

## Mundus, Remus and the Founding of Rome

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**Abstract:** *One of the most important rites of passage associated with the goddess Ceres was the opening of the mundus. The mundus was an object in Rome, the opening of which was a state ritual and held on special occasions. As long as the mundus was open, the spirits of the dead roamed the world, so any activity carried out at that time was threatened by bad omens. Much controversy surrounds the issue of the mundus, since we do not know the form of its appearance, its exact location and origin are also shrouded in darkness. In our study, we are looking for the answer to how Ceres, as an agricultural deity, was connected to the duality of life and death, why the mundus is connected to her figure, and how this appears in the works of Roman authors. We would also like to pay attention to how the mundus Cereris came to be when Rome was founded, what its purpose was and what it could mean to the Romans of the time.*

**Rezumat:** *Unul dintre cele mai importante rituri de trecere asociate cu zeița Ceres era deschiderea mundus-ului. Mundus-ul era un obiect în Roma, a cărui deschidere reprezenta un ritual de stat și avea loc cu ocazii speciale. Atâta timp cât mundus-ul era deschis, spiritele morților bântuiau lumea, astfel că orice activitate desfășurată în acea perioadă era amenințată de prevestiri rele. În jurul mundus-ului există multă controversă, deoarece nu cunoaștem forma sa, locația exactă și originea acestuia sunt, de asemenea, învăluite în mister. În studiul nostru, căutăm răspunsul la întrebarea cum era Ceres, ca zeiță a agriculturii, legată de dualitatea dintre viață și moarte, de ce mundus-ul este conectat la figura ei și cum apare acest lucru în operele autorilor romani. De asemenea, dorim să acordăm atenție modului în care mundus Cereris a apărut odată cu întemeierea Romei, care era scopul său și ce ar fi putut însemna pentru romanii din acea vreme.*

**Keywords:** Ceres, mundus, Remus, rite of passage, foundation.

### Introduction

In Roman religion, from the founding of the city through the monarchy and the republic to the era of the emperors, the goddess Ceres and the cult surrounding her enjoyed significant popularity. This is not surprising in itself, as an agricultural deity, she held the same fundamental reverence as bread and wheat, which were thanked to her during various festivals. However, she cannot be simply labeled as an agricultural deity, as her form, much like the religious life of the Romans, was not homogeneous but rather composed of multiple elements.

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Ceres' most defining role is indeed closely associated with agriculture, as she was revered as the goddess of plowing, sowing, harvesting, bread, grains, and fruitfulness. However, her primary and direct role extended to both human and animal, as well as plant fertility. Her presence is also noticeable in various liminal rites, such as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. The Romans took these rites and ceremonies very seriously because they knew that if they omitted or made a mistake during their performance, the goddess would afflict the crops and animals with drought and illness, affecting the daily sustenance of the Romans. This is perhaps best illustrated by Polybius when he speaks in general about the Roman religious practices:

μεγίστην δέ μοι δοκεῖ διαφορὰν ἔχειν τὸ Ῥωμαίων πολίτευμα πρὸς βέλτιον ἐν τῇ περὶ θεῶν διαλήψει. καὶ μοι δοκεῖ τὸ παρὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις ὀνειδιζόμενον, τοῦτο συνέχειν τὰ Ῥωμαίων πράγματα, λέγω δὲ τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν: ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον γὰρ ἐκτετραγώδηται καὶ παρεισῆκται τοῦτο τὸ μέρος παρ' αὐτοῖς εἷς τε τοὺς κατ' ἰδίαν βίους καὶ τὰ κοινὰ τῆς πόλεως ὥστε μὴ καταλιπεῖν ὑπερβολήν. (Polyb. VI. 56. 6–8)

Polybius's description of the Romans' "superstition" finds confirmation in the rituals associated with Ceres, as poorly performed ceremonies could jeopardize inheritance, marriage, and the religious purity of the family<sup>2</sup>. The vague fear and anxious atmosphere mentioned by Polybius were particularly true for those rituals connected in some way to death and funeral ceremonies. Death was a constant presence in the daily lives of the Romans, whether considering the spectacles in the arenas, child mortality, or the wars<sup>3</sup>. Notable instances, such as the suicides of great statesmen or the self-sacrifice of military leaders, further emphasized the theme of death<sup>4</sup>. However, it wasn't just death but also the remembrance of the deceased that was a daily occurrence for the Romans and an essential part of their lives<sup>5</sup>. One crucial element of this remembrance was the opening of the mundus.

