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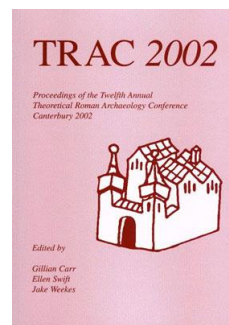
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# The Realm of Janus: Doorways in the Roman World

*Ardle Mac Mahon*

For the Romans, the doorways into their dwellings had tremendous symbolic and spiritual significance and this aspect was enshrined around the uniquely Latin god Janus. The importance of principal entrance doorways was made obvious by the architectural embellishments used to decorate doors and door surrounds that helped to create an atmosphere of sacred and ritual eminence. The threshold was not only an area of physical transition but also of symbolic change intimately connected to the lives of the inhabitants of the dwelling. This paper will explore the meaning of the architectural symbolism of the portal and the role of doorways in ritual within the Roman empire by an examination of the architectural remains and the literary sources. The exceptional assemblage of physical remains in Pompeii and Herculaneum offer the best evidence for an examination of the main portals of the houses of the élite in terms of height and preservation. A study of these towns may limit the implications that can be drawn concerning the social and ritual significance of doorways to the region of Campania, but by drawing upon the literary evidence and other sources inferences can be made for the importance of doorways in other regions of Italy, and perhaps the empire as a whole.

## *Janus and his realm*

The characteristic feature of Roman religious conviction was the belief that different deities had charge over specific functions and fields of activity and that all-important events were divinely activated (Ogilvie 1969: 10). All that was seen as significant for the interests of the Romans and their society was presided over by a god (Kerenyi 1962: 222). The principal doorway into a dwelling had an important role in protecting the physical, and also the spiritual, well-being of those that dwelt within and it is understandable that the Romans believed that a deity watched over and safeguarded it.

Janus was a very ancient Italian deity and there was no Greek equivalent (Orr 1978: 1561; Hornblower and Spawforth 1996: 793). The few depictions of him show him as having two heads but he is more commonly shown as a two faced deity. One of these faces is that of a youth who was symbolic of beginnings and the other is of an old man emblematic of the end of things. He is sometimes shown holding a key to indicate that he opens at the beginning and shuts at the end (St. Augustine 7.7–8). To him the Romans ascribed all things, the ups and downs of fortune, and civilisation of the human race by means of agriculture, industry, art and religion. Janus was also connected to crossing-places, boundaries and more especially doorways. When the Sabines attacked Rome the entrance to the forum was barred by miraculous jets of boiling water emitted by the god preventing its capture (Morford and Lenardon 1999: 505), thus emphasising Janus' role as a protective deity.

He was a deity of considerable importance and this significance is emphasised by the fact that he was the first deity mentioned during the incantation of prayers. His eminence and the emblematic role of the doorway are emphasised in the opening book of Ovid's *Fasti* when Janus is made to say:

Every door has two fronts, one on either side, of which the one looks out upon the people, but the other looks inward upon the household shrine; and as the gate-keeper among you mortals, sitting near the threshold of the front of the building, sees both the goings out and the comings in, so do I, the door-keeper (1.135–140).

*Ianua* is the term normally applied to a house door (Holland 1961: 293, fn 32) or gate and his image is reputed to be found on town gates (Scullard 1981: 61). Cicero explains in his *De Natura Deorum* that the name Janus came from the root of the word ‘to go’ and this was why passages that opened onto the street were called *Jani* and the doors of secular buildings were called *Ianuae* (2.27.67). This would seem to be an etymology that is accepted by most linguists (Bonnefoy 1991: 619; Cotterell 2000: 128). Janus’ charge at the doorway was the only place that the god played a domestic role (Orr 1978: 1562). More importantly, *ianua* was the noun that was used to describe the principal door of the house. There were other exits from the house but they did not open out from the front façade (Holland 1961: 304) and were known as the *posticum* or back door. Sometimes the owner of the house utilised this exit to escape the attention of importunate clients (Horace, *Ep.* 1.5.31).

Ovid states that “the month of Janus comes first because the door comes first” (*Fasti* 2.51). Janus was not only associated with doorways but also the beginning or the very threshold of events by which one embarked on every enterprise (St Augustine 7.7–9). Furthermore, the Romans saw places as sacred and every space was defined by a boundary. These boundaries were not hypothetical divisions that had the function of clearly defining territories but were intermediary zones at which people had to perform certain rites of passage (Dupont 1998: 83). As such, Janus was a god of separation and at the same time of proximity. Janus was seen as the guardian of the boundary between the homeland and the uncivilised lands beyond (Holland 1961: 305). In the first canton of Ovid’s *Fasti* Janus is identified with the boundary between order and chaos (1.103). To leave the house meant withdrawing from the psychological safety of the known to the insecurity of the lesser known. The passage through a doorway, whether going inwards or outwards, is to begin something, and beginnings are heavily charged with magical significance. A house was only as secure as its door and these actions exposed the privacy of the home to the chaos of the outside world. Whether the opening and closing resulted in good or evil for the person concerned depended on the favour of Janus (Ogilvie 1969: 11; Scullard 1981: 61). The doorway was seen as a weak point in the defences of the *domus* through which evil (whether spiritual or material) could most easily enter. Therefore, it is not surprising that the doorway that let the Romans into or out of their home had special significance that took to itself a god of doorways.

