

ROMAN DOMESTIC RELIGION: A STUDY OF THE ROMAN LARARIA

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ABSTRACT

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This study summarizes the existing information on the Roman domestic cult and illustrates it by a study of the archaeological evidence. The household shrines (lararia) of Pompeii are discussed in detail. Lararia from other parts of the Roman world are also studied.

The domestic worship of the Lares, Vesta, and the Penates, is discussed and their evolution is described. The Lares, protective spirits of the household, were originally rural deities. However, the word Lares was used in many different connotations apart from domestic religion. Vesta was closely associated with the family hearth and was an ancient agrarian deity. The Penates, whose origins are largely unknown, were probably the guardian spirits of the household storeroom. All of the above elements of Roman domestic worship are present in the lararia of Pompeii.

The Genius was the living force of a man and was an

important element in domestic religion. The Genius of the paterfamilias, head of the Roman family, was worshipped in the home along with the other domestic deities. The Greek Agathos Daimon was similar to the Genius in certain respects, but the exact relationship between the two is not clear. One religious symbol shared by both is the serpent. The history of the serpent in Greek and Roman religion is described in detail. The Genius and the serpent are both common religious subjects in the lararia of Pompeii.

The archeological evidence includes the lararia, domestic altars, and wall paintings found at Pompeii. The lararia are interpreted and their role in the domestic cult is described; they are also illustrated by twelve plates. Lararia have also been discovered in Herculaneum, Ostia, Delos, Spain, and Africa. The abundant archeological evidence found in the Roman world demonstrates the importance of Roman domestic worship in Roman life.

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All plates are of lararia found in Pompeii.

The three numbers by each figure number indicate the region, insula, and house number which are used as the addresses for the excavated buildings of Pompeii.

INTRODUCTION

The study of Roman domestic worship has great importance in the history of Roman religion. The domestic cult strengthened the ties of the Roman family and symbolized their ancient origins. It continued to flourish in all periods of Roman history and spread throughout the Roman Empire. By the worship of the household deities the Roman could identify with the culture of his ancestors and participate in their ancient rites. Lacking any definite mythology, these household deities reminded the Roman of his remote past, protected his home from evil, and ensured the continuation of his name. Nevertheless, there exists no complete treatise on the subject of Roman domestic religion.

This study intends to summarize the existing scholarship on the Roman domestic cult and illustrate it by an examination of the archaeological evidence. By studying the household shrines of Pompeii, the domestic cult of an entire city of the first century of the Roman Empire can be understood. The first two chapters will synthesize and clarify the basic elements present in Roman domestic worship. However, these two chapters are not exhaustive in their treatment of the domestic deities. Symbolism found in the household shrines, such as the serpent, will also be discussed. The last section is devoted to an

study and interpretation of the household shrines, lararia, found at Pompeii and in other cities of the Roman world. This chapter follows the work of George K. Boyce who first collected the lararia of Pompeii and described them in one work.¹ In this study Boyce arranges the lararia according to their geographical location within the city and discusses the features of each separate lararium. Interpretations found in this chapter are based partly on lararia described in Boyce as well as those lararia discovered since the publication of his *Corpus* in 1937. Many of these newly excavated, unpublished lararia are described and illustrated in this chapter. I hope to catalogue all the lararia found since 1937 in Pompeii and also those of neighboring Herculaneum. This illustrated catalogue will be included in my forthcoming doctoral dissertation which will also include a complete list of all the lararia that have been found elsewhere in the Roman Empire. Lararia from other parts of the Roman Empire are also studied in the last chapter.

The author would like to thank Mr. Stanley A. Jashemski for permission to use his photographs for Plate Viii, Figs. 20 and 22, and Plate Xii, Fig. 30. All of the remaining photographs were taken by the author.

¹George K. Boyce, Corpus of the Lararia of Pompeii (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1937). Hereafter the Corpus of the Lararia of Pompeii will be referred to as Corpus.

CHAPTER I

THE LARES, VESTA, AND THE PENATES

The domestic worship of the Lares, Vesta, and the Penates was an important element in the religious life of the Romans. Their private worship in the home persisted to the end of Rome's political existence.¹ This worship demonstrated the reliance of the family for its maintenance and continuity on superhuman powers which were approachable by all members of the household. It incorporated within its structure temporal regularity and ritual simplicity.² There was no priesthood to make Roman domestic religion concrete, no written dogma to express its thought. Each domestic numen, however, embodied some aspect of the continuity of the life force.³ The Lares, Vesta, and the Penates retained much of their primitive character and their roles within the Roman religious hierarchy emphasized their conservative and pragmatic nature. Their

¹W. Warde Fowler, Roman Ideas of Deity in the Last Century B.C. (London: Macmillan, 1914), p. 15.

²Ibid., p. 27.

³Numen is basically a supernatural power which can be deposited in tangible objects. See Albert Grenier, Les religions étrusque et romaine (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), pp. 82-84.

relationship with the household and its disciplined head, the paterfamilias, altered their ancient agricultural origins and gave them new meanings. However, the exact definitions of these domestic numina were obscured by their utilization as abstract generic terms.⁴ The household worship of the Lares and Vesta, and their unique attributes which differentiate them from the major Roman deities will be discussed in this chapter.

Reliable details regarding the origin of the Lares are lacking although in the beginning they undoubtedly were agricultural numina. The oldest Lar known is the one which inhabited a compitum (the place where four properties touched or where four streets met).⁵ Chapels, which had as many sides as there were properties, were placed at these compita. The Lares of the compita represented the distinct powers which ensured the productivity of the earth. This connection of the Lares with the land is found in the hymn of the ancient priestly college, the Arval Brothers:

⁴One use of the phrase Di Penates refers to all numina of the household, including Vesta. See Georg Wissowa, Religion and Kultus der Römer (Munich: Beck, 1902), p. 145.

⁵W. Warde Fowler, The Religious Experience of the Roman People (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 77. For compita see Wissowa, op. cit., p. 148. See also Jesse Benedict Carter, The Religion of Numa (London: Macmillan, 1906), p. 14.

Help us, Lases
 (repeated three times)
 Let no harm or danger, O Marmor, attack our people
 (repeated three times)
 Be thou satisfied, O fierce Mars!
 Leap over the threshold!
 Stand Still! [Beat the ground] (Three times)
 In alternate chant address all [the gods] of sowing [?]
 (three times)
 Help us, O Marmor (sic; three times)
 Rejoice (five times)⁶

Although this hymn as we know it dates from the early third century of the Christian Era, it is believed to have originated as early as the fifth century B.C.⁷

Professor Fowler believes that the Lares made their way from the fields to the house by way of the slaves of the familia.⁸ These slaves were admitted to the yearly festival in honor of the Lares of the compitum, called the

⁶F.C. Grant, Ancient Roman Religion (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. 17. See also J. Wight Duff, A Literary History of Rome from the Origins to the Close of the Golden Age, (London: Ernest Benn, 1960), p. 58. Duff translates "Stand Still" in line five as "Stay Thy Scourge". For complete text see Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum (1871-1951), I, 2. Hereafter the Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum will be referred to as CIL. All references to CIL are inscription numbers unless otherwise stated.

⁷M. Cary, et. al., eds., The Oxford Classical Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), s.v., "Fratres Arvales," p. 370. Hereafter The Oxford Classical Dictionary will be referred to as OCD. See also, Acta Fratrum Arvalium, W. Henzen, ed. (Berlin: Reimer, 1874), pp. 26-27.

⁸Fowler, The Religious Experience, p. 78. (Also Kurt Latte, Römische Religionsgeschichte [Munich: Beck, 1960], p. 91, n. 2).

Compitalia.⁹ This festival, even in imperial times, was not held on any fixed day but simply when winter arrived. As the rounds of farmwork were slackened (usually around early January) each individual farmer brought in his plow and hung it up before the Lares. A feast followed in which the gods received honey cakes which were offered on an altar located at the intersection of roads.¹⁰ The Lares received burnt offerings before the course of the feast.¹¹ In this case the Lares represented numina who presided over the rural community which lived in the immediate vicinity of the crossroads; these Lares had power to guard and to aid those who lived on adjacent farms. After the feast there occurred the curious ceremony of the woolen dolls. Each free member of the household was represented by a male or female puppet and each slave by a ball.¹² This apparently reflected the practice in primitive religion of

⁹Latte, op. cit., p. 90; W. Warde Fowler, The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic (London: Macmillan, 1899), pp. 279-280.

¹⁰Louise A. Holland, "The Shrine of the Lares Compitales," Transactions of the American Philological Association, LXVIII (1939), pp. 428-441.

¹¹The Lares also received sacrifices of flowers. See Suetonius Augustus 31. 4. An excellent discussion of the feast is in Ruth Edith Thomas, The Sacred Meal in the Older Roman Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), pp. 17-19.

¹²OCD, s.v., "Lares," p. 480. See Wissowa, op. cit., p. 149. These puppets and balls were hung up before the Lares. It was hoped that the Lares would spare the living and take the balls and puppets instead.

imparting a supernatural power to some inanimate object. They believed that this power was a tangible thing which could be deposited in puppets or balls to achieve the desired result. Cato¹³ mentions that the vilicus, the overseer of the farm, was allowed to sacrifice "at the compitum or before the hearth." It seems logical that the slaves brought the Lares to the hearth as they were permitted to worship no other deity, but of course this theory cannot definitely be proved. Unfortunately the Lares, like the other domestic numina, have no mythology and the later Latin authors were not sure of their origins or exact nature.¹⁴

Samter's¹⁵ hypothesis is that the Lares were intimately associated with the cult of the dead. He derived this theory from the passage in Pliny¹⁶ which states that if a scrap of food

¹³R.R. 5. 3. Cato R.R. 143. 2., also states that the Lar familiaris was sacrificed to "as one is able." See also Marcel Bulard, La religion domestique dans la colonie italienne de Délos (Paris: Boccard, 1926), p. 76.

¹⁴One exception is the story told by Ovid, Fasti, 2. 595-616, of how the Lares originated. A Naiad nymph by the name of Lara, daughter of the river god Almo, a tributary of the Tiber, gave birth to the Lares by Mercury. Ovid comments that they guard the crossroads and keep watch in the city. For an excellent example of later confusion with regard to Lares see Arnobius Adversus Gentes 3. 41.

¹⁵See Familienfeste der Griechen und Römer (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1901), pp. 105-108. For another statement of Samter's theory see Lily Ross Taylor, "The Mother of the Lares", American Journal of Archaeology, XXIX (July - September, 1925), pp. 299-313.

¹⁶N.H. 28. 27-28.

falls on the floor during the course of a banquet, it is proper to burn that portion before the Lares. Since the floor was the home of the ghosts, the food, therefore, had gone to the ghosts. The festival of the crossroads, described above, is used to support this thesis for according to Festus¹⁷ the balls and dolls would be taken by the Lares instead of their live counterparts. Wissowa¹⁸ points out, however, that the Lares were later intruders into the hearth from the land and he discounts the theory that they originally represented the ancestors of the family. Fowler¹⁹ accepts the views of Wissowa and agrees that the Lares indeed originated as agricultural numina. The view that the Lares were derived from the spirits of the dead ancestors of the family appears to be borrowed from Greek sources.²⁰

¹⁷p. 272. 15 Lindsay; OCD, s.v. "Lares", p. 480. See also A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, and W. Kroll, Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft (Stuttgart: 1893), s.v., "Lares", XII, pp. 806-834. Hereafter the Real-Encyclopädie will be referred to as PW.

¹⁸Op. cit., pp. 148-149. See also W. H. Halliday, Lectures on the History of Religion from Numa to Augustus (Liverpool: University Press, 1922), pp. 28-29.

¹⁹The Religious Experience, pp. 77-78.

²⁰Halliday, op. cit., p. 27. See also Margaret Waites, "The Nature of the Lares and their Representation in Roman Art", American Journal of Archaeology, XXIV (July-September, 1920), pp. 255-261

The Lar familiaris apparently entered the house, not as a dead ancestor but as a numen that protected the family. The opening lines of Plautus,²¹ Aulularia contain the earliest descriptions in Latin literature of the Lar familiaris:

That no one may wonder who I am, I shall inform you briefly. I am the Lar familiaris of that family from whose house you saw me come. For many years now I have possessed this dwelling, and preserved it for the father and the grandfather of its present occupant.

This speech demonstrates the protective role which the Lar familiaris played in the Roman household. Plautus²² also suggests that the Lar was worshipped with presents of wine, incense, and garlands.

The Lar familiaris was worshipped by the family on all family occasions and on the calends, nones, and ides of each month.²³ In the Roman household some sacrifice with prayer was probably made every morning to the Lar familiaris and again before the chief meal of the day. A girl, by the act of marriage, left one family for another; she thus passed from the hand of her father to that of her husband, or correspondingly, from the lar of her own household to the lar of her husband's.²⁴

²¹Aulularia. 1-5. Ne quis miretur qui sim, paucis eloquar. Ego Lar sum familiaris ex hac familia unde exeuntem me aspexistis. Hanc domum iam multos annos estquom possideo et colo patri auo que iam huius qui nunc hic habet.

²²Ibid., 23. Spelt is also mentioned as a sacrifice to the Lar. See Juvenal 9. 138. Grapes, garlands of grain, honey cakes, and honey-combs were also offered to the Lares. See Tibullus 1. 10. 21-25.

²³Halliday, op. cit., p. 29.
Cato R.R. 143. 3.

²⁴Ibid., p. 34.