### The mundus

*Mundo nomen impositum est ab eo mundo, qui supra nos est: forma enim eius est, ut ex his qui intravere cognoscere potuit adsimilis illae.” eius inferiorem partem veluti consecratam Dis Manibus clausam omni tempore, nisi his diebus qui supra scripti sunt, maiores censuerunt habendam, quos dies etiam religiosos iudicaverunt ea de causa quod quo tempore ea, quae occulta et abdita ea religionis Deorum Manium essent, veluti in lucem quandam adducerentur, et patefierent, nihil eo tempore in rep. geri voluerunt. itaque per eos dies non cum hoste manus conserebant: non exercitus scribebatur, non comitia habebantur: non aliud quicquam in rep. nisi quod ultima necessitas admonebat, administrabatur. (Fest. s. v. mundus, 142.)*

<sup>2</sup> MAGDUS 2021, 27–46.

<sup>3</sup> EDWARDS 2007, 5–9.

<sup>4</sup> HEGYI W. 2018, 19–20.

<sup>5</sup> HEGYI W. 2018, 122–125.

The mundus was an object in Rome associated with a special state ritual held on particular occasions. It is one of the most important transitional rites that can be connected to the deity we are examining<sup>6</sup>. These days were declared dies nefasti, during which all public activities were prohibited. This restriction was based on the belief that while the mundus was open, the spirits of the deceased traversed the world of the living, casting shadows of bad omens over any activities conducted during this time. Many questions surround the mundus, as its appearance, exact location, and origin are all debated<sup>7</sup>. The Romans themselves were uncertain when it came to defining the concept. Nevertheless, our sources indicate that the mundus served as a kind of gateway between the realms of the living and the dead. But why and how was Ceres connected to this liminal ritual?

The mundus is mentioned by several ancient authors, with Festus and Macrobius being the most important among them. These references are extremely concise and do not provide much information. Due to numerous uncertainties, reconstructing the opening of the mundus is challenging. It is worth quoting Plutarch's biography of Romulus as a starting point, where, although not providing explanations, important insights can be found regarding the creation of the mundus:

βόθρος γὰρ ὠρύγη περὶ τὸ νῦν Κομίτιον κυκλοτερῆς, ἀπαρχαί τε πάντων, ὅσοις νόμῳ μὲν ὡς καλοῖς ἐχρῶντο, φύσει δ' ὡς ἀναγκαίοις, ἀπετέθησαν ἐνταῦθα. καὶ τέλος ἐξ ἧς ἀφῖκτο γῆς ἕκαστος ὀλίγην κομίζων μοῖραν ἔβαλλον εἰς ταῦτό καὶ συνεμίγνυον. καλοῦσι δὲ τὸν βόθρον τοῦτον ᾧ καὶ τὸν ὄλυμπον ὀνόματι μοῦνδον. εἶθ' ὥσπερ κύκλον κέντρῳ περιέγραψαν τὴν πόλιν. (Plut. *Rom.* 11)

Although Plutarch does not provide a sufficiently detailed description of the mundus, it is immediately noticeable that he does not mention the dead or the underworld. Instead, he highlights that the pit symbolizing the mundus was filled with the first agricultural harvest. Let's set aside these details for now and focus on the author's last sentence, stating that the mundus was the future city's center, around which the city's boundaries were drawn. Fowler already expressed his position on the origin of the mundus in 1912. In his opinion, the mundus originally served as a penus, a granary, where, as described by Plutarch, the post-harvest grain was stored. The mundus was opened at fixed dates, on August 24th, October 5th, and November 8th, during which various rituals related to harvesting were performed<sup>8</sup>. Fowler's response to how the simple penus became the mundus is quite remarkable: the place, as a storage of essential crops for life, simply became sacred and, under Etruscan influence, came under the protection of the ancestors<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> VAN GENNEP 1960, 10–11.