Despite the many images of the Graeco-Roman deities that are known there are very few representations of Janus. There is barely any trace of him in the domestic cult and his image is not found in the *lararium*. However, it must be remembered that the Romans had a long religious history and like Vesta, another very ancient Italian deity, Janus was never entirely anthropomorphized. The concept of Janus worship was inherited by the Romans from their distant past, by ideas shaped by the nature of land and with elements of magic that had not entirely been discarded (Holland 1961: 265). The earliest reference to a monument to Janus is the Tigillum Sororium (Livy 1. 26). This consisted of a crude gate-monument in the shape of an *iugum*, that is, two upright wooden posts supporting a horizontal lintel (Holland 1961: 26 and 66). There were other monuments to the god and a later more ornate example is the Janus Quadrifrons which is located in the Forum Boarium and is dated to the early fourth century (Claridge 1998: 258–259). It was the very nature of Janus to be *pervius*, or passable, and the

function of the *iugum* was to mark the entrance to the passage over which the god presided. The door or gateway became the object in which his power was manifest and was seen as his image rather than his symbol (Holland 1961: 70–71). The closest association of Janus to the private house was that the main entrance resembled a Janus and as such was an *ianua foris* (Holland 1961: 304). Thus, the main portal into the Roman house was a descendent of the isolated portals of Janus.

### *Roman doorways*

The wall surfaces of Roman streets appear to have been quite plain and are frequently described as being ‘blank’ (Beard and Henderson 2001: 18; Thorpe 1995: 63). The occurrence of stark façades creates the problem of disorientation for any individual and this circulation predicament can be considerable and most acute for a stranger trying to find their way to a particular dwelling amongst a complex of buildings (Alexander 1977: 489). However, the façade of a building can be transformed by variations in the treatment of their openings onto the street. Doorways played a particular role in this environment and the principal entrances into the homes of the Roman élite were given particular attention. The size of a doorway, its position and decoration transmits information on the role of a building and the status of those that dwelt within. In their functional, visual and symbolic roles, doorways communicated the fundamental language by which a building was read and understood by those that entered or passed by the residences of the élite.

As pointed out by the modern architectural theorist Christopher Alexander, if a doorway is to be seen as significant it must appear large, solid, and bold, and be visible from the main avenues of approach (1977: 544). This will differentiate the portal from its immediate surrounds and emphasise its importance to those passing-by or approaching the door in the streetscape; and it will also emphasise the feeling of transition for those passing through (Alexander 1977: 279). Entrances should be wide but not so wide that they appear, according to Wallace-Hadrill, symbolically ‘sordid’ as in the case of *tabernae* openings that exposed their entire frontages for all to see (1994: 118). Buildings that create a graceful transition between the street and inner compartments are seen as more tranquil than those that opened directly onto the street. The Roman house was not entered directly from the street but was separated from it by the *vestibule* and *fauces* (Paoli 1975: 59). It is the creation of this transitional zone that helped to give the doorway an aura of spiritual significance. It is the whole experience upon entering a building, created by the doorway, which influences the behaviour and the attitude someone has towards the structure. Again, as Alexander points out, if the entry into a building is felt too abrupt, a feeling of arrival will not be created and the building fails to have a contrast between the exterior and interior which should be an inner sanctum (1977: 549). This transition zone must have the effect of transforming the behaviour that is seen as appropriate to the outside world, to one that is fitting to domestic life before an individual can feel relaxed (Alexander 1977: 550). This transformation takes place as an individual passes through the *vestibule* and *fauces* into the *domus*. As such, the main doorway is a natural form of monument to mark the boundary between the contrasting environments of the interior and exterior.

The doorway was a point that marked the terminus of one type of activity or place and the inauguration of another. If this boundary between actions and zones is to be significant in the minds to those passing through this transitional space then the line of demarcation must be

present and obvious in the physical world. In a dwelling this function is performed by the principal doorway, and the significance of this feeling of transition over the boundary from the outside to the inside, and vice versa, is made more important by the architectural embellishment of the main doorway (Alexander 1977: 277). As such the doorway transcends its practical function and creates an atmosphere charged with spiritual and ritual significance.

