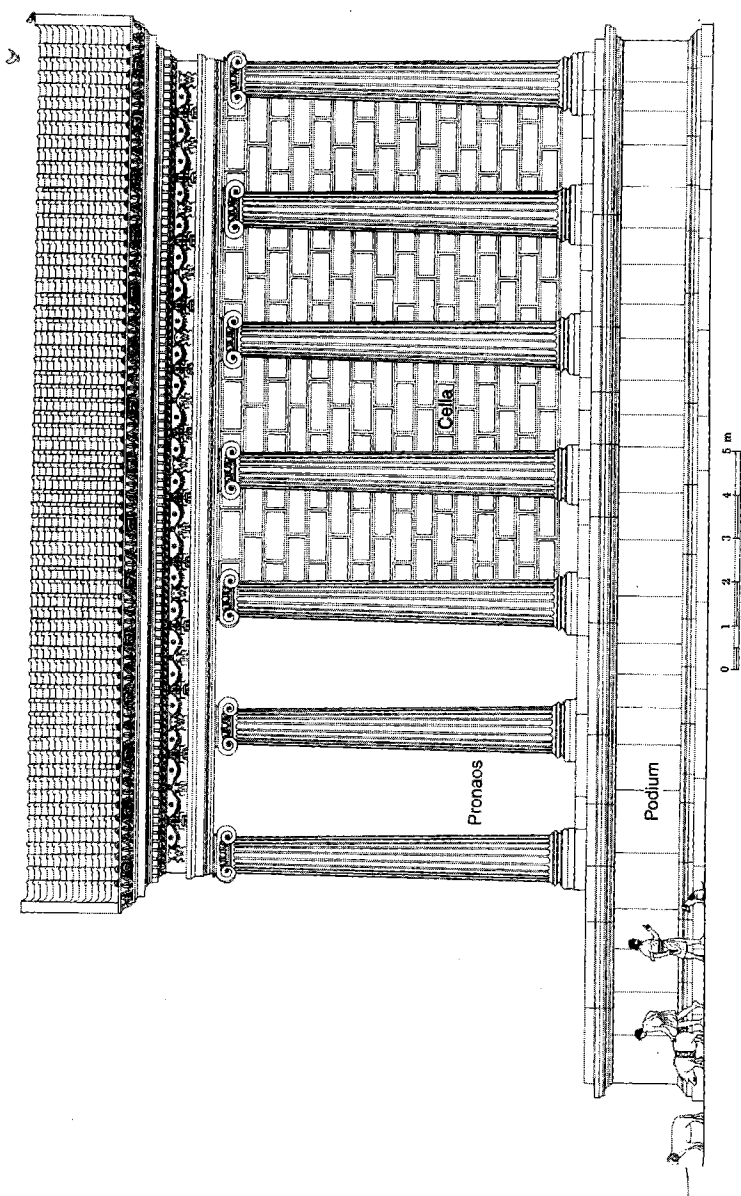
A cult place was surrounded by a wall, railings or boundary stones. Its most important feature was the altar (*ara*), which was all that was essential to celebrate a cult: the most famous example is the Altar of Augustan Peace (Ara Pacis) on the Campus Martius in Rome. Sanctuaries at crossroads, in the various districts of Rome, consisted of an altar, possibly placed before a niche or a chapel, containing the statues of the Lares Augusti and of the genius ('spirit') of Augustus. Many places dedicated to the imperial cult were isolated



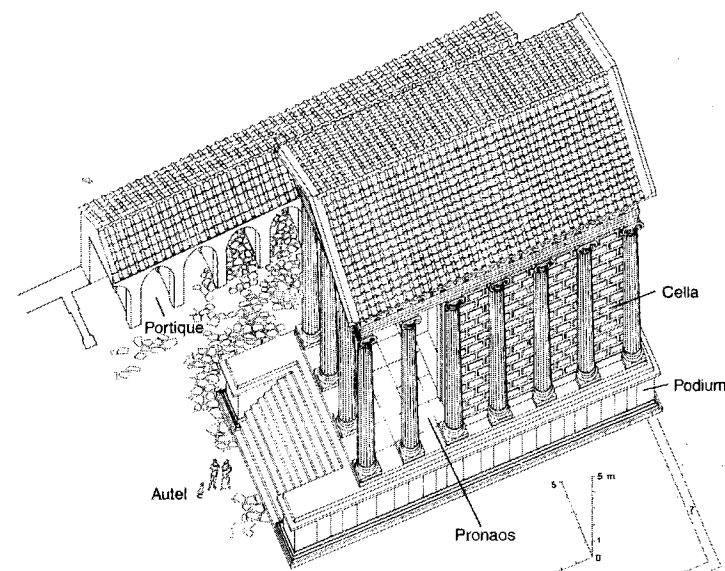
**Figure 3** A Roman temple (from J.-P. Adam, *Le temple de Portunus au Forum Boarium*, Coll. of the École Française de Rome, vol. 199): ground plan