This was dramatically illustrated by the three copper coins the bride carried. Amidst elaborate ceremony and precise ritual she gave one to her husband, one to the Lar familiaris of her new house, and one to the Lar compitalis, the numen of the crossroads. Thus, the household lar is directly linked with the fortunes of the home, a concept which lies at the foundation of the cult of the Lares in earliest times.²⁵ The sacred wedding meal was also closely associated with the cult of the household numina. The Roman bride and groom, in sharing the sacred cake with the numina, entered into communion with them and pledged fidelity to them and each other.²⁶ The household Lares also received supplication when a boy doffed his childhood dress and hung his bulla in the lararium as a dedication.²⁷ A girl dedicated hers to the Lares on the occasion of her marriage. Before this time it would be hung up in front of the Lar familiaris that it might give him or her protection. The boy took off his bulla and put on the toga virilis during

²⁵Waites, op. cit., p. 242.

²⁶Thomas, op. cit., p. 6. The implication that the cake was actually eaten is found in Servius in Georg. 1. 31.

²⁷H. J. Rose, Religion in Greece and Rome (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 187. A boy also dedicated his beard to the Lares. See Petronius 29. 8.

the Festival of Liber, the Liberalia.²⁸ The development of a young Roman into adulthood is reflected in the homage shown to the Household Lares. The worship of the Lares also reflected those virtues which the Romans sought to emulate. Cicero was a firm believer in maintaining ancestral religion and directing worship to the Lares. His belief in creating a more human and personal religion, because it personified morals and illustrated merit, led him to argue for the continuance of the old religious practices.²⁹

The Household Lares are frequently mentioned in Latin literature. One of the finest examples of sincerity in domestic worship is voiced by Tibullus,³⁰ who tells us that he expects to be sent on military service and hopes that his Lares will protect him and watch over him. This passage also suggests that the Lares accompanied their household wards on journeys and that their protective functions were not limited to the home. In Vergil³¹ the Lares are referred to in combination with the

²⁸Ovid Fasti. 3. 771-777.; Suetonius Iul. 84. 4.; Macrobius Sat. 1. 6. 16.; Plutarch Romulus 25. 5; Quaestiones Romanae 101. See also Fowler, Roman Festivals, p. 56.

²⁹Cicero Leg. 2. 27. (religio larium), 2. 19 and 27. For good discussion see John E. Rexine, Religion in Plato and Cicero (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), pp. 50-51.

³⁰1. 10. 15-25.

³¹Aen. 8. 543 (Penates and Lares); 5. 744 (Vesta and Lares); 9.258-259 (Penates, Vesta and Lares).

Penates, Vesta, or both. Vergil³² also occasionally uses the word *lar* as a synonym for "home" or "household". The satirist Juvenal³³ prays to the Lares for financial security in the coming years and asks 20,000 sesterterii for his peity. Martial³⁴ mentions the practice of sacrificing to the Lares on holidays. He also refers to the use of the word Lares as a possible synonym for the household.³⁵ Unfortunately, most of the information found in the literary sources consists of brief sentences which merely use the name Lares in an incidental reference to domestic worship.³⁶

The Lares had many different functions other than their purely domestic ones. They sometimes were looked upon as guardian numina of a particular place, not necessarily a home. Vergil describes a *lar* in one passage in the sense of the "lar of a place", not of a family.³⁷ This points out quite clearly the ambiguity of the terminology used in discussing Roman domestic religion. Charinus, a character in the Mercator by Plautus³⁸ states that he will seek another country and another Lar, meaning that he will seek another country and

³²Georg. 3. 344.

³³Aen. 5. 744.

³⁴Mercator 834.

³⁵9. 137-146.

³⁶3. 58. 23.

³⁷Martial 10. 61. 5.

³⁸Adversus gentes 3. 41. (See also George E. McCracken, trans., Arnobius of Sicca, the Case against the Pagans [Westminister: Newman Press, 1949], p. 224, nn. 250-260).

another city. Again, these numina are connected with the place Arnobius,³⁹ who writes in the fourth century, gives a confused description of the Lares. In one passage he states that the Lares are the gods of streets, roads, buildings, houses, and even the air.⁴⁰ He also mentions that Varro considers them to be the souls of the departed dead.⁴¹ One inscription even refers to the Lar of a forest.⁴² During the empire the Lares sometimes became affiliated with the gods of the city, a use which is found in Vergil and other Latin writers. Pliny⁴³ mentions two different types of Lares, called Lares publici and Lares privati. Another variant of the Lares was the Lares curiales who were the particular numina which presided over the curia (senate) or even a group of people.⁴⁴ The Lares viales were the guardians

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Brief mention of the Lares is found in Macrobius Sat. 1. 7. 34., Servius in Aen. 3. 63., and Livy 1. 29. Singular Lar: Plautus Mil. glor. 1339., Trin. 39, Tibullus 1. 3. 34. Plural Lares: Cicero, Leg. 2. 42., Dom. 108., Quinct. 85., Horace Carmina 3. 23. 4., Propertius 3. 3. 11.

⁴²CIL II 804.

⁴³N.H. 21. 11.

⁴⁴CIL VI 36811.

of roads and wayfarers and were represented by numerous roadside shrines.⁴⁵ Directly associated with the travelers who embarked on lengthy ocean voyages were the Lares permarini.⁴⁶ Among the soldiers in the Imperial armies, the worship of the Lares was popular and well established.⁴⁷ These Lares were the protecting numina of the common soldiery and probably reflected the Lares which the soldiers left behind at home. People who journeyed on the untraveled footpaths and byways had protecting Lares known as Lares semitales.⁴⁸ Even the games had Lares as the Lares ludentes found on the island of Delos illustrate.⁴⁹

The Lares praestites, the guardians of the state in general, were especially concerned in the empire with the perpetuation of the worship of the imperial cult.⁵⁰ In Capua, ministers had charge of the worship of the city Lares, a

⁴⁵Rose, op. cit., p. 205.

⁴⁶The temple of the Lares permarini was dedicated in 190 B.C., see Livy 40. 52. 4., CIL XIV 4547, X 4846. L[a]r [ibus] Perm[arini].

⁴⁷CIL III 3460. 3463.

⁴⁸CIL VI 36810. 3079

⁴⁹Bulard, op. cit., pp. 162, 163.

⁵⁰Ovid Fasti 5. 129. Wissowa, op. cit., p. 151. Known on Delos, see Bulard, op. cit., p. 330. In conjunction with Silvanus on Delos see pp. 330-331.

religious practice probably affiliated with the imperial cult.⁵¹ The Lares also appear in two inscriptions found at Naples: one is a dedication made by an individual and the other contains a dedication made to the Lares of Augustus.⁵²

Roman coinage furnishes valuable evidence for the study of the role of the Lares in municipal religion. The Lares are depicted on a silver denarius of the Roman Republic struck by Lucius Caesius (ca. 103 B.C.).⁵³ On the reverse the two seated Lares are shown together with a monogram inscription which Sydenham interprets as LA [res] RE [gienses]. RE [gienses] refers to the mint at Rhegium, the issue being associated with this city, and the Lares are either the guardian spirits of the town or a form of the Lares Praestites.⁵⁴

At Pompeii several inscriptions mentioning the Lares have been discovered. One inscription simply states ite Lares and was found on a shrine in one of the houses.⁵⁵ The Lares are frequently found in inscriptions dedicated to the Genius

⁵¹CIL X 3789. Roy Merle Peterson, The Cults of Campania (Rome: Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome, 1919), I, 354.

⁵²CIL X 1580 and 1582.

⁵³Edward A. Sydenham, The Coinage of the Roman Republic (London: Spink and Sons, 1952), p. 76, No. 564.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵CIL IV 1539.

of the family.⁵⁶ One inscription in a house on the via Stabiana reads: Lares Propitios, again in reference to a dedication.⁵⁷ However, most of the inscriptions are brief and complement the archaeological evidence, for example, one merely contains the word Lar.⁵⁸

In the paintings on the lararia at Pompeii, the Lares are portrayed as happy beings in dancing poses with brimming rhytons clasped in their hands, giving an impression of mirth and happiness.⁵⁹ Their intimate connection with the Roman Family is apparent in the shrines of Pompeii. They had undergone much evolution since their earliest years when they had not yet acquired anthropomorphism.

Vesta was closely associated with the family hearth and her name was used occasionally as a synonym for the "fire of the hearth." In spite of all we know concerning the public cult of Vesta, little is definitely known about her role in household religion.⁶⁰ However, her ancient connection with

⁵⁶CIL X 861., CIL X 1235 (At Nola).

⁵⁷CIL IV 844.

⁵⁸CIL X 7555.

⁵⁹See Attilio De Marchi, Il culto privato di Roma antica (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1896), I, p. 48, Plate I. See also Corpus Plate 18, No. 1; Plate 24, Nos. 1 and 2; Plate 22, Nos. 1, 2, and 3 for good illustrations of the Lares in the lararia of Pompeii. Waites, op. cit., pp. 254-255, associates the dancing pose of the Lares with Dionysus. See also Wissowa, op. cit., p. 172.

⁶⁰H. J. Rose, op. cit., p. 178.

the hearth fire and the agricultural community appears fairly certain.⁶¹ It seems that she was one of the Penates since she was referred to in conjunction with them. These Di Penates were supposed to have an abode in the Temple of Vesta, where ancient objects which pertained to them were preserved.⁶² The familiar round temple of Vesta, located in the Roman Forum, was very ancient and went back to prehistoric antecedents, even though it had been subjected to fewer changes than other cults. More than any other cult it symbolized to the Romans the religion of their ancestors.⁶³ According to mythology, her public temple contained the sacred fire and the Palladium brought from Troy by Aeneas.⁶⁴

There are many references to Vesta in Latin literature, although few refer to her connection with the domestic cult. Vergil⁶⁵ mentions a mythological Vesta-cult in Troy in the passage where he describes Helen as sitting on the threshold

⁶¹Cato R.R. 132. 2. Cyril Bailey, Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932), p. 49. See also Angelo Brelich, Vesta, trans. by V. von Gonzenbach (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1949), pp. 19-24.

⁶²Wissowa, op. cit., p. 143. Fowler, The Religious Experience, pp. 126, 136. Brelich, op. cit., pp. 41-48. This temple also served as the hearth of the State. See Bailey, op. cit., p. 150.

⁶³Wissowa, op. cit., pp. 29, 141.

⁶⁴Ovid Tristia 3. 1. 29

⁶⁵Aen. 2. 567.

of Vesta's temple. Ovid⁶⁶ states that in Vesta's temple there are no images, only fire. Her power is described as "standing-by power" by Ovid⁶⁷ in another passage. She is mentioned in oaths along with the Lares and the Penates, indicating her intimate connection with the other household numina.⁶⁸

Vesta is commonly associated with the Lares in the lararia of Pompeii.⁶⁹ Her likeness appears between those of the Lares, and she is frequently portrayed on the walls of bakeries and kitchens.⁷⁰ Occasionally she is shown accompanied by an ass which was regarded as under her protection.⁷¹ At Delos there are also paintings of Vesta (or her Greek counterpart Hestia) sometimes shown in connection with the omphalos.⁷²

Within the household, Vesta's fire was probably tended by the daughters of the paterfamilias and his wife. Sacrifices

⁶⁶Ovid Fasti 6. 291.

⁶⁷Ibid., 6. 299.

⁶⁸Vergil Aen. 9. 259.

⁶⁹Corpus, p. 105.

⁷⁰Peterson, op. cit., p. 255. See also Corpus, nos. 77, 185, 236, 240, 247, 313, 318, 419, and 420.

⁷¹Propertius 4. 1. 21. See Corpus, nos. 77, 420. This figure is either Vesta or Epona. See infra, pp. 93, 98.

⁷²Bulard, op. cit., pp. 400-401, 310-312.

to her at the hearth probably included many of the commoner items offered to the gods and there is one instance where she was worshipped with Jupiter Dapalis.⁷³ Although Vesta appears in anthropomorphic form on Roman coins and on the walls of Pompeii she preserved her more ancient fire character.⁷⁴

Only a brief mention is necessary to include the domestic aspects of the cult of Janus. Janus was one of the oldest of all the Italian deities and was closely coupled with Saturnus.⁷⁵ He has been interpreted as the bright sky, the half-yearly cycles of the sun, chaos, time, the creator of all things, the guardian of the city gates and boundaries, and the numen of the house doors.⁷⁶ Recent scholarship has shown that Janus was connected with the power of living water and was

⁷³Cato, R.R. 132. 2.

⁷⁴Bailey, op. cit., pp. 48-49. Sydenham, op. cit., pp. 138, 152, and 156. Ovid states that no statue of her was ever made. See Ovid, Fasti. 6. 295-296.

⁷⁵Cyril Bailey, Religion in Virgil (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 40-41, Plutarch Numa. 19. 6. For the ancient origins of Janus see Louise Adams Holland, Janus and the Bridge (Rome: American Academy, 1961), p. 308.

⁷⁶Holland, op. cit., p. 3. For Janus as a lunar divinity, see L. A. Mackay, Janus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), University of California Publications in Classical Philology, XV, n. 4, pp. 157-182.

indeed the guardian of river fords and bridges.⁷⁷ The old interpretation of Janus as the god of beginnings and gates has thus been challenged.⁷⁸ Ianus bifrons, the "double-faced", is portrayed on the Republican aes grave bronze pieces which illustrates Vergil's description.⁷⁹ However, there is little trace of Janus in the domestic cult, no images are in the lararia, and even his affiliation with the door is on unfirm ground.⁸⁰ His place at the fauces, the figurative boundary between public and private affairs, is the only area where Janus possibly played a role in domestic worship.⁸¹

Finally, in close association with the Lar familiaris, Vesta, and Janus, are the domestic Penates. Their origin, like that of the Lares, is practically unknown. They have been associated with the Dioscuri and with the Great Gods of the

⁷⁷Holland, op. cit., p. 308.