The doorways of élite dwellings became a focal point in the façade and were used as elaborate architectural centrepieces to define the house as belonging to nobility. In some cases, the façade of a building was finished in fine drafted ashlar (Richardson 1988: 387), but this was not done to detract from the pre-eminence of the door. The decorative elements of the door and surrounds were designed to impress, and during the day the doorway stood open to allow a view of the interior. Its purpose was to draw the eye, stress the importance of the doorway, and invite entrance. The embellishments of the portal and environs were enhanced even more during ceremonial occasions and this further enticed the gaze of passers-by to examine the entrance, the building beyond and the activities within.

### *The Doorways of Pompeii and Herculaneum*

The surviving remains that can be found in Pompeii and Herculaneum indicate the significance of doorways and can be seen by a casual glance along the sides of the streets. Town houses are easily recognisable by their façades and their entrances are impressive in their height and breadth. The size of the entrance into the Casa del Menandro, I.x.4, was 1.6m wide and 4.15m in height (Ling 1997: 264) and that of the Casa del Fabbro, I.x.7, 1.69m wide and 2.82m in height (Ling 1997: 283). The doorway was not just imposing but often elegantly framed with pilasters or semi-columns of stone or stucco-covered brickwork (Brothers 1996: 41) and even of elegant woodwork (Guhl and Koner 1994: 465). This architectural treatment would enhance the importance of the portal in the façade. This can range from quite simple decoration of the door surround to quite considerable architectural magnificence (Figure 1).

The pilasters that flanked the portals of the Casa del Menandro, I.x.4, (Ling 1997: 49, plate 23, 265 and 336), and the Casa dei Capitelli Figurati, VII.iv.57, were plain and square (Maiuri 1966: 47). This arrangement is typified by the Casa di Pansa, VI.vi.1, and Casa del Fauno, VI.xii.2, where the pilasters were of stone without cement (Englemann 1929: 62 and 82). The Casa del Tramezzo di Legno, III.11–12, in Herculaneum and I.x.8 had square stucco pilasters (Ling 1997: 289–90). The entrance into the Casa della Vestali, VI.i.7, (Leach 1997: 55, fig 6.3) and the Casa del Gran Portale, V.8, in Herculaneum (Maiuri 1959: 50) were flanked by brick recessed columns and these would originally have been stuccoed. It is very probable that the pilasters and recessed columns would have been painted. The lower portions of the pilasters that flanked the entrance of the Domus of Lucius Caius Secundus, I.vi.15, were painted red and the rest was in white plaster (de Franciscis 1978: fig 47), and the recessed columns of the Casa del Gran Portale were also originally painted red (Maiuri 1959:50).

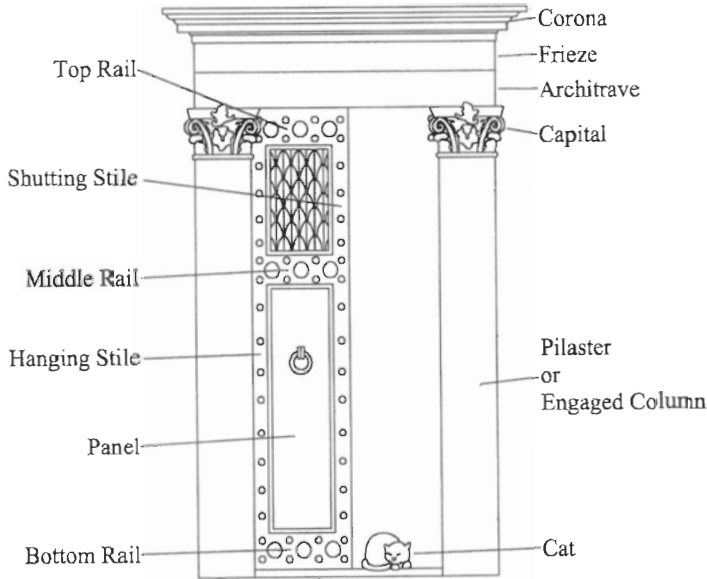


Figure 1. Reconstruction of Roman door (Drawn by author).

These pilasters and recessed columns were often capped by capitals. These could be very simple as in the case of the block tufa capitals of the Casa della Vestali, VI.xv.1 (Richardson 1988: 324), Domus of L Caius Secundus (Maiuri 1966: 47) (Figure 2). These cubical or square capitals appear visually very heavy when compared to the more stylistic Doric and Corinthian capitals. Of the more elaborate capitals, those of the Corinthian style seem to be the most common. The pilasters of the Casa di Pansa, VI.vi.1 (Richardson 1988: 121), Casa del Fauno, VI.xii.2 (Richardson 1988: 116), and the Casa del Menandro, I.x.4, (Ling 1997: 49, 264, 336) were surmounted by capitals in a fine Corinthian type (Figure 3). In other cases, these capitals were very ornate with figurative depictions. The impressive tufa capitals of the Casa dei Capitelli Figurati, VII.iv.57, which give the house its name, appear to be devoted to scenes connected to Dionysus (Zanker 2000: 37–39). The brick pilasters of the Casa del Gran Portale, V.35, in Herculaneum are surmounted by composite Corinthian capitals adorned with winged victories (Maiuri 1959: 50) (Figure 4).