<sup>7</sup> PEDRUCCI 2018, 628–629.

<sup>8</sup> FOWLER 1912, 26–27. We agree with Fowler's interpretation, but we miss the appearance of the cosmological and religious perspective.

<sup>9</sup> FOWLER 1912, 29.

Fowler's line of thought is logical and well-supported; however, in our opinion, we can examine the question of the original function of the mundus from a different perspective. The designation of the geometric center of the world/city is crucial from a practical standpoint, as all distances, the size of the city, etc.<sup>10</sup>, are measured from this point. Every city had its own center, which its inhabitants also considered the center of the world, and they were not far from the truth, as for their own world, their city truly served as the center<sup>11</sup>.

The organization of space is a fundamental consideration in the development and self-definition of a newly founded city. Based on the principles of spatial organization, we can form an understanding of the mindset and cultural background of the peoples founding Rome. While this understanding may be fragmentary, it is still suitable for drawing some important conclusions.

The origin of the mundus may stem from various religious ideals, cosmological, and cosmogonic concepts. Although, from a cosmological perspective, the mundus is undoubtedly an organic part of the city's body, it also represents a kind of fault line. By digging a pit into the ground, they disrupted the homogeneity of space and created a new passage<sup>12</sup>. This door connected something with something else, meaning that the cosmos expanded into another world, the underworld.

As Plutarch also points out, the pit we are examining was called mundus, similar to the sky. Regarding the naming, several explanations have been proposed. One suggests that the ceiling of the underground chamber was equipped with a vaulted roof. Although the scholarly literature has supported and almost treated this theory as a fact, archaeologists have not found such an object<sup>13</sup>.

Fowler suggests that Cato referred to a pit inside a building, which he believed to be a bowl-shaped depression, and the room did not have any vaulted roof but might rather have been a cellar<sup>14</sup>. However, the shape of the mundus may not have been crucial; the essential aspect was simply that it needed to be dug into the ground<sup>15</sup>. The symbolism of the analogy between the celestial and various cosmological levels can be found in other primitive

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<sup>10</sup> Following Ovid and Plutarch, scholarly literature connects the "drawing" of the pomerium with the ritual of creating the mundus, thus forming a unified whole from the two rituals. We also support this theory. However, other opinions suggest that from the perspective of the founding of Rome, this connection is not straightforward. This is because the object we are examining is specifically named mundus Cereris, and it has nothing to do with the ritual of foundation. MAGDELAIN 1990, 182–183. In our opinion, this stance is unacceptable; we cannot separate the two rituals.

<sup>11</sup> For example Cerveteri, Capua, Tarquinia. PEDRUCCI 2018, 626.

<sup>12</sup> ELIADE 1961, 28–29.

<sup>13</sup> PEDRUCCI 2018, 626.

<sup>14</sup> FOWLER 1912, 26.

<sup>15</sup> MAGDELAIN 1990, 182–183. Magdelain denies the existence of mundus at the time of foundation. His reasoning is based on the notion that the mundus only appears in late sources, whose authors project the founding ritual of later Roman cities onto the case of Rome.

societies as well, not just among the ancient Latins<sup>16</sup>. In these communities, the idea emerges that the center is likened to some kind of sanctuary, usually an initiation sanctuary. Death is a transitional rite; the living person leaves the world of the living and enters the underworld. Cosmologically, this can be followed by an initiation ceremony, but it is the departed ones who must perform it. The Latin word *mundus* signifies an orderly and harmonious universe. It resembles the Greek term *omphalos*, which precisely denotes the center, the „navel” of the cosmos. In Plutarch, the term *mundus* initially refers to the celestial spaces above our heads, where the gods themselves reside<sup>17</sup>. Although the three spheres (heaven, earth, underworld) are obviously distinct, they still reflect the fundamental structure of the *mundus*, where there is the celestial sphere where the gods live, the earth as the dwelling place of humans and living beings in general, and the underworld, the home of the dead and chthonic deities. In other words, the three spheres are tiered and symmetrical, as the world inhabited by humans is surrounded by two places inhabited by deities.