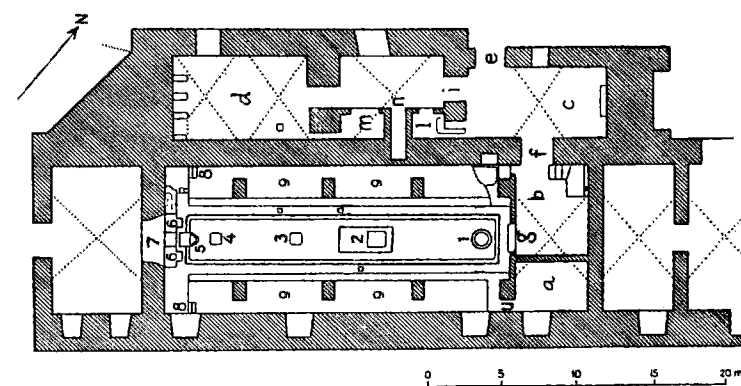
**Figure 4** A Roman temple (from J.-P. Adam, *Le temple de Portunus au Forum Boarium*, Coll. of the École Française de Rome, vol. 199): facade



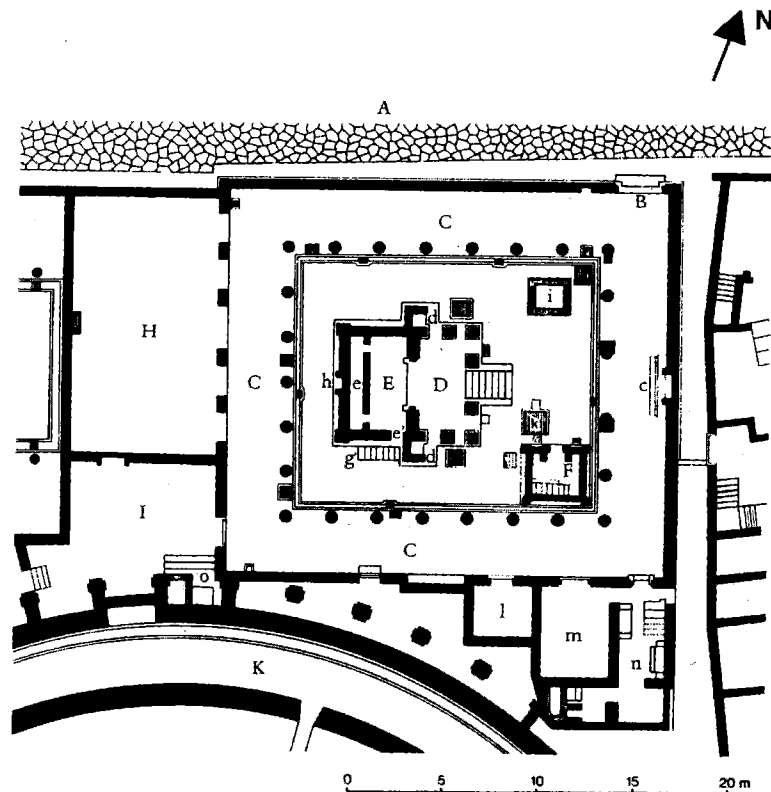
**Figure 5** A Roman Temple (from J.-P. Adam, *Le temple de Portunus au Forum Boarium*, Coll. of the École Française de Rome, vol. 199): side view



**Figure 6** A Roman temple (from J.-P. Adam, *Le temple de Portunus au Forum Boarium*, Coll. of the École Française de Rome, vol. 199): axonometric plan



**Figure 7** The Mithraeum of the Baths of Caracalla (from M. J. Vermaseren). a. Atrium. b. Atrium with a deep basin. c. Passage with a semi-circular tank. d. Room with a table, four semi-circular niches and an encircling ditch. e, f, g. Entrances. 1-4. Openings. 5. Triangular base. 6. Access to cult niche. 7. Cult niche. 8. Staircase leading to triclinia. 9. Triclinia. i. Passage. l-m. Small washrooms. n. Entrance to an underground passage. u. Entrance to a cult chamber.



**Figure 8** The temple of Isis at Pompei, AD 62 (from E. La Rocca, M. and A. De Vos, *Guida archeologica di Pompei*)  
 A. Street. B. Entrance. C. Colonnade. c. Small chamber with a wooden bench. D. Pronaos. d. Niches. E. Cella. e. Hollow podium with two openings. e'. Door. g. Side staircase. h. Niche containing statue of Bacchus. F. Washroom. i. Ditch for rubbish. k. Principal altar. L-m. Living rooms. n. Room with hearth. H. Meeting hall. I. Ceremonial hall. o. Small extra room. K. Theatre.

altars (for example, the so-called Lyons altar of the three Gauls) or placed before a niche sheltering the statue of a *diuus* (a deified emperor) or the genius of the emperor. Where the site included a temple, the altar was always positioned outside it, usually at its axis, except in the cult of Mithras, in which the altar would be placed in an enclosed space representing a cave. Alongside the 'master altar', which belonged

to the deity who owned the temple, temporary altars (*temporales*) were often erected for 'guest' deities.