The doorways that survive to a sufficient height show that the portal was often crowned with an entablature with an architrave, frieze and cornice. The entrance into the Casa del Tramezzo di Legno, III.11–12, (Figure 5) (Maiuri 1959: plate XII) and the Casa Samnitica, V.1, (Clarke 1991: 88, fig 24) in Herculaneum had entablatures decorated with dentils. The upper portion of the House of Julia Felix in Pompeii (Fagan 1999: fig 19) has an architrave decorated with *guttae* and *mutules* in terracotta as in the Casa del Gran Portale, V.35 (Maiuri 1959: 50). The entrance into the Casa di Julia Felix, II.iv.6, survived to a sufficient height to preserve a triangular pediment above the entablature.



Figure 2. Domus of Lucius Caius Secundus, I.vi.15, Pompeii (photo by author)



Figure 3. Casa del Fauno, VI.xii., Pompeii (photo by author)



Figure 4. Casa del Gran Portale, V.8 Herculaneum (photo by author)



Figure 5. Casa del Tramezzo di Legno, III.11-12, Herculaneum (photo by author)

A great deal of decorative detail may have been lost due to destruction and the rigors of time, but some indication of the embellishment of house doors can be surmised by a study of doorways depicted in wall paintings that were a frequent feature of First and Second-style interiors (Clarke 1991: 113).

The difficulty with this evidence is that it is often not clear whether the doorways shown are meant to be internal or exterior portals but in most cases the latter seems to have been the most common. In the painting of a doorway in the Villa of Publius Fannius Sinistor at Boscareale, the frieze above the door had been decorated with a depiction of the hunt for the Calydonian boar. In addition, the tympanum of the scrolled pediment had been embellished (Picard 1970: 48; Caro 2001: 148).

The actual doors that covered over the portal have not been preserved but there is sufficient evidence to reconstruct their probable appearance. The indentations in these sills show that the doors that covered these portals were single- or double-leafed and the overall impression is of the latter (Liversidge 1968: 80; Paoli 1975: 60; Guhl and Koner 1994: 465). House doors were composed of solid wood and none have survived but plaster moulds of several doors have been taken to recover their form. In these cases the volcanic dust hardened around the door, making it possible to make a cast of it by pouring Plaster of Paris into the cavity left by the wood in a technique known as the 'Fiorelli process' (Englemann 1929: 146; Connolly 1990: 12). The house doors of the Casa di Loreio Tiburtino, II.ii.2, is an example of doors that have been preserved in this fashion (Richardson 1988: 337). Ordinarily the leaf of the door is composed of a frame that has a horizontal top rail, middle rail, bottom rail, vertical hanging and shutting stile, and panels were set within this frame. Based upon the forms that have been preserved in plaster, these panels seem to be sunken and flush with the door. Sometimes the panels had mouldings set against the frame as can be seen on a wall-painting of a door in the Villa of Publius Fannius Sinistor at Boscareale (King 1982: 140; Caro 2001: 148) and in the Villa dei Misteri (Figure 6).

Although the actual doors have never been recovered, their fittings are familiar. The frame was often adorned with large gilt-headed nails with long shanks (MacKenzie 1910: 53; Richardson 1988: 337). In the plaster cast of the door in the Casa di Loreio Tiburtino, II.ii.2, these nails were placed in rows on the upper and middle bar (Englemann 1929: 136; Maiuri 1966: 75). This arrangement can also be found in the Domus of Octavius Quartio, II.ii.2, (Adam 1994: 296, plate 677) and the Domus of Popidius Montanus, IX.vii.9, which stood open during the time of the eruption (Englemann 1929: 146). Doors had knockers and handles and those that have been found are now preserved in the museum at Naples (Connolly 1990: 31).

It would seem that the doors that covered the portals into the houses of the élite were similar to doors illustrated on wall decoration. In the decorative alcove of *cubiculum* (6) in the Villa dei Misteri there is a painted depiction of a house door. This shows a double door with two panels in each leaf. In the lower panels, there are doorknockers or handles and the upper panels appear to be filled with some form of ornate latticework. The decorative nails that were used to decorate the Casa di Loreio Tiburtino, II.ii.2, can also be seen embellishing the upper, middle and lower rails of the doors (Englemann 1929: fig 14; de Franciscis 1978: fig 82).





Figure 6. Wall painting from the Villa dei Misteri (Photograph taken by author).