⁷⁸For the old interpretation of Janus see Bailey, Phases in the Religion, pp. 46-48, and also Franz Altheim, A History of Roman Religion, trans. by Harold Mattingly (London: Methuen, 1938), p. 194. See Holland, op. cit., for the most recent interpretation of Janus.

⁷⁹Sydenham, op. cit., p. 7. Aen. 7. 180., 12. 198.

⁸⁰Holland, op. cit., p. 304.

⁸¹Ibid. There is no actual information concerning the domestic cult of Janus. See Cyril Bailey, The Religion of Ancient Rome (London: Constable and Co., 1907), p. 36.

shrine of Samothrace,⁸² since both the Dioscuri and the Penates were referred to as the Di Magni. Servius⁸³ mentions Ceres, Pales, and Fortuna as the Tusci Penates. Their origin is unclear also, but they may have been linked to early Etruscan deities.⁸⁴ However, the position of the Penates in the family storeroom (penus) is not disputed. Behind the hearth of the early Roman household, at the back of the atrium was the penus; a place inhabited by the Di Penates, always conceived of and expressed in the plural.⁸⁵ Later, all the numina of the household were known as Di Penates.⁸⁶ These abstract numina represented guardian forces and perhaps also the variety of the store. Martial,⁸⁷ in this connection, refers to the Penates as guardians. By protecting the grains in the penus, they

⁸²Servius in Aen. 3. 12. Also Wissowa, op. cit., p. 148, n. 1. For the religion of Samothrace see Karl Lehman, Samothrace (New York: New York University Press, 1955), pp. 21-37. See also Waites, op. cit., pp. 256-257.

⁸³In Aen. 2. 325.

⁸⁴Lily Ross Taylor, Local Cults in Etruria (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1932), p. 243 for Ceres and Fortuna. See also p. 244 for Fortuna alone. For Pales see Altheim, op. cit., p. 136.

⁸⁵Fowler, The Religious Experience, pp. 73-74.

⁸⁶They also were sharply differentiated from the spirits of the dead (the Di Manes or Di Parentum). Fowler, Roman Ideas, p. 16.

⁸⁷8. 75. 1.

personified the continuity of the household's means of subsistence.

The Penates do not appear in Vergil as simply the guarding numina of the household. Vergil⁸⁸ describes them in the third book of the Aeneid which discusses Aeneas' sleep vision of the Phrygian Penates. These Penates are an important element in the Aeneid and are closely associated with the state cult. According to Vergil's myth, there was an altar at Troy to the Penates, the state-gods which Aeneas brought from his ancestral home to Italy.⁸⁹ The Penates of Vergil resemble the Penates publici populi Romani and were significant since their cult was of importance to the community. The worship of these Penates was also closely allied with that of Vesta in her round temple in the Forum.⁹⁰ In all probability the inspiration for these state Penates came from the Penates of the household. Vergil⁹¹ also connects the Penates with the Di Magni of Samothrace. He clearly uses the Penates as the symbol of the city of Rome and

⁸⁸Aen. 3. 148.

⁸⁹Ibid., 2. 512-514. For the mention of the Penates in Carthage see 4. 21.

⁹⁰Rose, op. cit., p. 203. Tacitus Ann. 15. 41. 1. See supra, p. 15, n. 63.

⁹¹Georg. 2. 505.

he describes the great concern of Aeneas for their care.⁹²

Thus the Penates are interpreted as the city gods which Aeneas brought with him to Italy since it was generally believed in Republican times that the Roman Penates probably came to the city by way of Lanuvium and Alba.⁹³

The state-cult version of the Penates is also known to us through a Republican silver denarius. This piece bears on its obverse the conjoined heads of the Dei Penates with the inscription: D.P.P. This abbreviation probably stands for the Dei Penates Publici.⁹⁴ Could these portraits possibly be the Dioscuri? If this could definitely be shown it might be possible to connect them since the Dioscuri were a common type of early Republican silver coinage. However, the coin is significant since the Dei Penates Publici were later transformed by Augustus for use in the imperial cult.⁹⁵

The worship of the Penates in the Roman household was

⁹²Aen. 2. 293.; 3. 12.

⁹³Bailey, op. cit., p. 95. Varro L.L. 5. 144.

⁹⁴Sydenham, op. cit., p. 78, No. 572.

⁹⁵Lily Ross Taylor, The Divinity of the Roman Emperor (Middletown: American Philological Association, 1931), p. 184.

a most important part of the domestic cult. Cicero⁹⁶ writes that the household Penates were significant and equates them with the worship of the Lar familiaris. In another passage he describes the gods of the ancestors and the household (here he uses the term Penates as a generic word meaning all of the domestic numina).⁹⁷ Horace⁹⁸ also frequently refers to all the household deities by the name Penates. The presence of the Penates in the household shrines of Pompeii shows significant changes in their domestic worship. Here, in the lararia of homes and shops, the Penates specifically indicated the various deities which were worshipped.⁹⁹ Like the Lares, the Penates had undergone an evolution which culminated in anthropomorphism.

This chapter has briefly discussed the importance of the Lares, Vesta, and the Penates, in domestic worship. The brief summary which has resulted is necessary for an understanding of the archaeological evidence found at Pompeii. The basic nature of these domestic numina are expressed in the paintings of the lararia and their study will give new meaning to the material presented in this chapter.

⁹⁶Rep. 5. 7.

⁹⁷Har. resp. 37.

⁹⁸Carmina 2. 4. 15.; 3. 23. 19.

⁹⁹Among the most important Penates, based on their frequency in the paintings of the lararia, are Fortuna, Vesta, and Bacchus. See infra, p. 92.

CHAPTER II

THE GENIUS

The term Genius in Roman domestic religion generally refers to the guiding numen of the continuity of the family, the living force of the paterfamilias. It was the spiritual double of a man and accompanied the Roman from the cradle to the grave.¹ Its most important power was fertility and the personification of the type of numen which enabled the family name to continue, generation after generation.² Since it represented the life force of a man and his family, the Genius was transferred to a successor on the death of the paterfamilias. However, the Genius never rose to the position of a fully developed deity and always remained a numen.³ The mysterious power of the Genius to continue the family and maintain its intimate association with the gens was its most important element.⁴ It represented

¹Fowler, The Religious Experience, p. 74. See also PW, s.v., "Genius," VII, 1163.

²Rose, op. cit., p. 193.

³Emily Shields, Juno: A Study in Early Roman Religion. (Northampton: Collegiate Press, 1926), p. 40.

⁴Fowler, Roman Ideas, p. 17. For the Genius, see also OCD, s.v., "Genius," p. 383.

the Italian concept of numina since its activities were not limited to any particular spot but manifested themselves in some peculiar function, wherever it might be exercised.⁵

The origins of the Genius date back to prehistoric Italy and are extremely obscure because of a lack of definite evidence. Professor Fowler⁶ believes that "the Latin concept of the Genius was a result of an unusually strong idea that the Latins must have had when they first passed into Italy." Wissowa⁷ also argues that the Genius was unmistakably one of the very oldest elements present in Roman religion. Sex-blood connections, the special position of women within Etruscan society, and the close affinity between procreation and death are all included in the Etruscan embodiment of the Genius.⁸ Like the Roman Genius,

⁵Cyril Bailey, Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932), pp. 51-52.

⁶Fowler, The Religious Experience, pp. 74-75.

⁷Op. cit., p. 182. The Genius in early times must have been "ein Seelischer Begleiter" (a spiritual companion) of the individual man, as a tenant of his body. See Otto, s.v., "Genius", PW VII, 1155-1158. This in-dwelling spirit was then extended to every place and every collective group of thing.

⁸Franz Altheim, A History of Roman Religion (London: Methuen, 1938), p. 169. See also Massimo Pallottino, The Etruscans, trans. J.A. Cremona (Baltimore: Penguin, 1955), p. 158. Pallottino states that the "Roman Genius was originally the Etruscan Genius" which he conceived as a result of a "vagueness" toward deities which the Etruscans possessed.

the Etruscan version was subordinated to the individual man and held sacred on the day when procreation became manifest, i.e., the birthday of the paterfamilias. When the Genius appeared in Rome, it meant not only the divine power of procreation, but also was used as a symbol for the male sperm, which from the father begets the son and thus continues the lineage of the family.⁹ Consequently, the same identical seed which was originally in the father will be in the grandchildren and all future generations. The family is thus perpetuated by the men, not by the women. This fact underscores a peculiarly Roman idea and was represented in the power of the paterfamilias.¹⁰

In Rome there was an old cult of Hercules worshipped at the Greatest Altar in the Cattle Market, from which women were forbidden. It has been argued that the older cult of the Genius (or male principle) was the same one, because of this taboo.¹¹ This female taboo seems to be somewhat related to the idea that the Genius had a feminine counterpart, called the Juno. The

⁹Ibid., p. 59. See also Wissowa, op. cit., p. 155.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Eli Edward Buriss, Taboo, Magic, Spirits: A Study of Primitive Elements in Roman Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 45.

Juno, like its related numen, the Genius, was employed to designate the potential reproductive powers.¹² Every man had his Genius and every woman, her Juno.¹³ The roots of the Juno concept appear to be in the same remote circles that gave birth to the idea of the Genius.¹⁴ The intimate association with the Genius, however, appears to be of later date and came about after she was regarded as a deity of birth and women.¹⁵ Juno originally was goddess of light, and her use in connection with the Genius was not her earliest one. The goddess Juno may not have been the deity of female individuality anymore than Venus, yet the term indicates a closer affinity.¹⁶ Moreover, the festival of the Juno is the birthday and the Juno in this guise is called Natalis.¹⁷ The naming of a Genius, in association with women is definitely known from an inscription.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the

¹²Halliday, op. cit., p. 26.

¹³PW, s.v., "Kultus"(Personen XI, 2126)"Jeder Mann hat seinen Genius and jede Frau ihre Juno;" Juno, Petronius 25; Juno and Genius, Pliny N.H., 2. 16; Tibullus 4. 6. See also Jesse Benedict Carter, The Religion of Numa (London: Macmillan, 1906), p. 12.

¹⁴Shields, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁷Shields, op. cit., p. 38-40. Juno was worshipped on the calends of each month. See also PW, s.v., "Genius," VII, 1158.

¹⁸CIL VIII 22770.

concept of the Juno can not be definitely joined to that of the Genius, although in all probability it was a feminine counterpart of the male principle.

The literary evidence for the Genius in the Roman household is meager but significant. The Genius was worshipped with bloodless offerings on the birthday feast of the paterfamilias (his chief festival).¹⁹ Horace²⁰ states that a pig was sacrificed to the Genius. Plautus,²¹ in the Curculio refers to the Genius in the simple phrase, me et genium. Apuleius,²² comments that the Genius is both deus and immortalis. Horace²³ best identifies the Genius since he emphasizes its abstract nature and does not mention it as a specific deus. Servius²⁴ mentions an inscription which was written on the old shield on the Capitoline: "To the Genius of the City of Roma whether male or female." The fact that a serpent's image

¹⁹Tibullus 2. 2. 1; Censorinus 2. 2. For the birthday feast see Thomas, op. cit., pp. 55-57.

²⁰Carmina 3. 17. 14-15.

²¹Curculio 628 (Genius also mentioned in Aulularia 724).

²²De deo Soc. 15.

²³Epist. 2. 2. 188.

²⁴In Aen. 2. 351. genio urbis Romae, sive mas sive femina. A depiction of the serpent is on this shield also. See also Shields, op. cit., p. 37.

accompanied the inscription makes it more important since this animal was closely associated with the Genius. Wine was a regular libation and sacrifice to the Genius, as it was to Jupiter and Liber.²⁵

Epigraphical evidence is valuable in describing the Genius worship during the Roman Empire. Although many of the inscriptions are not associated with the domestic Genius and refer mostly to the worship of the emperor or a place, it is important to consider them as examples of the variety present in the Roman's conception of the Genius.²⁶ At Stabiae there is considerable evidence for a temple which may have survived from the Oscan period, dedicated to the Genius of the City.²⁷ The original idea of the Genius as a personification of the city was borrowed from the Romans.²⁸ Similarly, the cult of the Genius at Puteoli appeared to be distinct from the cult of the emperor and was known as the worship of the Genius Coloniae

²⁵Ibid., p. 37. PW, s.v., "Jupiter X, 1131. Juvenal 5. 36.

²⁶Robert Etienne, Le culte impérial dans la péninsule Ibérique d'Auguste à Dioclétien (Paris: Boccard, 1958), pp. 305-309. A good discussion of the use of the Genius is in the Imperial Cult.

²⁷CIL X 772; Peterson, op. cit., p. 299.

²⁸Ibid.

Puteolanorum.²⁹ Here there existed a dedication of a vow made by Marcus Annius Macer, a freedman, to the Genius of the City.³⁰ In Herculaneum there is an enigmatic inscription which might possibly refer to the Genius of a collegium or Genius civitatis.³¹ Philemo, an actor of secondary roles, records an offering made by some magistri of some collegium to the Genius of that particular body.³² In this example the use of the term Genius seems to be derived from the personal Genius. In the empire the Genius is used more commonly to refer to the place or to the emperor. A curious example of this use is seen at Capua where the Genius is employed to represent the theater.³³ The final extension of this broadening of the Genius' usage was the practice in the later empire of representing the people as a Genius. On the flange of a red earthen vase found in Vienne, France, is the simple inscription: "To the Genius of the People."³⁴ The Genius of the people was also a very common coin device during the

²⁹Ibid., p. 119.