The temple itself was built on a raised podium, a typically Roman characteristic. A staircase led to the temple *pronaos* (porch), in which 'open-air' rituals were performed. At the back of the *pronaos* a doorway led to the *cella*, where the deity lived. Every deity was provided with a *cella* and an altar placed in front of the temple. The Capitol thus had three *cellae*, each with its own door: Jupiter's in the middle, Juno Regina's on his right, Minerva's on his left. At the back of the *cella* was the deity's cult statue. In many cases the *cella* contained a table (*mensa*) for extra sacrificial offerings, statues of other deities associated with the temple's titular god, works of art and ritual objects. Sometimes a secret place (known as an *adyton*) was constructed in the *cella*, to contain such objects. In principle, the *cella* was entered only for religious reasons, whether public or private. Some temples also had spaces about which little is known, designed to hold beds or chairs to accommodate the *lectisternia* and *sellisternia*. These were probably outside the temple.

In front of the temple, extending right round the altar and the *aedes*, was an area (*area*) the status of which might vary from one temple to another. In some cases it was sacred, like the temple itself, and could be entered only for religious reasons or for its upkeep. In others, part of it was profane, that is say accessible to the activities of mortals and for their offerings: *stelae*, altars and statues. The richest religious centres and those on their own in the countryside were in many cases flanked or surrounded by colonnades. These were designed to be used by human beings, who could shelter there from the sun or from storms. On a cult site situated on his land, Pliny distinguished between the *cella* of the temple and its colonnade as the difference between that which belonged to the deity and that which could be used by mortals: 'But there is no shelter near by from rain or sun, so I think it will be an act of generosity and piety alike to build as fine a temple as I can and add porticoes – the temple for the

goddess and the porticoes for the public' (Pliny, *Letters*, 9.39.1–3).

Sometimes celebrants would hold banquets (particularly if, as sometimes happened, a number of rooms were attached) or would spend the night here. Many offerings and *ex-votos* were placed on show under the colonnades, and votive graffiti were frequently to be found even on the plastering covering their walls and columns. Sanctuaries outside the city, too far distant from Rome for the celebrants to return the same evening, were equipped with somewhere to stay (*hospitalia*), in some cases no more than a simple colonnade. Close to the temple or under the colonnade itself there would be a kitchen in which to prepare offerings and sacrificial banquets. Particularly well-equipped sanctuaries offered banqueting halls (*triclinia*). As constant ablutions were required in the performance of the cult, sanctuaries contained wells, pools and even, in the case of isolated sites, baths in which the celebrants could wash before the rites. Where protracted visits were necessary in sanctuaries situated some way out of town, these bathing establishments would offer the same services as the urban baths. Finally, some cult sites incorporated springs and pools and sometimes baths dedicated to a water deity, which were used for therapeutic purposes.

Depending on the requirements of the cult and the public activities that it involved, some temples had theatres or circuses associated with them. Major sacrifices would be rounded off by theatrical performances or chariot races. The tiered steps round these arenas where games took place could also be used for assemblies.

Some sanctuaries of Isis boasted, alongside a temple, representations of the Nile, such as the magnificent decorations of the Iseum in the Campus Martius, consisting of obelisks and sculptures in the Egyptian style, while others offered a simple room containing a pool of sacred water (as at Pompei, room F). Also attached would be somewhere to stay, somewhere for the priests or temple guests to gather (*pastophorion*), and

somewhere for initiation ceremonies. Different again were the religious spaces devoted to other Eastern gods. Since the famous sanctuary of the Syrian gods on the Janiculan hill at Rome is currently being thoroughly reassessed, it is better to cite as examples the cult complex of Jupiter Dolichenus on the Aventine, dating from the second century AD, the Mithraic 'caves', and the premises devoted to the Phrygian cult in the Palatine temple of the Great Mother. A *mithraeum*, for example, generally situated below ground level, was shaped like an elongated *triclinium* at the end of which stood an altar and a bas-relief depicting the myth of the god.

The variety of settings was infinite, whatever the type of cult. But the Roman model of a cult place consists of an open area containing an altar, a temple and a number of chambers for various ritual functions. In private houses, the scale and number of cult places varied. Not all houses ran to a built-up or wooden *lararium* in the atrium or altars and extra rooms devoted to a cult as did grand aristocratic residences. In poorer houses, without an atrium or specially decorated rooms, the earthenware statuettes of the family 'pantheon' would be kept in cupboards, and sacrifices would generally be made on the ground or, when banquets were held, in the flames of a portable altar.