### **Ceres as the Guardian of the Underworld's Gate**

From the perspective of this study, Fowler fails to address, and does not even mention, one of the most crucial questions<sup>18</sup>. He does not associate the opening of the *mundus* with the gods, despite our sources clearly indicating that it was Ceres who protected the passage. The relationship between the Romans and their gods was based on the *pax deorum*, and by creating a *mundus*, they made peace with the chthonic deities<sup>19</sup>, as the *mundus* became a sacrificial site for these gods<sup>20</sup>. If we accept Fowler's theory that the *mundus* previously served as a *penus*, it becomes evident why Ceres is connected to the *mundus*. As the Roman goddess of agriculture, she was responsible for the abundant harvest, the bread made from it, and, more broadly, human and animal fertility.

*Cereri qui mundus appellate qui ter in anno solet patere: [IX] Kal. Sept. et III Non. Octobr. et [VI] Id. Novemb. Qui vel omni dictus est quod terra movetur. (Fest. s. v. mundus. 54.)*

Festus connects Ceres with the ritual of opening the *mundus*. The fundamental question is how Ceres, as the goddess of agriculture, became the guardian of the gate to the underworld. One answer is that Ceres was chosen through a process of associative thinking, which then developed into a tradition that gave the goddess a new role. According to

<sup>16</sup> PAILLER 1988, 431; ELIADE 1961, 29–31.

<sup>17</sup> Fest. s. v. *mundus*, 142.

<sup>18</sup> The relationship between Ceres and the *mundus* is highly debated. Many doubt that the *mundus Cereri* is the same as the *mundus* created by Romulus. COARELLI 1983, 208–226; CHIRASSI-COLUMBO 1984, 418–420; LE BONNIEC 1958, 175–184; MAGDELAIN 1990, 182–183.

<sup>19</sup> PEDRUCCI 2018, 627.

<sup>20</sup> Serv. *Aen.* 3, 134: *quidam aras superiorum deorum volunt esse, medioximorum id est marinorum focos, inferiorum vero mundos; Fest. s. v. altaria 27.: Altaria ab altitudine sunt dicta, quod antiqui diis superis in aedificiis a terra exaltatis sacra faciebant; diis terrestribus in terra, diis infernalibus in effossa terra.*

Pedrucci, Ceres was an ideal choice because she was connected to all three realms. As a goddess, she belonged to the celestial sphere, but after her daughter Proserpina was abducted, she descended to the earthly realm of mortals to search for her, and through her daughter, she became connected to the underworld, where Proserpina spends half the year with her husband, Dis Pater<sup>21</sup>. Ceres is also connected to the earthly sphere in numerous other ways, as she taught humanity to cultivate grain, was the first to harness animals for ploughing, and was the first to ignite fire<sup>22</sup>. Fundamentally, we agree with Pedrucci's view, yet we believe that Ceres' role can be traced back to even deeper reasons than the story of Proserpina's abduction.

As an agricultural goddess, Ceres has a close connection to the earth. The earth has two functions: it gives life through its produce, and as a burial place, it receives the dead. While Ceres' relationship with grain, plants, animals, and bread does not need further examination, her connection with death has not been the focus of research<sup>23</sup>. We hypothesize that this is precisely what links the goddess to the mundus.

Ceres' connection with death and funeral rites is best illustrated by the marble relief on the tomb of the Haterii. Here, the goddess appears with the gods Mercurius, Proserpina, and Dis Pater. Ceres holds a torch and ears of wheat, Dis Pater holds a staff, and Proserpina is seen with Mercurius' caduceus. Except for Ceres, the other three deities are all connected to the world of the dead: Dis Pater and Proserpina are rulers of the dead, and Mercurius guides the souls of the deceased to the underworld. Ceres' presence among the chthonic gods clearly suggests that she too was connected to the underworld and death<sup>24</sup>. This assertion is supported by the fact that the goddess plays a significant role in two death-related rituals, the *porca praesentanea* and the *porca praecidanea*<sup>25</sup>. In the former, a purification sacrifice was required when a family member's death caused contamination<sup>26</sup>. The *porca praesentanea* sacrifice was likely performed so the deceased's heir could inherit, making the ritual a prerequisite for inheritance<sup>27</sup>. Thus, the *porca praesentanea* sacrifice was obligatory upon death. The sacrifice was dedicated to Ceres, and at least part of the ceremony had to be conducted in the presence of the corpse<sup>28</sup>. In contrast, the *porca praecidanea* sacrifice was not