Doors and doorways are a common motif found on sepulchral sculpture in many parts of the empire from Italy (Lawrence 1928: 433; Lawrence 1958: 273–274), France (Toynbee 1971: 247) to the so-called Asiatic sarcophagi (Lawrence 1928: 421). These representations presumably have a symbolic value connected with death (Haarløv 1977) but they are still characteristic of doorways in a functional sense as they are similar in form and decoration to portals found on wall paintings. The remains and embellishments that survive in Pompeii and Herculaneum show that house doors may have been similarly decorated but were less ornate. If this is the case, then the preserved examples of doorways found in Pompeii and Herculaneum are not unique to the region of Campania, but similar forms, taking into account regional variations, would have existed in other parts of the empire.

The form of the doorway had a lot to say about identity and it is clear that the entrance into the houses of the élite was a symbol of the owner's ambitions and was the focus of much artistic attention (Thébert 1987: 354). The entrance and the various architectural elements used to decorate the door surround combined to create a monumental impression. The doorway and the *domus* beyond was based upon the principal of display and was organised in the belief that prestige and power went hand in hand with a presentation of discerning opulence. This display became essential in determining an individual's public status (Beard and Henderson 2001: 18).

Furthermore, the architectural features linked the doorways of the dwellings of the élite with the public role of municipal and religious buildings. As such, not only did the decorative elements help to create and display personal identity, they also reflected and echoed the architecture of public and, in particular, temple architecture. Similar design features were also used to decorate *lararia* found within the houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The simple niche shrine often had pilasters or applied columns and a pediment. Sometimes there was a low step against the shrine to further create the illusion of a small temple. This effect is made most complete in the *aedicula* type *lararium* (Boyce 1937: 10–14; Orr 1978: 1577 and 1585). Thus, the intimate connection between the house and temple was made most obvious and the doorway provided a basis for characterising the form of relationship between the gods and man.

The decorative details and many of the features that characterised doors and doorways had practical origins. Despite the functional and utilitarian purpose of a portal and its elements, it cannot be denied that the elaboration of a doorway gave special significance to the threshold as a symbol of transition. Doors were opened to communicate and even embrace the activities that took place in the world outside and closed to hide and protect those inside who no longer wished to be part of the wider community. It was in this manner that doorways transcended their utilitarian role as an entrance or exit but became an opening into the very sanctum of the family and a metaphor of vigilance and inner knowledge (Miers 2000: 11).

### *The gods in the realm of Janus*

Not only was there a divinity associated with doorways, but the portal also had an important role in domestic custom and ritual. However, the difficulty with any discussion of family festivals or beliefs, regardless of how superficial, is attempting to ascertain what was carried out from the random details that have been preserved in the ancient sources. This evidence is derived from a small group of articulate and highly educated Romans who are only representative of a very small segment of that society. The sources do not provide details of how frequently rituals were carried out or by which stratum of society (Harmon 1978: 1592). Furthermore, as Fowler points out, it is impossible to recover the religious psychology of that age and no excavation will ever reveal it (1914: 158). Customs and beliefs must have varied enormously from region to region, in time, and with economic and social standing but there must have been some consistent pattern underlying them. Nonetheless, it would seem that concern for domestic religion went deep into the Roman psyche. Veneration of the household cult continued to be worshipped from the very earliest period until the fourth century when it was thought necessary in the interests of Christianity to forbid its worship by the emperor Throdosius (Fowler 1914: 15; Nilsson 1960: 285). What can be stated is, the people that partook in these rites believed in the efficacy of the household deities that had, for most of the Roman period, been resolute and general. It may not necessarily have been a strong one, as they may not have been able to explain or justify why they uttered certain prayers or performed certain ceremonies (Ogilvie 1969: 5).

While the particularities of the religious belief of the ordinary population are unknown, evidence of its existence is widespread. The numerous household shrines, of whatever form, show that the inhabitants of Pompeii and Herculaneum remained basically religious. Studies of domestic religion have naturally tended to focus upon its more obvious physical remains, such

as *lararia* and their contents, contained within dwellings, and the role of the doorways within this activity have seldom been investigated and discussed. However, the entrance into the home was a region of religious belief and ceremony as is evident from shrines and religious representations found in the vicinity of the doorway (Waites 1920: 253, fn 4).

On the walls of the *fauces* into the Casa del Fauno, VI.xii.2, there are two ornate *lararia* with very fine stucco decoration (Maiuri 1966: 45; Ling 1999: 16). A shallow arched niche, the back of which is painted with a *Lar*, can be seen in the east wall of *fauces* into I.x.3 (Boyce 1937: 27). In the east wall of the *fauces* into I.ii.17 is a rectangular niche with an *aedicula* façade (Boyce 1937: 22). A similar niche surrounded by an *aedicula* façade was also located in the north wall of the *fauces* of the Domus of M Tofelani Valentis, V.i.28 (Boyce 1937: 12 and 33). Other examples have been found in the *fauces* of the Casa del Cenacolo, V.ii.N (Boyce 1937: 36), and VI.xv.9 (Boyce 1937: 55).