³⁰CIL X 1559.

³¹CIL X 1404.

³²Peterson, op. cit., p. 286.

³³CIL X 3821.

³⁴CIL XII 5687 - 44. Coins of the third century A.D. have the inscription Genio Populi occasionally. For example see David Sear, Roman Coins and Their Values (London: Seaby, 1964), Nos. 3433, 3498, 3532, 3533, 3534, 3571, 3608, 3620, 3634, and 3654.

third century of the Christian Era.³⁵ The Genius is depicted with a patera and sometimes a cornucopia and is shown nude.³⁶

Pompeii, as might be expected, has been the source of numerous references to the Genius, many of which are directly associated with the Genius of the paterfamilias. An inscription on the herm of L. Caecilius Jucundus records a dedication to his Genius by one of his freedmen.³⁷ In another inscription, the Genius and the two Lares are honored, again by a dedication to the paterfamilias by a freedman.³⁸ Nearby Nola records an inscription which is quite similar and which tersely states: "To the Genius and Lares."³⁹ The Genius is depicted in the lararia of Pompeii as togate and is usually shown pouring a libation on an altar.⁴⁰ He is most commonly accompanied by the Lares, one or more assistants, and one or two serpents.⁴¹ The use of the serpent in Pompeian religious iconography and its intimate connection with the Genius of the paterfamilias will

³⁵Harold Mattingly, Roman Coins (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960), p. 66. The Genius of Roman People appears on a Roman Republican denarius of Cn. Lentulus; see Plate XV, No. 4.

³⁶An excellent example is in Sear, op. cit., No. 3434, Plate 5.

³⁷CIL X 860.

³⁸CIL X 861.

³⁹CIL X 1235 (Genio et Laribus).

⁴⁰Corpus, p. 103. For a good example see Plate III, Fig. 9.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 103.

be explored later in this chapter. The pictorial representation of the Genius at Pompeii graphically personifies an inscription found at Terracina and dedicated to the "Genius of the Family."⁴²

The concepts which were clustered around the Roman Genius were not without a parallel in the Hellenic world. A possible counterpart may have been the Agathos Daimon, or Agathodaimon, which has a lengthy history in Greece. A Hellenistic inscription shows the Agathos Daimon as the guardian spirit of the household's master.⁴³ Harrison⁴⁴ argues that the Agathos Daimon was a concept that preceded most of the Olympian gods of Hellas

⁴²CIL X 6302. Boyce, op. cit., p. 21 states that Lily Ross Taylor "first pointed out to me the lack of evidence for the widely used term Genius familiaris." He calls the Genius found in the domestic lararia merely the "Genius" throughout his work. This writer finds the evidence at Pompeii overwhelmingly in favor of a Genius which, although versatile and representing many ideas, nevertheless is a family spirit which watches over the domestic situation.

⁴³Wilhelm Dittenberger, editor, Sylloge inscriptionum Graecarum (4 vols; 4th ed.; Hildesheim: 1960), Vol. III, 1044, lines 35-36. This inscription mentions the sacrifice of a ram to the Agathos Daimon of Posidonius and his wife Gorgis. See also lines 9-10. Hereafter the Sylloge inscriptionum Graecarum will be referred to as SIG. SIG, Vol. III, 985, line 11, mentions a private house with altars (?) dedicated to the Agathe Tychē, the Agathos Daimon, and other deities. The Agathos Daimon is also mentioned in SIG, Vol. III, 961, n. 2; 1032, lines 4-5; and 1124, line 2.

⁴⁴Jane Harrison, Themis (Cambridge: University Press, 1912), p. 277.

and which represented "a very primitive fertility spirit." The constant depiction of the Agathos Daimon as a serpent and various other fertility symbols complements this theory.⁴⁵ A study of the meaning of the name Agathos Daimon provides important information. The term daimon, in Homer, may be used in association with the great deities but its use has peculiar features.⁴⁶ Daimon seems to correspond to the supernatural forces and existed not as a generic conception but in particular manifestations. Although it seems incorrect to term this "fate", the daimon appears to closely resemble this definition.⁴⁷ Daimon can represent the good and the evil of men which accompanies them through life. Professor Rose states that the Agathos Daimon was a "kindly power", who "liked to see people enjoying themselves."⁴⁸

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶OCD, s.v., "Daimon, p. 251.

⁴⁷M.P. Nilsson, A History of Greek Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 283. Daimon is also a term used to denote man's protecting Genius. See F. M. Cornford, Principium Sapientiae: the Origins of Greek Philosophical Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 141.

⁴⁸Rose, op. cit., p. 80. See also PW, s.v., "Agathodaimon", Supplement Volume III, pp. 38-59. A different viewpoint is found in PW, s.v., "Agathodaimon", Vol. I, Part I, pp. 746-747.

The Agathos Daimon was similar to the Roman numen, since it was an active spirit with will power, the particular activity involved being designated by the adjectival quality of agathos.⁴⁹ Its development proceeded from a sexless power to that of the male, and thus corresponded to the Roman Genius. By resisting complete personalization and becoming essentially a daimon of generation, the Agathos Daimon evolved into a collective representation and a type of fertility-daimon.⁵⁰ However, the Agathos Daimon was also personified by several individual Greek deities. Harrison⁵¹ argues that Hermes was closely associated with the Agathos Daimon and cites considerable epigraphic evidence to illustrate that the two were placed in the relation of father to son, or teacher to disciple. Agathos Daimon and Agathe Tychē (good fortune) were employed by Hermes to guide men, and the two deities were conceived of as "messengers". Although Harrison's book Themis was largely the result of comparative

⁴⁹Fowler, The Religious Experience, p. 119.

⁵⁰Harrison, op. cit., p. 282.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 296.

anthropological discussions on Greek religion and other religions, it can be used cautiously with great value. This discussion of Hermes and a possible connection with the Agathos Daimon will become more meaningful when we study the archeological evidence at Pompeii in a subsequent section. Another deity which Harrison mentions in connection with the Agathos Daimon is Zeus Ktēsios. A relief found in Boeotia, dating from the third century B.C., is clearly dedicated to Zeus Ktēsios (Zeus of household property).⁵² Since this depiction of Zeus represents a daimon of fertility, the snake image is used to represent him. His domestic quality seems unmistakable since he is also found associated with pots. A votive inscription in the temple of Zeus at Panamara is dedicated to "the household gods, Zeus Ktēsios and Tychē and Asklēpios."⁵³ Zeus Ktēsios emerges as a daimon of fertility and in this capacity was represented to the Greeks by a house-snake, with storehouse jars as a chief sanctuary. Perhaps this function of the Agathos Daimon as a storeroom guardian was somewhat similar to the guardian powers which the

⁵²This relief is illustrated in Harrison, op. cit., p. 297. Zeus Ktēsios is mentioned as god of property in Aeschylus Suppl. 443.

⁵³Harrison, op. cit., p. 298.

Latin Penates possessed.⁵⁴ However, the pluralistic concepts associated with the Penates seem far removed from the singular powers of Zeus Ktēsios.

The term Agathos Daimon was used to designate various deities in the Hellenic world and sometimes indicated domestic worship. However, it was at Alexandria that the cult of the Agathos Daimon seems to have been most significant.⁵⁵ The Agathos Daimon was worshipped in every Egyptian town and had a special name in each.⁵⁶ It had its center at Alexandria and was worshipped at the Great Serapeum. There is a strange myth which explains how the Agathos Daimon became the chief cult and patron deity of Alexandria before being completely absorbed in the worship of Serapis.⁵⁷ According to this myth Alexander the Great saw a huge snake and ordered his men to build a huge

⁵⁴A.B. Cook, Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion, 2 vols. (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1964), II, 1068.

⁵⁵H.I. Bell, The Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 20.

⁵⁶Reginald Stuart Poole, A Catalogue of the Coins of Alexandria and the Nomes (Bologna: A. Forni, 1964), p. lxxxvi. See also Bell, op. cit., p. 20.

⁵⁷Bernhard Kuebler, Iul. Valer. 1-28, p. 37, 15. According to this passage Alexander also had garland shops erected near the tomb he built for the huge snake. This statement becomes very important when we study the iconography of the lararia at Pompeii and the association of garlands with the reptiles of the lararia. See Cook, op. cit., p. 1127.

tomb for it after it was killed.⁵⁸ From this beginning, the cult achieved great popularity in Alexandria and was also intimately linked to the serpent as its main depiction. Professor Cook⁵⁹ argues that the Agathos Daimon was conceived of in Alexandria as a snake after beliefs prevalent in Egypt, and spread to Rome by way of Delos. Our discussion of the serpent will amplify this theory although it is important to note that this is true only if one assumes that the serpent is in fact the Agathos Daimon. Cook⁶⁰ also assumes that the statues of Bonus Eventus and Bona Fortuna on the Capitol in Rome were representations of the Agathos Daimon and his counterpart, Agathe Tychē. This latter personification, Agathe Tychē, was also worshipped at Alexandria and appears as the feminine counterpart to the Agathos Daimon.⁶¹ She is also a symbol of fertility and is sometimes accompanied by a snake.⁶² Like her

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Cook, op. cit., pp. 1127-28.

⁶⁰Ibid.; for statues see Pliny N.H. 36. 23.

⁶¹R.C. Bosanquet, "Excavations of the British School at Melos," Journal of Hellenic Studies, XVIII (1898), p. 60, Fig. 1 illustrates Agathe Tychē holding a child in her arms, the statue coming from the Hall of the Mystae of Dionysus excavated on the island of Melos. Also SIG 1032.

⁶²Daremborg and Saglio, Dictionnaire des grecques et romaines d'après les textes et les monuments (Paris: Hachette, 1877-1919), s.v. "Agathodaemon," Part I, p. 131, Fig. 174.

masculine counterpart, the Agathos Daimon, she is frequently mentioned in official writings.⁶³ It is significant that by the time of the first century B.C. the cult of the Agathos Daimon and the Agathe Tychē had spread to Lydia.⁶⁴ The appeal of the cult was not limited to the upper classes at Alexandria as is suggested by Cook,⁶⁵ but extended to the very poor. In the second century A.D. a woman of Antinoopolis instead of addressing her prayers to the goddess Isis directly asked the Agathos Daimon and the Agathe Tychē to intervene for her.⁶⁶

There seems to be no doubt that the serpent was the most important manifestation of the Agathos Daimon at Alexandria and even in Greece. Since the serpent also is affiliated with the Roman Genius it is important that a close examination be made in order to distinguish between the two. Once this distinction is made the more basic question of whether the Genius is the Agathos Daimon itself can be approached more rationally.

The serpent was the animal most frequently worshipped in antiquity. Serpents have a long history of employment as

⁶³SIG 1032 - Vol. III.

⁶⁴SIG 985. Agathe Tychē occurs commonly in Greek inscriptions with the Agathos Daimon.

⁶⁵Cook, op. cit., p. 1127.

⁶⁶Bell, op. cit., p. 66.

religious symbols in practically every culture and civilization. Possibly this is due to the great psychological and physical impression a snake of average length makes on the unwary individual who disturbs him. The serpent is the bringer of health and wisdom, the teacher of knowledge, the oracle of future events, and the carrier of good fortune. His sanctity arose probably because of fear but it gradually developed into respect among his votaries.

There are several symbolic manifestations of the serpent to be found in various cultures. The serpent represented the primeval cosmic forces as embodied in the Uraeic serpent in Egypt and the Pytho in Greece. Murison⁶⁷ states that the serpent is endowed with "uncanniness", a veritable overpowering enigma. Since it sheds its skin, the snake symbolized the power of resurrection.⁶⁸ Its sinuous movement combined with powerful

⁶⁷Ross G. Murison, "The Serpent in the Old Testament," The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures, No. 2, XXI (1905), 115. Murison summarizes the serpent's qualities which make it such an important religious symbol. He includes its power of existing for long periods of time without food, its habit of frequenting caves, and its constant vigilance.

⁶⁸Emma J. and Ludwig Edelstein, Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies, two vols. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1945), I, 366. This writer inspected the freshly sloughed off skins of snakes which inhabited the excavated areas of Pompeii. It seems certain that ancient Romans observing the same occurrence would have been profoundly impressed.

coils give the serpent an aura of strength and invincibility.⁶⁹ Conversely, the snake's vicious temperament and behavior give it an evil aspect which also exists as one of its many attributes.

It is important that the serpent's meaning in Egyptian religion be examined since it is in Hellenistic Egypt that much syncretism occurred between Hellenic and ancient Egyptian iconography.⁷⁰ Throughout this process and even extending into the Roman period the serpent retained most of its primitive meaning.⁷¹ In ancient Egypt the serpent was intimately associated with fecundity and reproduction.⁷² The serpent entwined the earth and protected it from cosmic forces.⁷³ It also guarded the underworld and symbolized the kingdom of the lower regions.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 272.

⁷⁰ Adolf Erman, A Handbook of Ancient Egyptian Religion, trans. by A.S. Griffith (New York: Dutton and Co., 1907), pp. 217-228.

⁷¹ Herman Kees, Der Götterglaube im Alten Aegypten (Leipzig: J.D. Hinrichs, 1941), p. 57.

⁷² Ibid., p. 56.