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<sup>21</sup> PEDRUCCI 2018, 627.

<sup>22</sup> MAGDUS 2020, 150–157.

<sup>23</sup> SPAETH 1996, 34–41; MAGDUS 2020, 155–156.

<sup>24</sup> DE ANGELI 1988, 152. FIG.

<sup>25</sup> MAGDUS 2021, 29–33.

<sup>26</sup> WATSON 1971, 4.

<sup>27</sup> LE BONNIEC 1958, 92.

<sup>28</sup> SPAETH 1996, 54. considers it possible that this is reflected in the etymology of the term *praesentaneus*. According to this view, the word derives from *praesens*, which means being in the same place, physical presence. However, some ancient historians reject this etymology. According to RADKE 1965, 88–89, the term might originate from *praesementaneus*, meaning before harvest, and likely refers to an agrarian propitiatory sacrifice rather than a burial ritual. This explanation seems forced due to a lack of evidence, and furthermore, Radke rejected the funerary

mandatory<sup>29</sup>. The heirs performed it only if the body was not properly buried or if there was an error during the funeral rites<sup>30</sup>. Neglecting proper expiatory rituals resulted in the family becoming impure, tainted by death, placing them in a socially unacceptable state. This situation could be rectified through the *porca praecidanea* ritual, during which the sacrifice was also offered to Ceres.

The expiatory sacrifice of a pig to Ceres held special legal and religious significance, as discussed by Cicero in his work *De Legibus*<sup>31</sup>. According to Cicero, the Romans sanctified the burial grounds with this sacrifice, making them *loci religiosi*—places surrounded by religious fear and respect. The sacrifice allowed the application of religious laws (*religiosa iura*), and from that point on, the site was officially considered a burial place. A grave serves as a boundary, physically separating the world of the living from that of the dead. Although the burial site has its place in the orderly world, it is set apart from its surroundings, marked by the blood of the pig dedicated to Ceres. Cicero's assertion that the site of cremation lacks special religious significance until the burial rites, including the pig sacrifice, are performed, supports this idea. These rites sanctify the grave, thus removing this delineated area from the profane world, which was of great importance to the Romans<sup>32</sup>. In the creation of a burial site, the blood of the pig sacrifice is the crucial element. The Romans established a boundary between the world of the dead and the profane world, starting with the pig sacrifice associated with Ceres<sup>33</sup>. The earth gives life because essential plants grow from it for humanity. The pig's blood, spilled during the sacrifice, purifies this land. What grows from the earth returns to the earth. This presents a strange duality, as the purification is carried out with the blood of a pig that has died violently. This process helps to cleanse the soil, ensuring it remains fertile and productive. By performing the sacrifice, the family is removed from their state of impurity, but not only the family—the earth itself becomes tainted because it serves as the resting place of the dead. Therefore, the earth must also be purified, so that the blood-soaked soil can later produce grain.

### **The Death of Remus and the Creation of the Mundus**

In light of this, let us re-examine Plutarch's description of the *mundus* in a broader context:

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significance of *porca praecidanea*. LATTE 1960, 101, suggests that *praesens* means immediate, without delay, as opposed to *novendialis*, the ceremony that had to be performed eight days after death. For more on the latter, see TOYNBEE 1971, 51.

<sup>29</sup> LE BONNIEC 1958, 106.

<sup>30</sup> HEGYI W. 2009, 70–77.

<sup>31</sup> Cic. *Leg.* 2. 55. Cicero does not explicitly mention that a pig sacrifice was offered, but this can be inferred from the referenced sources.