#### 4 GROVES, CAVES, POOLS, SPRINGS

As well as spaces that were liberated, designated and consecrated, that is to say entirely arranged and controlled by the city authorities, there were natural places that the ancients considered to be residences that the gods had organised for themselves. These groves, huge caves, unfathomably deep pools and river sources inspired fear because they were used as places of residence by the gods. It was the terror and awe that such places inspired that signalled some divine presence. Mortals ventured to do no more than identify such spots and delimit them. They would enter them only to celebrate the cult or to see to the site's upkeep. Groves (*luci*) were

particularly favoured by the gods as residences. Strictly speaking, a *lucus* was a clearing in a wood, and it would be in such a clearing, ritually cleared and tended, that the deity's cult would be celebrated. In some cases, temples and porticoes would be constructed there. Traditionally, the Latin League of the early Republic held its meetings in groves outside the towns, in Latium, for example, in the *lucus Ferentinae* or the *lucus* of Diana at Nemi, in the heart of the Alban Hills. Other groves, such as that at Feronia, twenty or so kilometres to the north of Rome (*lucus Feroniae*), later became the site of great fairs. After the Social War and the Civil Wars, some of these special Italic places were turned into prefectures or colonies in order to keep them under the strict control of the Romans (for example, *Lucus Feroniae*, the *Lucus* of Diana Tifatina, and the *Lucus Angitiaie*).

Many of these 'natural' sanctuaries were situated in the territories of Rome or other cities, but some were to be found within the built-up area of towns. In Rome, for instance, the *lucus Vestae*, the *lucus Libitinae* and the *lucus Silvani* were all situated inside the city. Groves were not the only kind of sanctuaries to be found in the territories of Rome and other cities. As well as the suburban temples built very close to the *pomerium* and the town gates (for example, in Rome, the temples of Apollo, Hercules, Mars, Vulcan, and the sanctuaries of the Aventine), the territory contained temples way outside the city (extra-urban). Some of these were privately owned. Pliny the Younger writes:

I must rebuild the temple of Ceres which stands on my property; it needs enlarging and improving, for it is certainly very old and too small considering how crowded it is on its special anniversary, when great crowds gather there from the whole district on 13 September and many ceremonies are performed and vows made and discharged.

Pliny, *Letters*, 9.39.1–2

These cult places, constructed by local landowners or inhabitants, were used only by them. But the territory also

contained extra-urban sanctuaries that were public and that should not be confused with the rustic cult places that were designed for the inhabitants of the countryside or as places of pilgrimage. Through the sanctuaries situated along the major roads and out near the edges of its territory, the city controlled the latter and celebrated that control. Those who visited such sanctuaries to celebrate the cult of a deity once or twice a year included city authorities, not just the peasants who cultivated the land around the sanctuary. The sanctuaries of the *uici* scattered across the territories of the major cities had a special role to play. Although linked to the community of the *uicani*, these cults were in fact public, for a *uicus* was considered a part of the city itself built in the outlying territory. So there was no difference between the cults of a *uicus* and those of a district of the city.

## 5 BURIAL GROUNDS AND TOMBS

Through the funerary rites, the dead, by some kind of apotheosis, joined the group of *di manes*. The tomb in which the remains of someone deceased were deposited was the place of a private cult managed by the family, and it belonged to the *di manes*, whose rights over that property were guaranteed by the city. All tombs, except those of newly born infants, had to be situated outside the *pomerium*. Usually cemeteries stretched along the roads leading away from towns or *uici*. In the city's territory, they were accommodated in the vicinity of farms. A tomb was a place strictly reserved for the dead and it could not be altered in any way without permission from the pontiffs. It was surrounded by facilities for the celebration of the cult or designed to increase prestige. The larger monuments comprised gardens situated inside the precinct, a *triclinium* for ritual banquets, and a special spot on the ground which was reserved for funerary sacrifices. Inscriptions inform us that such precincts offered places to accommodate all family members and friends. Because of the increasing shortage of space from the beginning of the



Empire on, the great families had underground cemeteries (catacombs) dug out of the tufa rock which formed the subsoil around Rome. These were collective tombs known in Latin as *columbaria* (dovecots), accommodating the urns of the dead in numerous niches. The dead from poorer families were buried in simple graves made out of masonry or dug in the ground and covered by tiles or half-amphoras. Amphora necks made it possible to communicate with the interior of a tomb and to pour libations into it. Nearby there would be pyres to be used for incineration. During the second century AD many tombs and mausoleums were modified in order to accommodate sarcophagi, for at this point the practice of inhumation (rather than cremation) became widespread again in Italy.

### *PART III*

## **Religious Rituals**