⁷³ Desmond and Romona Morris, Men and Snakes (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), pp. 42-43.

⁷⁴ To the ancient Egyptian the serpent was both good and evil. When it was the Uraeic serpent it is the avenger of good; when it is the "dragon of darkness" it becomes the representation of evil. See Henri Frankfort, Ancient Egyptian Religion (New York: Columbia Press, 1948), pp. 18 and 132. For Uraeus see also

Its role as a guard or protector existed as a common theme in Egyptian art motifs and pairs of guardian serpents are frequently encountered in Old and Middle Kingdom heraldry. Deities such as Isis and Serapis were represented by snakes.⁷⁵ Pharaohs were represented by crested and bearded serpents as early as the twenty-first dynasty.⁷⁶ During the Hellenistic period the serpent was worshipped at Alexandria. It seems possible that the snake of Amen was transferred to the Theban Zeus in the resultant cult of Zeus Ammon.⁷⁷ Nearby, Cyrene's cult of the Punic Ask-lēpios was united with the horned Ba'al-hamman in a similar example of Hellenistic syncretism.⁷⁸ Herodotus gives an account of the importance attached to the snake in Egyptian religious thought:

In the neighborhood of Thebes are sacred snakes which do no harm to man. They are small of size and have two

James Henry Breasted, The Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912, p. 135; Murison, op. cit., p. 116, n. 7.

⁷⁵V.I. Cook, op. cit., p. 360. See also Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, Tutankhamen (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1963), p. 22, Plate III b, which illustrates an earring depicting the young Tutankhamen flanked by two sacred heraldic cobras.

⁷⁶No. 22942, Egyptian Collection, British Museum, London, England. (Coffin lid representation of bearded and crested snakes).

⁷⁷Cook, op. cit., p. 360.

⁷⁸Ibid.

horns springing from the top of the head. When they die they are buried in the sanctuary of Zeus; for they are deemed sacred to the god.⁷⁹

He has left us a beautiful description of the deadly vipera cerastes, or horned viper,⁸⁰ which inhabits the desert areas of Egypt. The story attests to the mildness of these snakes, which have been found in mummified form. Two gnostic cults based on snake worship appeared later in Egypt. These sects--the Sethians and Ophites--celebrated a eucharist-like sacrament in which a sacred snake crawled over consecrated bread and then was kissed on the head after the bread was eaten.⁸¹

The ancient Greeks revered the serpent for a number of fundamental reasons. The snakes regularly were depicted as the companions of deities (e.g., Pallas Athena and Asklēpios) and were also associated with the Greek underworld. The Greeks considered the serpent to be the one who makes his home among the Chthonioi (Earth-People).⁸² This affiliation was probably directly connected with the serpent's habit of making his home

⁷⁹Herodotus 2. 74.

⁸⁰Ibid. Pausanias mentions this animal as the "horned snake." Pausanias 8. 4. 7.

⁸¹Bell, op. cit., p. 93.

⁸²Gilbert Murray, The Five Stages of Greek Religion (New York: Doubleday, 1951), p. 18. Serpent worship probably existed in mainland Greece before the Mycenaean period. See S. Davis, "Argeiphontes in Homer--the Dragon Slayer," Greece and Rome, XXI (1953), p. 37.

in subterranean tunnels. This chthonic nature must be kept distinct from the serpent's other attributes since its use as a house deity has little chthonic meaning.⁸³ The Greeks also were aware of the snake as a symbol of rebirth since they also had observed the periodic discharge of the snake's skin. The serpent is depicted as the accompanying animal of Hygieia, the daughter of Asklēpios, and is shown being fed from a patera.⁸⁴ Sir James Frazer⁸⁵ argues that this representation of Hygieia and the serpent is a direct descendant of the ancient Cretan snake-goddess cult. In Greek religion the serpent is also the regular symbol or attribute of the dead.⁸⁶ During the Thesmophoria in October, Greek women threw cakes and prayed to serpents (representing the dead

⁸³Nilsson, M.P., The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1927), pp. 283-284. Nilsson states that the snakes were guardians of the houses.

⁸⁴W.K.C. Guthrie, The Greeks and Their Gods (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), p. 225; Sear, op. cit., Nos. 1170, 2133, 2404, and 2476; Rose, op. cit., p. 245.

⁸⁵Adonis, Attis, Osiris (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1961), p. 88, n. 1. For a complete discussion of the Minoan snake goddess see Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenaean, pp. 278-284. Nilsson is of the opinion that this snake-goddess cult was a domestic one. See also J.D.S. Pendlebury, The Archaeology of Crete (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1965), pp. 166, 274. Pendlebury also describes a complete set of vessels which were used in the worship of the domestic snake. Some of these tubular vases were used as homes for the reptiles, p. 211.

⁸⁶Nilsson, History of Greek Religion, p. 13.

spirits), which lived in caverns or vaults sacred to Demeter.⁸⁷ In sharp contrast to these chthonic qualities were the fertility aspects of the serpent which were represented at the Asklēpieion at Epidaurus. Women who slept in the Asklēpieion and were visited by a serpent might possibly give birth later to children sired by the snake.⁸⁸

The venomous qualities of some species of snake also gave rise to their connection with supernatural powers. This powerful weapon of the venomous serpent, the potential of instant death from a single bite, contributed to his sanctity. Professor Rose states⁸⁹ that the Greeks did not, however, venerate all snakes and that those regarded as evil were killed whenever they were encountered.

The serpent in Greece was the guardian of the house and a portent of good fortune.⁹⁰ Since he was the house guardian

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 88. Plutarch Cleomenes 39. Harrison, op. cit., illustrates an extremely interesting example of the chthonic implications of serpents contained on grave stele, on p. 433, Fig. 134. In the example a man is shown apparently in the act of killing a serpent. Harrison connected it to the Sauroktonos and Pythoktonos epithets of Apollo (in this case the Pythoktonos) but it seems to indicate deeper and more personal qualities than that.

⁸⁸Frazer, op. cit., p. 80. ⁸⁹Op. cit., p. 34.

⁹⁰Nilsson, M.P., Greek Folk Religion (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 71. See also Murison, op. cit.,

he received offerings for his domestic services.⁹¹ Many naturalistic statues of serpents are known and one particular example can easily be recognizable as a Rat Snake (Coluber longissimus?) and might possibly have been a votive offering or even used in domestic worship.⁹² Serpents were also the domestic and tutelary deities of the Spartan kings and as such were depicted by the symbol of two upright beams topped by a crossbar (the abbreviated representation of the half-timber framework of a house).⁹³ Finally, Herodotus gives us the account of how the sacred snake of Athena on the Acropolis fled at the approach of the Persians.⁹⁴

p. 116, n. 5. Murison states that the serpent was kept as a pet in ancient Greece and in Greek pictures (vase paintings) snakes are sometimes depicted under the table. See also Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenaean Religion, pp. 279-281.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Gisela M.A. Richter, Animals in Greek Sculpture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1930), Plate LVII, Fig. 181. A bearded snake is illustrated in Fig. 182 on a gem from the fifth century. The first example mentioned in Fig. 181 is also from the fifth century. Earlier than this there exists a vase in the shape of a coiled snake (viper?) with a reticulate pattern, found in Boeotia and dating from the early sixth century B.C. See Isabelle K. Raubitschek, "Early Boeotian Potters," Hesperia, Vol. XXXV, No. 2, April-June, 1966, pp. 154-165. Vase mentioned is illustrated in Plate 51.

⁹³Nilsson, Greek Folk Religion, p. 34.

⁹⁴Herodotus 8. 41; Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenaean Religion, p. 427.

The serpent appears in Greek religion in highly diversified roles. Alexander of Abonutichus created a new god in the form of a serpent during the Hellenistic period.⁹⁵ Zeus Ammon, discussed already in connection with Alexandria, was said to have transformed himself into a serpent in order to win his bride. Cook argues that in this particular instance the use of the serpent was due to Egyptian influences.⁹⁶ Quite similar to the story of Zeus Ammon is the account that the mother of Aratus of Sicyon had intercourse with a serpent.⁹⁷ A serpent was seen lying at the side of Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great, and Philip after noticing this, avoided her perhaps fearing the presence of a god.⁹⁸ Zeus, the lord of the Greek deities, had three different serpent shapes under the guises of Zeus Melichios, Zeus Sabazios and Zeus Ktēsios.⁹⁹

In the rites of Dionysus at Ephesus the snake in the cista was a common symbol and can be found as the favorite device

⁹⁵Lucian Alex. 7.

⁹⁶Cook, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 358.

⁹⁷Pausanias 2. 10. 3.

⁹⁸Plutarch Vit. Alex. 2.

⁹⁹For Zeus Melichios See Cook, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 1108, 1109. Also Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenaean Religion, p. 282, n. 4.; Zeus Sabazios, see Cook, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 283-285. For Zeus Ktēsios, see Harrison, op. cit., p. 279 and Cook, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 1061.

on the large silver coins called cistophoroi which were struck at the mint in Ephesus.¹⁰⁰ As early as the first century B.C. pairs of serpents, one bearded and one beardless, were depicted on these cistophoroi.¹⁰¹ Serpents were commonly kept in enclosures for religious purposes in many of the Hellenistic Greek sanctuaries. Tame snakes were carefully tended, for example, in a sacred grove dedicated in Apollo in Epirus. As a young virgin fed them, various omens of health or sickness, famine or abundance, were interpreted from the manner in which the snakes took the food from her.¹⁰²

The Hellenic concept of the serpent follows closely the reptile's usual manifestation in primitive religion. On the one hand he is a procreative life force and incorporated the twin functions of fertility and reproduction. Through this facet of his religious symbolism he comes to represent good fortune, abundance, happiness, and fecundity. On the other hand he

¹⁰⁰B.V. Head, Historia Numorum (London: Spink and Sons, 1964), pp. 575-576. For Dionysos see Euripides, Bacchae 101; 687; and 1017 for the use of the serpent in the cult.

¹⁰¹Gilbert Askew, A Catalogue of Greek Coins (London: Seaby, 1951), No. A 1113; B.V. Head, Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Ionia, edited by Reginald S. Poole (Bologna: Forni, 1961), pp. 63-65, especially nos. 143-144.

¹⁰²Aelian, N.A., 11. 2.

represented a mysterious chthonic deity who was intimately associated with the underworld and who personified the spirits of the dead.

In Roman religion the serpent also was a very common symbol. Ovid¹⁰³ relates how Aesculapius came to Rome in the form of a snake, following the embassy sent to bring him to Rome. The presence of Jupiter had been connected in Roman legend with the visible form of a serpent.¹⁰⁴ One of the most ancient cults in Italian religion was that of Fortuna of Antium and her constant companion was a large serpent.¹⁰⁵ The serpent also appeared in another cult equally as venerable, that of Juno Sospita. The main feature of this cult was the immense serpent which inhabited a grotto near the temple of Juno Sospita in Lanuvium.¹⁰⁶ This fortunate beast was fed annually by a young virgin, who if truly chaste, would escape unharmed, but if not would be destroyed. There is an example of a Roman Republican silver denarius which shows the head of Juno Sospita wearing a

¹⁰³Met. 15. 691-740.

¹⁰⁴Jean Bayet, Histoire politique et psychologique de la religion romaine (Paris: Payot, 1957), p. 52. Also Silius Italicus Punica 13. 640-644.

¹⁰⁵Latte, op. cit., Plate 5, Fig. 7.

¹⁰⁶Propertius 4. 8. 3. mentions this cult.

goat-skin headdress on the obverse and bearing the figure of Juno Sospita in a biga, on the reverse, accompanied by a serpent underneath the horses.¹⁰⁷ Another denarius connected with the worship of the same deity depicts a maiden feeding a crested and bearded serpent.¹⁰⁸

Roman history has a number of serpent references. A serpent guarded the spirit of the dead Scipio Africanus according to a passage in Livy.¹⁰⁹ Livy,¹¹⁰ possibly following Greek traditions, also mentions a different aspect of the serpent's religious role when he tells how a snake was responsible for the conception of Alexander the Great. Cicero¹¹¹ states that serpents were very important because of their role as portents.

The Romans distinguished between the various types of serpents which were present in Italy. Pliny¹¹² states that Asps (Aspides) kill by coma, inflicting "of all serpents the most incurable bites." The Draco is not poisonous according to

¹⁰⁷ Sydenham, op. cit., p. 126, No. 772.

¹⁰⁸ Latte, op. cit., Plate 6, Fig. 9b

¹⁰⁹ 38. 53. ¹¹⁰ 26. 19.

¹¹¹ De divinatione. 2. 29. 62.

¹¹² N.H. 29. 65. Vipers are fairly common in the mountainous regions of Italy today, some having been found in the excavated areas of Pompeii, particularly the Amphitheater.

Pliny¹¹³ and this snake must represent some of the larger Rat Snakes still present in Italy. It is significant that in present day Calabria harmless snakes are kept as house pets.¹¹⁴ These reptiles appear to represent the incarnation of protective spirits and the departure of one of them from a house portends disaster.¹¹⁵ How close this idea is to the thought of Pliny is demonstrated by this passage in the Natural History: "Its (i.e., of the Draco) head, buried under the threshold of doors after the gods have been propitiated by worship, brings good luck to a home."¹¹⁶

The serpent thus was extremely important in the iconography of both Greek and Roman religion. Our first question then, having established this point, is whether or not the serpent represented the Agathos Daimon. The best evidence is provided by a series of coins from Alexandria. These coins, mostly billon tetradrachms, confirm the use of the serpent in representing the Agathos Daimon. One coin, a billon tetradrachm of the emperor Nero, has on the reverse a good example of a crested

¹¹³N.H. 29. 67. Draco non habet venena.