<sup>32</sup> HEGYI W. 2013, 60–66.

<sup>33</sup> MAGDUS 2021, 29–30.

ἐπεὶ δ' ἔγνω τὴν ἀπάτην ὁ Ῥέμος, ἐχαλέπαινε, καὶ τοῦ Ῥωμύλου τάφρον ὀρύττοντος ἦ τὸ τεῖχος ἔμελλε κυκλοῦσθαι, τὰ μὲν ἐχλεύαζε τῶν ἔργων, τοῖς δ' ἐμποδῶν ἐγένετο. τέλος δὲ διαλλόμενον αὐτὸν οἱ μὲν αὐτοῦ Ῥωμύλου πατάξαντος, οἱ δὲ τῶν ἐταίρων τινὸς Κέλερος, ἐναυῦθα πεσεῖν λέγουσιν. ἔπεσε δὲ καὶ Φαιστύλος ἐν τῇ μάχῃ καὶ Πλειστίνος, ὃν ἀδελφὸν ὄντα Φαιστύλου συνεκθρέψαι τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ῥωμύλον ἱστοροῦσιν. ... ὁ δὲ Ῥωμύλος ἐν τῇ Ῥεμωρία θάψας τὸν Ῥέμον ὁμοῦ καὶ τοὺς τροφεῖς, ὥκιζε τὴν πόλιν, ἐκ Τυρρηνίας μεταπεμψάμενος ἄνδρας ἱεροῖς τισι θεσμοῖς καὶ γράμμασιν ὑφηγουμένους ἕκαστα καὶ διδάσκοντας ὥσπερ ἐν τελετῇ. βόθρος γὰρ ὠρύγη περὶ τὸ νῦν Κομίτιον κυκλοτερῆς, ἀπαρχαί τε πάντων, ὅσοις νόμῳ μὲν ὡς καλοῖς ἐχρῶντο, φύσει δ' ὡς ἀναγκαίοις, ἀπετέθησαν ἐναυῦθα. καὶ τέλος ἐξ ἧς ἀφῖκτο γῆς ἕκαστος ὀλίγην κομίζων μοῖραν ἔβαλλον εἰς ταῦτό καὶ συνεμείγνυον. καλοῦσι δὲ τὸν βόθρον τοῦτον ὦ καὶ τὸν ὄλυπον ὀνόματι μοῦνδον. εἶθ' ὥσπερ κύκλον κέντρῳ περιέγραψαν τὴν πόλιν. ὁ δ' οἰκιστὴς ἐμβαλὼν ἀρότρῳ χαλκῆν ὕνιν, ὑποζεύξας δὲ βοῦν ἄρρενα καὶ θήλειαν, αὐτὸς μὲν ἐπάγει περιελαύνων αὐλακα βαθεῖαν τοῖς τέρμασι, τῶν δ' ἐπομένων ἔργον ἐστίν, ἃς ἀνίστησι βώλους τὸ ἄροτρον, καταστρέφειν εἴσω καὶ μηδεμίαν ἔξω περιορᾶν ἐκτρεπομένην. (Plut. *Rom.* 10–11)

The narrative in the two consecutive chapters of the *Life of Romulus* contains a wealth of information that may be interrelated. The first key moment is Remus jumping over the trench that later marked the city walls, serving as the boundary of the city<sup>34</sup>. The second key moment is the violent death of Remus, Faustulus, and Plistinus. Following their deaths, the burial of the dead takes place, religious experts arrive from Etruria, and the mundus is established. In our opinion, Remus' transgression was the catalyst for the creation of the mundus<sup>35</sup>.

Ceres is strongly associated with boundaries and liminality. Although she is not the only deity in the Roman pantheon with such connections, her role related to the mundus cannot be overlooked. Remus' crossing of the boundary does not go unpunished; he loses his life and is buried in Remoria<sup>36</sup>. The exact location of Remoria is uncertain, but it is clear that it was outside the walls of Rome. The fact that Remus had to be buried outside the city limits is no coincidence, as he violated the boundaries and thus offended the deities who guarded them. Romulus, as the city's leader and founder, did not know how to handle the situation from a religious perspective<sup>37</sup>. By jumping over the boundaries, Remus put the city in a difficult position, as the boundaries became dysfunctional and could no longer serve their purpose. This situation needed to be rectified, making it logical to bury Remus outside the city. Remus

<sup>34</sup> A defining element of the relationship between Romulus and Remus is competition. We believe that Remus jumping over the wall is also tied to this competitive dynamic. HEGYI W. 2018, 58.