On a less ornate level, the belief in the presence of the gods or a divine element in the area of the doorway was shown by a depiction of deities. In the *fauces* of VI.ix.2 on the wall is a panel containing Melenger and Atlanta, and another panel including Mercury and probably Ceres. The figures of six deities can be found on the walls of the *vestibule* of I.ix.1. On the eastern side is Mercury, Hercules and possibly Bacchus and these are faced on the western wall by Minerva, Juno and possibly Venus Pompeiana. On the pilaster to the right of the entrance of I.iii.24 was a depiction of Mercury and, on the left pilaster, Hercules (Boyce 1937: 110). The entrance pilasters of VI.xiv.43 show depictions of Mercury and Fortuna (Boyce 1937: 111). Perhaps the best known illustration of a deity found in the region of the *vestibule* is that of Priapus in the House of the Vettii, VI.xv.1 (Caro 1999: 61; Beard and Henderson 2001: 33).

It is significant that many of the deities that are associated with doorways are protective gods. The *Lares* themselves were associated with boundaries and protected the *domus* of the family (Holland 1937: 436; Nilsson 1960: 278; Tybout 1996: 359). According to a farmer's prayer recorded in Cato's *de Agri Cultura* (142), Mars was seen as a protector of crops, house and land and was not simply a god of war (Scullard 1981: 84). Priapus protected the boundary from intruders by promising to assault them (Beard and Henderson 2001: 35, fig 30). He also had an apotropaic function (Caro 1999: 61), an attribute also recognised in Hercules (Nilsson 1960: 275; Scullard 1981: 171). It is quite possible that the aggressive posture adopted by snakes depicted in many of the *lararia* may have had the power of averting evil influence or spiritual threats to the household (Tybout 1996: 362). The *Lares* received particular veneration during the most important events in the life of the family, such as at weddings, births, deaths and at the leaving on a journey and return of a member of the family (Nilsson 1960: 278). These were also occasions in which the principal portal into the dwelling received ritual attention and it can be no accident of chance that shrines and representations of divine beings were located in the region of the doorway. The general purpose of these altars or depictions of deities must have been to protect the *domus* and purify the passer-by and purge them from the evil of the outside world. Certainly, these paintings and shrines in the area of the doorways illustrate a level of religious deference.

### *Ritual activity in the region of the portal*

Given that there was a god of doorways, other deities associated with the postal and shrines located in the region of the doorway, it is understandable that the portal was a locale associated

with many of the most important ritual and social activities of the household, such as the celebration of marriages, births and deaths. Inasmuch as they took place at the front door of the dwelling, they inevitably took on a wider social significance to the community. These activities involved purification rituals, not only for the benefit of an individual (or individuals) involved but, just as importantly, for the well being of the general community. Thresholds are liminal zones that can be both spatial and temporal and as people pass from one state to another, they are exposed to hazards that must be controlled through rituals that protect against corruption (Pearson and Richards 1994: 25). As such, they fulfil van Gennep's definition of 'rites of passage' or 'transitions' as they consisted of a sequence of rituals performed at a special time, in a particular order and in a designated place (Gennep 1960; Turner 1969: 14 and 95). However, they are by no means only rites of passage as many single rites can be interpreted in several ways and have individual purposes. The significance of these rituals to the wider community meant that it was necessary to carry them out in a public manner and forum, and the doorway provided such a location. It is the physical transition during a rite of passage that is important, such as the actual crossing over a threshold accomplished during the rite by walking through a doorway. Furthermore, ritual activities help "to enforce the usual rules of normal life" (Muir 1997: 19–20). Rituals and practices should not be seen, as Turner points out, as "grotesque" reflections or expressions of economic, political and social relationships" (Turner 1969: 6). They are decisive keys that enhance our understanding of how the Romans thought and felt about these relationships, and about the natural and social environment in which they lived and operated. Thus, the portal reflected both the symbolic use of architecture and the social implications attached to such activities.

According to Binski, the historian or archaeologist assessing rituals must make a distinction between what can, and cannot, be excavated; generally in considering ritual the historian or archaeologist is speculating not so much on belief, but on behaviour; not what people thought but what they did (Binski 1996: 51). The rituals of the household are imperfectly known but they nevertheless played an important role in Roman dwellings. However, evidence from the literary sources can help to reconstruct some of the ritual activities that took place in the area of the doorway. With the information provided by the physical remains and the ancient sources it is possible to study how the ancient Romans, in the anthropological words of Pearson and Richards, "categorise space and associated meanings in given social situations" (1994: 1). The doorway was perhaps seen as a 'pivotal point' or 'focus' as ritual activities became associated and attached to the portal, making it resonate with custom, tradition and experience. These culturally constructed ritual actions are thus transformed into a material and permanent marker and the physical place in turn gives credibility, stability and validity to the activity.