¹¹⁴Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenaean Religion, p. 281.

¹¹⁵Gordon J. Laing, Survivals of Roman Religion (New York: Cooper Square, 1963), p. 26.

¹¹⁶N.H. 29. 67.

erect, and bearded serpent with the unmistakable inscription encircling his thick coils; Neo Agath Daim ("the new Agathos Daimon").¹¹⁷ Nero, as the new imperialist force of Rome, claims to be the "good daimon" for the entire Roman world. There are other coins in this series which show two snakes coiled around a modius, and snakes surrounded by fertility objects, e.g., ears of grain. This numismatic chronicle of the Agathos Daimon is especially relevant since Alexandria was the home of the cult itself.¹¹⁸ This series of coins will also aid in an attempt to identify the serpents contained in the lararia of Pompeii. Another excellent piece of evidence connecting the snake with the Agathos Daimon is a relief cited by Harrison¹¹⁹ which shows the human and the serpent forms occurring together. Servius,¹²⁰ in a controversial passage, argues that the serpent represented

¹¹⁷In this case, the emperor Nero is represented. Sear, op. cit., p. 64. See also Reginald Stuart Poole, op. cit., Plates 26 and 30 illustrating most of the key coins in this series. Plate XIV, No. 1105 illustrates the head of Serapis substituted for the serpent's head.

¹¹⁸Supra, p. 38, n. 59.

¹¹⁹Op. cit., p. 285, Fig. 75. The monument is of Roman date. There seems to be no other parallel for this in antiquity.

¹²⁰In Georg. 3. 417.

the Agathos Daimon. Cook¹²¹ illustrates a relief showing a large snake installed on a couch with two figures, one male and one female, which is identified as a representation of the Agathos Daimon in both human and animal form. Bulard¹²² states that popular imagination attributed to the serpent the role of a fertility daimon. Erich Kuester¹²³ concurred with Bulard in describing the snake as "a generous, charitable, fertility, and prosperity creature, in short an Agathos Daimon." There exists little doubt that the serpent did represent the Agathos Daimon.¹²⁴

There is considerable evidence that the serpent also represented the Roman Genius. Numerous references in ancient authors present the strongest body of evidence for the intimate relationship between the serpent and the Genius. One of

¹²¹Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 1128.

¹²²Bulard, op. cit., pp. 347-348. See also Tran Tam Tinh, Le culte d'Isis à Pompei (Paris: Boccard, 1964), p. 105.

¹²³Die Schlange in der griechischen Kunst und Religion, Vol. XIII, Part 2 of Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, ed. by Albrecht Dieterick and Richard Wuensch (27 vols.; Gieszen: Wuensch and Deubner, 1903-39), p. 142.

¹²⁴Bulard, op. cit., p. 348.

the best of these is the enigmatic account from Cicero which describes how Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus sees two snakes, one of each sex, in his bedroom and it depends on which one he kills whether he or his wife Cornelia will die.¹²⁵ A curious element in this account is the fact that serpents are difficult to identify by sex and yet Tiberius recognized them immediately.¹²⁶ Aelian¹²⁷ sheds some light on this enigma by stating that the male snake can be distinguished by the crest and the beard. Pliny the Elder,¹²⁸ sharply rejects this with the terse statement that "no one can be found who has seen serpent's crests." Significant is the supposition that the reptiles represented the life and death qualities of two people, a male and female, and thus appear to be manifestations of the Genius.

¹²⁵Cicero, De divinatione 2. 29. 62. Also Bayet, op. cit., p. 65.

¹²⁶Coleman J. and Olive B. Goin, Introduction to Herpetology (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1962), p. 113. Sexual dimorphism is usually much less evident in snakes. Frequently there are no visible distinguishing characteristics. The main differences between male and female snakes are in the number and form of the scales on the ventral side of the body and in the length of the tail. The male usually has a longer tail than the female.

¹²⁷N.A. 11. 26 and 10. 25.

¹²⁸Pliny N.H. 11. 122. Pliny seems to be rejecting the painted crested and bearded serpents which appear commonly on the lararia of Pompeii.

Servius,¹²⁹ commenting on Vergil's Georgics, states that the serpent rejoices in the dwelling and is called Genius by the Latins. In the late Roman Empire, Arnobius¹³⁰ connected the snake with the Genius but failed to back up clearly his supposition. Wissowa¹³¹ and De Marchi¹³² both associated the snake with the Roman Genius and used a passage from Persius¹³³ to support their arguments. Wagenvoort¹³⁴ also connected the Genius with the serpent but his arguments are vague and tend to represent chthonic aspects of the snake rather than his fertility

¹²⁹In Georg. 3. 417. [Serpens] gaudet tectis ut sunt
(ἀγαθὸν δαίμονες) quos Latini genios vocant.

¹³⁰2. 67.

¹³¹Op. cit., p. 155. (Two snakes mean the presence of the Juno and the Genius.)

¹³²Op. cit., I, 78.

¹³³1. 112. In this passage two sacred serpents painted on a wall clearly are used as guardians of a sacred place. This would seem to be a reference to the Genius of the place.

¹³⁴Hendrick Wagenvoort, Roman Dynamism (Oxford: Blackwell, 1947), p. 192. Apuleius Plat. 1-12. Seneca Ep. 90. 28. A possible chthonic implication is also found in an unattributed bronze coin with coiled snake on reverse (posthumous commemoration?) described on p. 159, n. 6, of Michael Grant, From Imperium to Auctoritas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946).

and guardian role. Shields,¹³⁵ Otto,¹³⁶ and Kuester,¹³⁷ concur in stating that the serpent represented the Genius but all, unfortunately, offer little additional evidence.

Most important is the passage from Vergil's Aeneid¹³⁸ in associating the serpent with the Genius, in this instance the Genius of the place or Genius loci. Aeneas is holding a memorial feast in honor of his deceased father Anchises. Suddenly a snake appears and tastes of the offerings and itself in turn is then honored with fresh sacrifices. This honor was paid to the reptile because he was either the Genius of the place or an attendant of the hero, Anchises. Servius¹³⁹ comments on this passage saying that there is no place without a Genius, which usually manifests itself in the form of a snake. Gellius¹⁴⁰ remarks that the snake had a high golden crest and possibly represented the Genius.

¹³⁵Op. cit., p. 40.

¹³⁶PW, VII, 1161. s.v. "Genius."

¹³⁷Op. cit., p. 146, n. 3 and 153. Also Ludwig Friedländer, Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms, trans. J.H. Freese and Leonard A. Magnus, 4 vols. (London: George Rutledge and Sons, Ltd., 1936), III, p. 114.

¹³⁸5. 84 - 85.

¹³⁹In Aen. 5. 84.

¹⁴⁰Noctes Atticae 6. 1. 3.

Boyce¹⁴¹ argues strongly for the position that the serpent in the Vergilian passage given above is the Genius of the place. The Genius was extensively used as a guardian spirit of any individual site throughout the Roman world. A good example of this particular usage is an altar dedicated to Jupiter and the Genius of the place found in the Pannonian frontier town of Brigetio.¹⁴² Boyce's discussion of the serpent is the best yet advanced, since he attempts to interpret its precise function in the lararium paintings of Pompeii. He describes the various positions assumed by the reptiles in the lararia paintings. The most basic pose is the symmetrical arrangement of two serpents facing each other, one on each side of an altar on which they rest their heads.¹⁴³ Another pose represents a pair, male and female, the male slightly larger than the female and easily distinguishable from her because of his beard.¹⁴⁴ The

¹⁴¹"Significance of the Serpents on Pompeian House Shrines," American Journal of Archaeology, XLVI (1962), 13-22, Murison, op. cit., p. 116, n. 7, and Nilsson, Minoan-Mycaean Religion, p. 282 both concur with Boyce.

¹⁴²Pavel Oliva, Pannonia and the Onset of Crisis in the Roman World (Prague: Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1962), p. 360, n. 173.

¹⁴³Boyce, Significance, p. 14.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 14 (for crest see Aelian N.A. 11. 26).

offerings to the serpent depicted in the paintings also help in identifying their fertility role since they consist of pine cones and eggs.¹⁴⁵ Boyce¹⁴⁶ has discussed a number of the major points concerning the reptiles and their function as manifestations of the Genius. He points out that considerable freedom is allotted the snakes in their depiction and that they are portrayed in various postures and stances, even frequently appearing alone. The same kind of snakes which appear on lararia are also seen on city walls and in the public shrines at street crossings.¹⁴⁷ However, Boyce restricts his argument to the thesis that the serpent represents the Genius of the Place

¹⁴⁵The egg was an offering to the dead. See M. Nilsson, Das Ei im Totenkultus der Griechen (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1901), pp. 3-12, Figs. 1-2. Asklēpios was offered a pine cone, see Pausanias 2. 10. 3. Cirlot, op. cit., p. 244 states that the pine cone was the symbol of fertility, since it was the seed of life. The pine cone is a conventional symbol of moisture, vitality, and fertility. It is an indication of the sap of life. See Eldesteins, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 226. Also Cirlot states that the egg was the seed of life since it contained the great potential of life, p. 90. Ian Richmond, in his book Roman Britain (London: Penquin, 1955), p. 180, mentions that: "there was a limited but steady trade in cones of the stone pine for altar fuel." There seems to be every indication that pine cones were used for sacrifice at Pompeii.

¹⁴⁶Boyce, Significance, pp. 16-18.

¹⁴⁷Two giant snakes are painted on the wall at VIII. ii. 28. in Pompeii.

and he rejects any connection the serpent has with the more intimate Genius of the household. He also rejects Wissowa's arguments that the serpent is the personal Genius and sums up his criticism with the statement that: "in all Latin literature preserved to us there is not a single reference to a serpent representing or in any way connected with the Genius of a man!"¹⁴⁸

Boyce continues by discussing the House of the Vettii in Pompeii. He argues that despite the fact that two men were known to have lived here there is only one large serpent on the lararium of the house.¹⁴⁹ Another house, belonging to a married man, has only one snake also. Boyce feels that this is conclusive evidence that the Genius could not have represented the Genius of the man. The inconsistencies indicated that the Genius of the Place was represented instead. His best evidence rests on a painting found in Herculaneum and showing a huge snake coiling around an altar and raising its head to the offerings presented to him.¹⁵⁰ Beside it is the inscription "This is the Genius of the Place and Mountain."¹⁵¹ A similar

¹⁴⁸Boyce, Significance, p. 17.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 18. See also CIL VIII 14588 for another good example of an inscription referring to a Genius of a mountain.

¹⁵¹CIL IV, 1176.

depiction was found in Pompeii and has both the snake and the mountain.¹⁵² Boyce¹⁵³ argues that the Romans easily transferred the Genius from men to an inanimate object. He adds that the nature of the offerings are not the usual commodities offered to a man but to an inanimate object; eggs and pine cones are offerings to a distinct deity and not what the term Genius seems to indicate. The Genius, according to Boyce,¹⁵⁴ is fundamentally a guardian of a sacred spot. Boyce has a fair amount of evidence to support him on this point. Many of the walls of Pompeii have inscriptions pleading that the passerby refrain from defiling the wall or house corridor. In one such painting the man who is apparently ignoring the warnings is attacked by two serpents.¹⁵⁵ However, Boyce fails to explain adequately why the Genius serpent is as common in Pompeii as any other religious symbol and his restriction of the snake to only one role is in sharp contrast to the traditional iconography of the serpent and the long history of the Genius itself.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵²Boyce, Significance, p. 20.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 20. See also Wissowa, op. cit., pp. 177-179.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 21. An altar found at Ostia was dedicated to the Genius loci, see CIL XIV 11.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶See especially Wissowa, op. cit., p. 154, and Latte, op. cit., pp. 103, 332.

The serpent therefore has been used as the symbol both of the Genius and the Agathos Daimon. The natural sequence of such an argument, then, is to connect the Genius and the Agathos Daimon intimately together as manifestations of the same basic religious idea. Again, the passage from the Georgics (3. 417) which Servius commented on in relation to the serpent as Genius and Agathos Daimon is necessary for this argument. Servius¹⁵⁷ states that the "serpent is the Agathos Daimon which the Romans call the Genius." Nilsson¹⁵⁸ rejects this assertion by Servius with the argument that the evidence for this connection is non-existent and that there seems to be little basis for such a theory. There is no definite evidence to confirm this theory that the Genius and the Agathos Daimon are the same despite their similar iconography and usage. De Marchi's¹⁵⁹ comments to the effect that the Genius sometimes represents the soul of a deceased individual seems to refer to a Greek concept with regard to the Agathos Daimon¹⁶⁰ but the exact relationship between the two is still not clear.

¹⁵⁷In Aen. 5. 84.

¹⁵⁸Nilsson, History of Greek Religion, p. 23, n. 123.

¹⁵⁹Op. cit., I, 71.

¹⁶⁰Harrison, op. cit., p. 314.

The serpent and the Genius are both common religious elements in the lararia at Pompeii. The next chapter will analyze examples of house shrines many of which honor the Genius, the serpent, or both. A study of Boyce's Corpus¹⁶¹ reveals that the Genius is depicted in lararium painting in seventy-nine instances. It is represented by a togate male figure usually holding a patera in sacrifice and sometimes carrying a cornucopia.¹⁶² The serpent occurs in the lararium painting thirty two times as a painted device in the lararia without the Genius and over fifty times accompanied by the Genius.¹⁶³ Pliny's¹⁶⁴ remarks concerning serpent's crests are immediately recalled when crested serpents are encountered in the lararia. Caspar¹⁶⁵ confirms this impression when he writes that "the practice of depicting a crested snake beneath the master of the house to

¹⁶¹Op. cit., p. 103.