<sup>35</sup> The sacrifice of one brother is a recurring theme in Indo-European creation myths. PUHVEL 1975, 146–157.

<sup>36</sup> WISEMAN 1995, 113.

<sup>37</sup> As HEGYI W. 2018, 58. succinctly describes the state following Remus' death: "The wall of the City is both a spatial and temporal boundary, a limit up to which the twins advanced together, but beyond which, into Rome, only one could enter."



violated social norms, causing disorder, and therefore had to be removed from society, both physically and symbolically.

Investigating the earliest phases of Rome's settlement is restricted by well-known issues. The Urbs has been continuously inhabited throughout history, making it impossible to identify all ancient structures. Even ancient authors emphasized the crucial role religion played in defining and organizing the Roman urban space. The prestige of Etruscan religion in founding rituals was so significant that, according to Roman tradition, even the foundation of the Urbs followed Etruscan rites, as Plutarch confirms.

Removing the guilty Remus physically was not enough; Etruscan religious experts were needed to continue building the city with their help. It is a common scholarly point that the Romans adopted certain elements of the significant Etruscan mortuary cult, including the mundus<sup>38</sup>. The mundus, in its appearance and function, closely resembles graves. The story goes that the Etruscan religious experts precisely defined the location of the mundus and placed all necessary items inside, likely including a sacrificial offering<sup>39</sup>.

We believe that the mundus is a grave, connected to the death of Remus. It is a ritual grave where those things most essential to human life were ritually sacrificed and buried. Similar rituals are clearly linked to the Roman Ceres and the Greek Demeter cults. Across Italy and Magna Graecia, Ceres and Demeter sanctuaries have been found with similar pits containing various plant and animal remains and votive figurines representing them<sup>40</sup>. Notably, in the Demeter sanctuary at Knidos, far from Italy, lifeless pig sacrifices were lowered into a chasm symbolizing the passageway, and the decaying flesh was retrieved months later for sacrificial use<sup>41</sup>.

In the case of the Roman mundus and city foundation, while the underlying motivation of the ritual is similar, it does not involve retrieving decayed offerings. The sinful act of fratricide had occurred, with the deceased being the son of the god Mars. Following this, an expiatory sacrifice was necessary to restore the delicate ritual balance<sup>42</sup>. At this point, it is worth referencing a passage from Macrobius, where he quotes Varro:

*„et cum Mundus patet, nefas est proelium sumere... quod sacrum Diti patri et Proserpinae dicatum est meliusque occlusa Plutonis fauce eundum ad proelium putaverunt. Unde et Varro ita scribit: Mundus cum patet, deorum tristium atque inferum quasi ianua patet. Propterea non modo proelium committi, verum etiam dilectum rei militaris causa habere ac militem proficisci, navem solvere, uxorem liberum quaerendorum causa ducere, religiosum est.”* (Macrob. Sat. I.16.16–18)

<sup>38</sup> FOWLER 1912, 26.

<sup>39</sup> At this point, it is essential to discuss the concept of the favissa. Similar to the Greek bothros, the favissa is a ritual offering pit where offerings were placed and stored. Examining the relationship between the favissa and the mundus would exceed the scope of this study. HACKENS 1963, 71–99.

<sup>40</sup> WHITE 1967, 335–352; DIETRICH 1962, 140; BEVAN 1986, 82.

<sup>41</sup> BEVAN 1986, 82.

<sup>42</sup> For more on Ceres and post-mortem purification, see MAGDUS 2021, 29–30.