There were several important occasions in the life of the family in which the doorway became the focus of attention and decoration. Marriage was an event of such magnitude to the Romans that divine co-operation was essential for its success and this led to the evolution of an elaborate ritual to seek the assistance and favour of the gods (Ogilvie 1969: 103). During a wedding the door and doorposts of both the bride's and bridegroom's houses were hung with wreaths of flowers and branches of beeches, bay-trees and cypress (Cato 64.293) and evergreens such as ivy, myrtle and laurel, and these were decorated with coloured ribbons (Juvenal 6.51–2; Apuleius 4.26). The bride's physical entry into her new home was an important part of the marriage ceremony. When she reached the house, she further decorated the doorway with woollen fillets (Pliny 29.30). The use of wool in ritual was important for its lucky or apotropaic powers (Holland 1937: 435). Then the bride ritually anointed the doorposts with oil and fat to conciliate the spirits that operated them, to keep out evil (Pliny, *Historia*

*Naturalis* 28.135; 28.142) and as a sign of her domesticity (Harmon 1978: 1600). Her husband who stood at the threshold then greeted her and those that had accompanied her from her home lifted her over the threshold (Cato 61.160–3; Paoli 1975: 59; Dixon 1992: 135). This was to prevent the bride from stumbling, as this would have been an ill omen for her first entry into the house and a bad indication of how the marriage would fare in the future. Every precaution was taken to ensure that all went well from the very outset of the marriage (Ogilvie 1969: 104). Still at the entrance, her husband offered her a torch and a vessel containing water to welcome her into the partnership of fire and water (Varro 5.61). These were symbolic of the essential elements of domestic life and worship (Seyffert 1891: 378; Fowler 1963: 142) and the new bride was thereby admitted to share the domestic and religious life of the household (Kiefer 1934: 20). The entry of a bride, of one whom was not part of the household, could cause tension in the relationship between the spiritual and mortal members of the dwelling. Therefore, the entry of the bride was a matter of grave seriousness and difficulty and not to be done without the intervention and acceptance of the gods and any household deities (Fowler 1963: 135–7).

At the time of a birth to the household, the door was also wreathed (Statius 4.8.40). The decoration to the doorway would have had, as with a marriage, the useful purpose of publicising the important event to the rest of the community. There was also a rite, which is mentioned by St Augustine, in which three men impersonating three guardian deities at night went about the house striking the thresholds with an axe, then with a pestle and finally sweeping them with a broom (6.9.2). The purpose of this was to prevent Silvanus from entering the dwelling to attack the mother and newborn child. Childbirth was difficult and dangerous and took a heavy toll on mothers and infants (Balsdon 1962: 195; Balsdon 2002: 87–88). As a consequence the co-operation and the protection of the gods were sought and every effort was made to expel evil from the dwelling and set up barriers at the threshold against malevolent spirits that might harm the mother and infant (Ogilvie 1969: 102–103). Presumably, the main doorway into the household received particular attention. Silvanus was a god of nature and the woodland and in the words of Bonnefoy “is characterised by a clear allergy to women” who were not allowed to be present at his ceremonies (1991: 636). The use of agricultural implements, which brought civilisation and order to the land, was in order to set up a magical barrier against the threats of the wilderness that were embodied in Silvanus (Ogilvie 1969: 103; Harmon 1978: 1597). There is, perhaps, an interesting link to Janus here, who was reputed to have brought civilisation by the introduction of agriculture. On both the occasions of a marriage and birth, the doorway was the stage for the celebration of new beginnings and new life.

In contrast to this, the portal was also the setting for rituals connected with the ending of life. Death was taken very seriously by the Romans (Kerenyi 1962: 261) and was perceived as a major blemish striking the family of the deceased, with the risk of it affecting all with whom the family had contact. Furthermore, the failure to carry out appropriate funerary rites could have dire consequences for the departed soul (Toynbee 1971: 43). For nine days after the death, the household observed a time of purification known as the *feriae denicales* (Balsdon 2002: 127). Cyprus branches decorated the door, which remained shut for the period of official mourning, and announced the bereaved house to those outside (Hornblower and Spawforth 1996: 433).