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 103. See especially Region VI. iv. 3/4. For a similar Etruscan statuette see Emeline Richardson, The Etruscans: Their Art and Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), Plate 47C. The figurine is togate and 0.32 meters high. It dates from the early second century B.C.

¹⁶³Corpus, p. 103. An inscription in the form of a serpent has even been found. See CIL IV 1595.

¹⁶⁴N.H. 11. 122.

¹⁶⁵Jacob William Caspar, Roman Religion as Seen in Pliny's Natural History (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1932, p. 148.

refer to the Genius" is reflected in Pliny's comment. Pliny's¹⁶⁶ other statement with regard to the serpent probably refers to the Genius of the place in Pompeii since it brings good fortune to the entire household. Caspar¹⁶⁷ also comments that perhaps Pliny did not believe the views then current concerning the Genius of the individual and that possibly this might have slanted his outlook towards a role of the Genius in domestic worship.

It is important to note the great variety of serpents depicted on the lararia of Pompeii. Some snakes are huge and thick while others are slender and similar to the Rat Snakes which still inhabit Italy today. Where did the iconography come from? This question is a difficult one because snakes are common artistic manifestations in Greek and Near Eastern religion. However, the snakes depicted on the coins of Ephesus and Alexandria are similar to the serpents found in the Pompeian lararium paintings.

A comparison between the snake depicted on the Alexandrian tetradrachm discussed previously¹⁶⁸ and a serpent such as that

¹⁶⁶N.H. 29. 67. During the summer of 1966 when this writer also came across serpents in Pompeii, the local guards also regarded this phenomenon as "good fortune," a curious legacy from antiquity.

¹⁶⁷Op. cit., p. 148.

¹⁶⁸Supra, p. 51.

seen in the lararium in the House of the Vettii¹⁶⁹ shows many similarities. However, the two snakes depicted on the reverse of a cistophoric tetradrachm struck in Ephesus in the first century B.C. show even stronger resemblances.¹⁷⁰ These two snakes share not only the same anatomical similarities which many Pompeian lararia snakes possess but also have a distinctive heraldic appearance also displayed by paired serpents in Pompeii. However, the most significant element is that one of these snakes is bearded and crested while the other is not. Can this refer to a possible artistic depiction of their gender? It appears likely that this indeed was the motive and that these reptiles are almost identical to those which inhabit the domestic shrines of Pompeii. Since both of these coins are from a Hellenistic background, it seems reasonable to suppose that the snakes of Pompeii are manifestations of an eastern Greek or Alexandrine artistic influence.

It is also interesting to speculate as to whether or

¹⁶⁹Corpus, No. 211.

¹⁷⁰See Frederick S. Knobloch, Fixed Price List, No. 32. January, 1968, No. 189 illustrated, B.M.C. 143. Although only a price list and not a professional numismatic account, the plate is magnificent and the beard on one of the serpents shows unmistakably. This writer knows of no finer specimen of this extremely important coin.

not the artists at Pompeii were inspired by a live model for their lararium serpents. There is little reliable means at our disposal by which to identify those which are obviously apocryphal (crested and bearded snakes). However, considering the habits of known Italian serpents and traditional religious affiliations, the probable candidate would be Elaphis aesculapii or Coluber longissimus.¹⁷¹ This intelligent reptile ranges all over Greece, the Balkans, Italy, Dalmatia, Central Europe, and even as far north as Denmark.¹⁷² It attains a length of about six feet and is a glossy animal, brown to jet black. This distinctively marked snake loves the cool of the forests and also the warmth of masonry.¹⁷³ Snakes of this species were probably the ones consecrated to Aesculapius and it was a snake of this genus which was brought to Rome when the cult of Aesculapius was introduced into the city.¹⁷⁴ Their occurrence in the vicinity of former spas in countries outside of their normal range has suggested that they were possibly kept as sacred snakes in

¹⁷¹George Boulenger, Catalogue of the Snakes in the British Museum (London: British Museum, 1896), II, 52.

¹⁷²Ibid. See also George A. Boulenger, The Snakes of Europe (London: Methuen, 1913), p. 189.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 80.

places of healing springs.¹⁷⁵ I observed one of their species in the excavated area of ancient Pompeii during the summer of 1966.¹⁷⁶ Many of the lararium serpents are long and slender and are similar to snakes of this type.¹⁷⁷

The Roman Genius, represented anthropomorphically, zoomorphically and abstractly, was an integral part of the Roman domestic cult. Its use at Pompeii was even extended to the emperor cult and coupled with the State deities.¹⁷⁸ If not abruptly cut off by the eruption of Vesuvius, the cult of the Genius might well have continued at Pompeii until the late fourth century when the emperor Theodosius finally suspended the Genius worship.¹⁷⁹ The Genius was a Roman religious concept which played a great variety of roles. Every individual, city, household, legion, cohort, and guild might possess a Genius.¹⁸⁰ The

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 189. See also Raymond L. Ditmars, Snakes of the World (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 87.

¹⁷⁶ David G. Orr, "Coluber longissimus in Pompeii, Italy," Journal of Herpetology, II (1968), p. 167.

¹⁷⁷ Corpus, Nos. 318 and 415.

¹⁷⁸ August Mau, Pompeii (New York: Macmillan, 1902), p. 266. Mau suggests that the emperor Nero is represented in the figure of the Genius painted on the large lararium in the House of the Vettii. See also Corpus, p. 54, nos. 211, 219.

¹⁷⁹ Cod. Theodosian. XVI. 10. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Individual CIL X 860; city CIL X 772; household CIL VIII 2597; legion CIL VII 103, cohort CIL VII 440; and guild CTL XIV 10.

old Roman belief in Genii evolved into a concept which filled almost every part of the Roman's world with a religious power whose mission it was to preserve, protect, and most important, to generate life itself.

CHAPTER III

THE LARARIA OF THE ROMAN WORLD

The lararia, household shrines where the worship of the domestic deities took place, constitute our most valuable evidence for Roman domestic religion. This chapter will analyze their structure and significance and interpret their meaning in relation to the other elements of the household cult. The word *lararium* is first found in the Scriptores historiae Augustae¹ and was used by Roman authors as a convenient term to describe the household shrines.² However, the shrines are known as sacraria in the early Latin sources.³ The household shrine is also referred to as an *aedicula*, a term that refers to a particular type of *lararium*.⁴

The practice of erecting a shrine to the household deities within the Roman home was an ancient one and there is some indication that the Romans borrowed the idea from the

¹Marcus Aurelius 3. 5.

²Servius In Aen. 4. 475. Privata lararia in quibus singulari ritu colunt penates.

³Cicero Pro Milone 86.

⁴Petronius 29. 8. For *aedicula*, see infra, p. 70.

Etruscans. A few extant Etruscan paintings seem to represent household rites in honor of the Lares.⁵ Small aedicula shrines are known from Etruscan urns of the fourth century B.C.⁶ Covered altars or shrines appear frequently in later Etruscan reliefs. One example found on a cinerary chest from Volterra depicts a sacrifice at a lighted altar which supports a small pedimental shrine quite similar to the Roman lararium.⁷ Lararia are known from the first century B.C. in Rome and were utilized occasionally in the art which propogandized the imperial cult.⁸

It is the lararia of Pompeii, however, which are most important, since no other Roman town can equal their quality, preservation, and variety. A study of these lararia is mandatory for an interpretation of Roman domestic worship. In his study of Pompeian lararia Boyce has classified them in three main types: the niche type, the aedicula, and the wall painting.⁹ In all of these, there are two main features in common; the representation of the images of the gods to be worshipped in them and the provision for sacrifice before these images.

⁵Inez S. Ryberg, Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1955), p. 11.

⁶Ibid., p. 15.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 57

⁹Corpus, p. 10.

Boyce¹⁰ states that these two requirements "dictate the form of the shrine within certain limits but allow at the same time considerable freedom in working out details of form and appearance." Images are represented within the lararia either by statuettes placed inside the shrine or by paintings of the deities on the lararia walls. Sacrifice is implemented by permanent or non-permanent altars placed in front of the lararia.

The simplest and most primitive form of the lararium is the niche type which is often merely a square or rectangular recess in the wall of the room. (See Plate I, Figs. 2 and 3.) Usually it is coated with the same kind of plaster as that which covers the wall surrounding it. An interesting feature of the niche type is the great diversity of patterns and modes of execution; no two niches seem to be alike. Unfortunately, because of this simplicity, it is difficult to determine if many niches found in Pompeian houses were used as domestic shrines.¹¹ Most of them were located at an easily reached height above the floor while others were located either on the floor itself or high up on the wall.¹² One example has a masonry table (altar?) beneath it and is covered with successive layers of stucco, variously painted red, blue, and

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 8.

¹²Ibid., p. 10.

Niche Lararia



Figure 1
IX. iii. 12.



Figure 2
VII. i. 36/37.



Figure 3
VII. iv. 25

yellow.¹³ Many of the niches have an aedicular façade built up around the recession and acting as a frame. (See Plate II, Figs. 4, 5 and 6, and Plate X, Fig. 25.) This miniature temple is added to the wall niches to give it a more realistic appearance. Few of these niches have been found with their contents untouched and those that have been preserved with their statuettes intact are especially valuable.¹⁴ According to Boyce, these "pseudo-aedicula" lararia occur forty times around a niche, eleven times around a wall painting, and twice on the back of wall niches.¹⁵ Stucco is the favorite type of construction used in aedicular façades.

The finest lararia take the form of a miniature temple. This form, three dimensional and resting on its own podium, is known as an aedicula. One of the finest examples of this kind of lararium is the beautiful aedicula in the House of Menander. (See Plate III, Fig. 7.)¹⁶ The columns of these aediculae are regularly Doric (See Plate III, Fig. 7) but sometimes Corinthian capitals are employed as in the lararium in the House of the Vettii. (See Plate III, Fig. 9). The decoration in the aediculae regularly tends to blend in harmoniously with the

¹³Ibid., No. 24, I. iii. 15.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 14.

Pseudo-Aedicula Lararia

Figure 4
II. i. 9.



Figure 5
IX. ii. 21.



Figure 6
I. vii. 8.

Aedicula Lararia



Figure 7
I. x. 4.



Figure 8
VIII. vi. 37.



Figure 9
VI. xv. 1.

rest of the room, complementing the standard of room decor already employed. A unique example having slabs of greyish marble covering its base and decorated with friezes referring to the earthquake of 62 A.D. is found in the atrium in the home of Caecilius Jucundus.¹⁷ Most of the examples of the aediculae studied by Boyce, forty-eight in all, are free-standing with only four occurring as half-niche, half-aedicula. Six have statuettes, eight have paintings, and one has reliefs.¹⁸ One unique example has both paintings and statuettes.

The last form of lararium is the wall-painting type. These lararia are usually accompanied by portable altars of one kind or another. Examples of this type are illustrated in Plate IV, Figs. 10, 11 and 12. The most common form (see Plate IV, Fig. 10), consists of a painted aedicula on a peristyle wall with an altar placed in front of it.

The rarest of all forms of the lararia is the sacellum, a room or building set apart for the worship of domestic deities.¹⁹

Boyce describes six examples, one of which is located in Region IX. ix. 6.²⁰ A garden sacellum, one belonging to

¹⁷ Ibid., Plate XXX, Fig. 4.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁰ Ibid., no. 457 c. See also Notizie degli scavi di antichità, VI (Rome: 1877-), (1889), p. 123 Hereafter the Notizie degli scavi di antichità will be referred to as NS.

Wall Painting Lararia

Figure 10
V. ii. 15.



Figure 11
II. ix. 1.



Figure 12
I. vi. 2.

the wine-merchant Caius Caesius Restitutus (see Plate V, Fig. 14), had a lararium niche on its east wall, a masonry altar in front of the niche, and two painted garlands above the niche.²¹ The sacellum found in the caupona in VI. i. 1. is significant since it contains information on many aspects of Roman domestic worship. This sacellum is a rectangular, windowless room with red walls and low benches distributed around three of the sides, except for the door and the area immediately below the niche.²² The ceiling is vaulted, covered with white stucco and floral ornaments, with a painting found inside the niche. (See Plate VIII, Figs. 19 and 21). In front of this lararium, on the floor, stands a masonry altar which was decorated with the figure of a pig with a garland on its head.²³ Other examples have been found in the new excavations. A separate room leading from the peristyle of the House of Venus Marina (See Plate V, Fig. 13) is decorated on the outside with a garden painting of birds, lattice

²¹August Mau, Mittheilungen des Kaiserlich Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abtheilung 4 (1889), p. 14 ff. See also Wilhelmina Jashemski, "A Pompeian Vinariarius," The Classical Journal, No. 5, XII (February 1967), pp. 193-204.

²²Corpus, No. 132.

²³For the pig used in sacrifice see supra, p. 29, no. 20.

Sacella



Figure 13
II. iii. 3.



Figure 14
IX. ix. 6.

fencing, a fountain with a tree growing behind it, and a garland of ivy. Inside is a masonry altar and bench. A garden sacellum with an altar has been discovered in II, iii. 4. Another sacellum not known to Boyce has been found in I. xiii. 2.