The mundus is associated with the rulers of the underworld, Dis Pater and Proserpina, the chthonic deities (*tristes atque inferni dei*), and the ritual of opening the mundus is likely linked to Ceres. The mundus serves as a passage (*ianua*) to these aforementioned deities (*fauces Plutonis*). The days when the mundus was open were considered inauspicious and unsuitable for public affairs. Macrobius highlights a series of measures primarily concerning the military and warfare. These measures were presumably intended to prevent military enterprises from ending in misfortune. However, the prohibition extended beyond military matters to many other areas of life. Nothing was to be done publicly to avoid offending the boundaries and the wandering souls of the dead. This fact, along with the circumstances surrounding the creation of the mundus, points to certain connections. The general prohibition's aim was perhaps to prevent any actions that might lead to violence or death.

Remus' violent death likely played a significant role in the creation of the mundus, but the incident raises numerous other issues<sup>43</sup>. Although Remus violated the city boundaries, his killing was arbitrary, and the appropriate purificatory sacrifices were not performed until later<sup>44</sup>. If we can strip away the various layers that have accumulated around the story, we may allow ourselves certain conclusions. It is plausible to suggest that without Remus' death, the founding of Rome might not have occurred, or at least not in the way we know it today.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, we have attempted to examine in detail one aspect of Ceres' role and complex nature. The opening of the mundus Cereris aimed to appease the dead, whose souls could temporarily visit the world of the living. The Romans believed that by allowing this temporary breach of the boundary between the living and the dead, they could ultimately reinforce this boundary and maintain the status quo. The concept of boundaries was extremely important in Roman religion, serving to prevent the supernatural powers of the dead from harming the living. Thus, the opening of the mundus was fundamentally linked to Roman beliefs about the afterlife, where the living acknowledged and strengthened their relationship with each other and their ancestors.

The rituals of the *porca praesentanea* and the *porca praecidanea* illustrate how Ceres, as a deity associated with death, appeared in the lives of Romans at the end of their days. This association is also reflected in mythology, particularly in the story of Proserpina's abduction. Dis Pater kidnaps and keeps Proserpina, and after much searching by Ceres, Jupiter intervenes, resulting in Proserpina spending half the year in the underworld and the other half with her mother. This myth was seen as a symbol of the changing seasons even in ancient times. Agricultural activities could only be conducted from spring to autumn, while winter

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<sup>43</sup> For more details on Remus's fault and Romulus's guilt, see PUHVEL 1975, 150–151.

<sup>44</sup> The purifying sacrifices were probably not performed because they did not know how to carry them out, and that is why the Etruscans were needed later.

brought dormancy. Proserpina's cyclical journey symbolizes the alternation between life and death, a natural association given that spring brings renewed life to the fields, while autumn and winter bring apparent death and barrenness<sup>45</sup>. In this context, Ceres is connected to the underworld, supported by the well-structured myth.

The opening of the mundus transcends individual concerns, elevating the relationship between the living and the dead to a state level. It was crucial for both the *populus Romanus* and the state to participate in remembering and honoring the dead. As seen in Plutarch, Remus' crime and death seem closely linked to the creation of an object similar to the mundus. This raises the question of what came first: the ritual or Remus' death? It is likely the ritual itself, as the Etruscan religious experts were well aware of how to resolve such issues, knowing the ceremony even if its origin had faded. The Romans adopted and integrated this ritual into their system, and gradually, the mundus could indeed have become a *penus*, as Fowler hypothesized.

The most important lesson centers on the duality surrounding Ceres: life and death, the worlds of the living and the dead, and the changing seasons, which also symbolize life and death. If the Romans sacrificed to the goddess according to the prescriptions, they could expect a bountiful harvest; otherwise, drought and famine, hence life and death, would ensue. Misconduct or omission of the rituals could disrupt the balance of social order, resulting in hunger and death. This state had to be remedied. Through the rituals of the *porca praesentanea*, the *porca praecedanea*, and the opening of the mundus, the natural and social order was restored.

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<sup>45</sup> According to VAN GENNEP 1960, 88. in antiquity, the reason for the staged re-enactments of seasonal rituals (such as the Osiris, Adonis, and Attis cults) was the motif of death and rebirth.

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