If the family was wealthy, the body of the deceased was laid in state on a bed in the *atrium* with the feet of the corpus always pointed towards the house door (Persius 3.103–5). The exposition of a woman can be seen on the late-Flavian or early-Trajanic tomb of the Haterii

family. Garlands of flowers and fruit are depicted decorating the walls of the *atrium*, which are presumably symbols of afterlife fertility. The great acanthus branch that can be seen on the far left of the funeral scene may represent the foliage that would have been hung from the front door to indicate that the household has suffered a loss (Toynbee 1971: 44–45). Great care was taken over funerals, as the powers of the underworld were mysterious and sinister (Ogilvie 1969: 104). The dead were seen as powerful spirits who expected reverence from the living and resented neglect. Furthermore, the departed were close to the living, and could help or injure their descendants, and were not distant like the gods. During the three-day festival of the *Lemuria* in May the dead were believed to revisit their early homes (Scullard 1981: 118). Apart from the expected visitations to the living, the dead could return to demand restitution for some ill deed or to haunt a malefactor, and Valerius Flaccus mentions this as a privilege of the dead (3.386). Certain rites needed to be carried out to prevent the dead from returning to the house and this is reflected in the custom of carrying a corpse feet first out through the doorways for fear that the departed spirits might find their way back through them (Scullard 1981: 18). The people that were involved in these ceremonies became part of, and lived in, the realm of Janus.

Exactly what was seen as magic and superstition for the Romans is perhaps less sharply defined than it is today. However, a simple distinction was made between what was seen as acceptable and what was inappropriate. Ritual that was done for some benefit or to heal was seen as acceptable while that which was intended to do harm was not (Liebeschuetz 1979: 126–127). Magic and superstition were very close to the everyday life of some Romans and the realm of the doorway was the object of superstitious belief. Although our knowledge of magic and superstition during the Roman period is limited it was probably based on very personal and individual belief. To stumble on the threshold whilst leaving the house was considered a bad omen and the superstitious believed it better to go back and spend the rest of the day safely in the house (Cicero, *De Div.* 1.40.84; Ovid, *Meta.* 10.452; Paoli 1975: 281). The threshold was an object of reverence and to enter a doorway or tread on the threshold with the left foot first was considered to be a bad omen and on special occasions a boy was given the charge to caution visitors to put the right foot forward (Petronius 30; Dyer 1867: 267). It was for this reason that Vitruvius in his *On Architecture* states that the steps leading into a temple should be of an uneven number, because the worshipper, after placing their right foot upon the bottom step, would then place the same foot on the threshold (3.4). By writing the word *Arseverse* on the door of a house it was believed the risk of a fire could be avoided (Paoli 1975: 281). There was a great fear of witches gaining entry into the household (Apuleius 2.21; Petronius 63 and 134). To protect themselves against the power of sorceresses, some people nailed the beard of a wolf onto their door, as a wolf's beard had great potency in spells and could both render and dispel incantations (Pliny 28.157; Horace *Sat.* 1.8.42).

### Conclusion

The vivid physical remains of Pompeii and Herculaneum offer the greatest opportunity for the study of the main doorways into the domiciles of the élite. Parallels with wall paintings and sepulchral monuments from around the empire indicate that the form of doorways found in Pompeii and Herculaneum was not unique to Campania. However, the material remains are limited in that they cannot explain the purpose and motivations behind their form and the activities that took place in the area of the portal. The evidence of structures and other material

culture associated with doorways can be interpreted but these can only remain as hypotheses if they are not supported by other forms of evidence. The surviving written sources can create the opportunity to reconstruct some of the human activities and events that occurred within the excavated remains. Archaeological and literary sources have their biases and limitations, but they are both primary sources for the past, and should where possible compliment each other, as each present information about matters on which the other is silent. Neither should be neglected, as there is no common measure of the past and where feasible interdisciplinary approaches are important to present a more holistic and accurate picture of Roman society. Ultimately, the aim is to reconstruct and explain the physical and social milieu of the past in which life was lived.

It seems clear that the doorway into the homes of the Roman élite was an area of great socio-religious significance. Roman doorways were loaded with social and symbolic meanings that were inextricably linked to their function. The principal doorway offered a choice between exposure and observation from the outside world and shelter from unwanted extraneous scrutiny. The deities and rituals at the portal served to keep what belonged within the dwelling safe inside and to ward off intrusion from the outside. The shrines to the domestic cult and the ceremonies framed by the portal were part of the mental furniture, as definitely fixed in the minds of the Romans as the doorway itself, and the relationship between humans and the gods was characterised by the doorway. The main doorways into the domiciles of the élite performed an important ritualistic and symbolic purpose as well as a reference function in the construction and dissemination of culture and identity. Many and varied ritual activities took within the region of the doorway and the knowledge of most of these have probably been lost. In a perverse way, the rituals carried out at the doorway tell us more of the social units that practised the ritual than about the ritual they practised. On a superficial level the rituals that took place, and the shrines and depictions of deities found in the locale of the doorway, seemed to have had little connection to Janus. However, further study demonstrates the inextricable link between the ceremonial activity and the deities found at the doorway to Janus because they all took place under the watchful gaze and domain of the god and his image, the doorway. It can be seen that the Romans used vernacular detail to innovative effect to decorate their doorways and the embellishment of the doorway reinforced and provided a dignified setting for the ritual activities that took place in the realm of Janus.

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