There are also several different types of altars used in connection with the various kinds of lararia. These altars, whether of stone or masonry, regularly have some provision at the top for sacrifice. Most of the stone altars are of tufa and several of them date back to the tufa period of Pompeian building, two of which are still in situ, placed there perhaps by the inhabitants of Pompeii before the Romans arrived.²⁴ Many of these stone altars have been painted after first being covered with thick coats of stucco. Religious motifs also appear on these altars and they bear colorful representations of yellow candelabra, garlanded hogs, cocks, two serpents, and other religious objects.²⁵ At the House of Popidius Priscus (VII. ii. 20) there was one altar with two niches. The paintings of the Genius and the two Lares appear within the niche on the left and two large yellow serpents appear on the west wall. The altar was not symmetrically placed before the two

²⁴Corpus p. 15.

²⁵Ibid.

niches but stood far off to the west. Some altars still bear traces of the last offerings made upon them. The altar in the house at V. ii. 7. has traces of black burnings on its surface.²⁶ Portable altars of diverse sizes and forms are also encountered in Pompeii. In one example, a small conical altar of terracota stands beside the image of a goddess.²⁷ Some altars even have provisions for sacrifice to more than one deity. One such example, a small masonry altar with two cavities in the top, is set before a niche-type lararium.²⁸ Finally, in some cases where an altar is not provided, a simple roof-tile is embedded in the wall.²⁹

The lararia of Pompeii are distributed throughout the city and do not appear to be confined to one specific area. Regions VI and VII have only a few shrines but Boyce argues that this is because those regions were the sites of the early

²⁶Ibid., p. 36. For ashes found on an altar in a garden lararium, see also Wilhelmina Jashemski, "The Caupona of Euxinus at Pompeii, "Archaeology, Vol. XX, no. 1 (January 1967), p. 44.

²⁷Taberna with Thermopolium II. iv. 1.

²⁸Corpus, p. 28. This lararium is located in a small room opening off of the northwest corner. Many altars still show the traces of burning and even the remains of their last sacrifices. See Boyce, nos. 103, 126, 253, and 463.

²⁹Ibid., Plate XXVII, Fig. 1.

excavations and consequently little was preserved.³⁰ The regions which have been excavated more recently, on the other hand, have more preserved examples of lararia. The lararia are irregularly distributed throughout the city because much of the early work was incomplete, and many shrines have vanished completely. The distribution of the lararia in various parts of the Roman house is more informative and those studied by Boyce are located as follows: in the kitchen (86 examples), peristyle (58), atrium (56), viridarium (garden) (47), and fauces, (entrance hall) (5).³¹ Five examples are found in rooms off the atrium and one example is known in the triclinium (dining room). The finest are found in the atrium and peristyle in houses which have several lararia. More lararia have been found in the kitchen, for the domestic deities had a long history of intimacy with the hearth and the storerooms.

Which deities did the inhabitants of Pompeii worship? The answer to this question is most important in a study of domestic worship. We have already mentioned that the Lares, the Genius, and the Penates were worshipped in the lararia of

³⁰Ibid., p. 8.

³¹Ibid., pp. 105-106.

Pompeii. Besides these a great number of other deities was worshipped. Paintings and statuettes found in the lararia are the best sources of information for the deities worshipped in the Pompeian domestic shrines.

The Lares are represented in the lararia frequently both as painted images and small sculptured figures. They appear most often as mirthful spirits with brimming rhytons of wine as illustrated by Plate III, Fig. 9. In this guise, carrying a situla (pail) also, they are depicted forty times in lararium paintings studied by Boyce.³² Sometimes they carry a patera (dish) in the place of a situla.³³ They are nearly always identical in appearance and give the impression that they are practically heraldic in their paired symmetrical relationship. One strange example has one Lar holding a rhyton and situla while the other one has rhyton and a cup.³⁴ A lararium painting from a house connected with the home of Caecilius Jucundus shows one lar directly behind the Genius and one flanking him.³⁵ The iconography connected with the Pompeian Lares gives a distinctly eastern impression since many

³²Ibid., p. 102.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid. Boyle calls this a skyphos, no. 129.

³⁵Ibid., no. 79.

of their attributes are non-Roman. The rhyton which the Lares carry is definitely an imported Hellenic object which can also be traced back to the Near East.³⁶ Rhyton is the Greek name for a cup which resembles the head of an animal. The rhyton in Pompeian wall paintings recalls those found in certain Achaemenian treasure hoards which have ends that terminate in animal heads.³⁷ The Lares are also seen wearing Phrygian caps, similar to those seen on the tauroctonus (bull-slaying) friezes connected with the worship of Mithras; even some Lares wearing trousers are found.³⁸ A lararium which shows a lar wearing a Phrygian cap also depicts an omphalos with a serpent coiling around it, another distinctively non-Roman representation.³⁹ A lararium in the Boscoreale villa shows Lares strangely dressed in green trousers reaching to their ankles and wearing shoes instead of the usual boots.⁴⁰ The ancient

³⁶Olivier Rayet, Histoire de la céramique grecque (Paris: Decaux, 1888), p. 278, Fig. 106. See also Waites, op. cit., pp. 252-255.

³⁷Seton Lloyd, The Art of the Ancient Near East (New York: Praeger, 1961), pp. 250-251, Fig. 211.

³⁸Franz Cumont, The Mysteries of Mithra (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 21. Boyce, Nos. 174 (Phrygian caps) and 489 (trousers).

³⁹Corpus, no. 174; see a parallel example from Delos, infra, p. 117, no. 149.

⁴⁰NS, VI (1898), p. 421.

Lares are represented in Pompeii not only in anthropomorphic form but also with Near Eastern and Hellenic attributes.

Representations of the Genius in the Pompeian lararia demonstrate both Roman and foreign affinities. He is represented in human form (see Plate II, Fig. 6 and Plate III, Fig. 9), togate, and usually carrying a cornucopia and a patera. The Genius is also depicted frequently in the act of sacrificing over an altar and appears generally as a sober contrast to the more dynamic Lares. He is pictured as static and calm while the Lares flanking him are more animated and energetic. (See Plate III, Fig. 9).⁴¹ He is represented most frequently in combinations with the Lares, one or more serpents, and one or more assistants. In one rare instance the Genius may indeed be paired with the Juno, the female counterpart of the Genius, and thus both the husband and the wife are commemorated in the family shrine.⁴² The Genius is also depicted alone on eleven lararia and on two of these examples he is painted twice. His Roman attributes are his togate representation, often with the borders of the praetexta clearly indicated, and

⁴¹Corpus, nos. 272, 285, and 417.

⁴²Ibid., No. 349. See supra, p. 28.

his sacrificial attitude.⁴³ In one example the Genius is shown with a steering-rudder which is the usual attribute of Fortuna.⁴⁴ Several extant paintings of the Genius may also represent actual portraits of individuals.⁴⁵ Mau⁴⁶ argues that a lararium which showed Jupiter side by side with the Genius in fact represented the emperor Claudius since no Roman mortal would ever be linked that closely with the head of the Roman Pantheon. An adjacent hospitium also contains a lararium portrait of a Genius which appears to suggest strong individuality and is indicative of art work of the early Empire.⁴⁷

The serpent at Pompeii is closely linked with the representations of the Genius. Discussions affirming this have previously been offered in the section on the Genius itself. Three distinctive types of serpent depiction encountered in the lararia of Pompeii are illustrated on Plate II. A stucco image of a lararium snake is seen in Plate II, Fig. 4

⁴³The Genius is pictured with a toga drawn over his head in a sacrificial attitude on Plate III, Fig. 9.

⁴⁴Corpus no. 427.

⁴⁵Ibid., no. 217. The Genius on Plate III, Fig. 9 might possibly represent a portrait of the emperor Nero; see supra, p. 66, no. 178.

⁴⁶Op. cit., p. 264.

⁴⁷Corpus no. 309

(approaching a stucco altar below the lararium niche). Occasionally the serpent is pictured at Pompeii in a context other than religious. A man who is apparently defiling another man's house is attacked by two serpents which seem, in this example, to represent the forces of evil (see Plate VI, Fig. 15). Another serpent, perhaps the protective Genius of the place, is painted on the wall of a garden latrine (see Plate IV, Fig. 11). On still another lararium painting, a huge coiled serpent, bearded and crested, is shown in a garden setting with another smaller serpent, a peacock, and various garden birds (see Plate IV, Fig. 12). In a caupona in the new excavations a scaly serpent is depicted on a rectangular lararium painting with what seems to be a garden scene (see Plate VII, Fig. 18). A serpent even reposes on the wall of the oven and mill room in the House of Pansa (VI. vi. 1.).⁴⁸ Another lararium (I. xiii. 12.), contains within a painted decoration of plant material two caducei, a sistrum, and two tiny coiled serpents entwined around two omphaloi. One unique statuette of a serpent has also been found in a Pompeian lararium, the reptile posed with his head held above a low

⁴⁸William Gell, Pompeiana: The Topography, Edifices, and Ornaments of Pompeii (London: Jennings and Chaplin, 1832), Plate XXXVIII.

PLATE VI



Figure 15
IX. vii. 21/22.
(Boyce, Corpus, Plate 26, Fig. 2)



Figure 16
I. iii. 15.



Figure 17
I. xii. 5.



Figure 18
I. iv. 9.

rectangular base.⁴⁹ The bronze figurine obviously was part of the worship connected with the lararium.

In lararium paintings serpents are usually offered eggs and pine cones in sacrificial depictions (see Plate III, Fig. 9., Plate IV, Figs. 11 and 12, and Plate VIII, Fig. 21.). Although serpents do not relish pine cones in the natural state, eggs are common items in the diet of the large Rat Snakes which frequent the areas adjacent to Pompeii.⁵⁰ Again, one can only speculate on the tremendous visual impression a large reptile, in the act of devouring an egg, would make on an ancient who chanced upon this type of scene. Eggs and pine cones are frequently used to symbolize immortality.⁵¹ One important painting of a togate man sacrificing upon an altar guarded by two large Genius serpents seems to show a pine cone as the object being placed upon the altar (see Plate IX, Fig. 24).⁵² An interesting restoration from Mazois (see Plate VIII, Fig. 21), also depicts a man placing a pine cone on a lighted altar.⁵³ The best evidence for the use of pine cones

⁴⁹Corpus, no. 493.

⁵⁰Supra, p. 65.

⁵¹Supra, p. 58, no. 145.

⁵²Corpus, no. 146.

⁵³F. Mazois, Les ruines de Pompeii, 4 vols. Paris: F. Didot, 1812-38), II, Plate X. No. 1. Richmond feels that pine cones were used for altar fuel but the evidence at Pompeii indicates that they were sacrificial objects. Supra, p. 58.



Figure 19
VI. i. 1.

(Boyce, Corpus, Plate 40, Fig. 3)



Figure 20
I. xiv. 4.



Figure 21
VI. i. 1.

(Boyce, Corpus, Plate 40, Fig. 4)

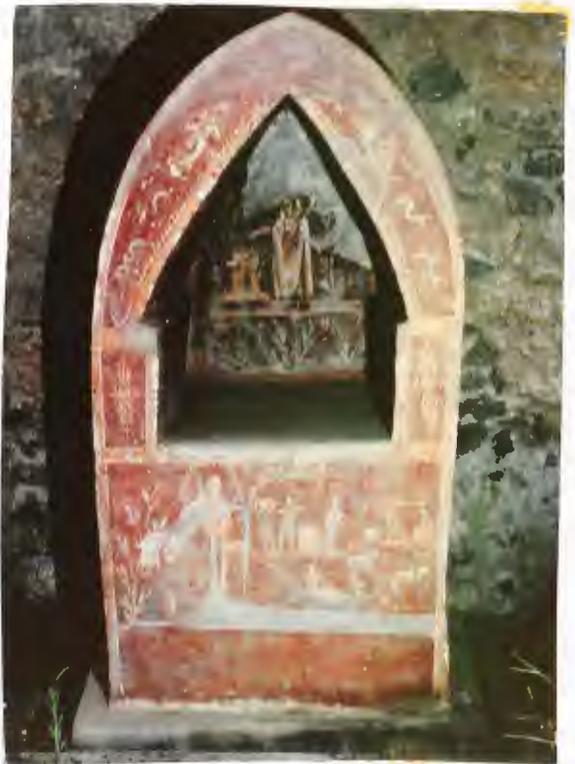


Figure 22
I. xiv. 7.

PLATE IX



Figure 23
VI. iii. 7.
(Boyce, Corpus, Plate XII, Fig. 2)



Figure 24
VI. iii. 7.
(Boyce, Corpus, Plate XII, Fig. 4)

as sacrificial objects is provided by an interesting marble relief found in the garden of the House of the Golden Cupids (VI. xvi. 7.) Two men are depicted carrying trays of fruit to a blazing altar. In the center of one of the trays is the distinct representation of a pine cone. Pine cones, eggs, and most important, serpents, all share with each other the power of possessing the potential of life. This seems to be the most important reason for their close juxtaposition in the lararium painting of Pompeii.

Most of the major deities known to be worshipped in the lararia of Pompeii are shown as Penates which were painted on the shrines themselves. The three deities most frequently found among the painted Penates studied by Boyce are: Fortuna (12 examples), Vesta (10), and Bacchus (8). Fortuna appears standing, in a long red, sleeveless chiton, with a modius on her head, a rudder in her right hand, a cornucopia in her left hand, and a green globe at her feet, in a lararium painting found on a latrine wall in IX. vii. 21/22 (see Plate VI, Fig. 15). Interestingly enough, she also appears as Isis in at least three examples.⁵⁴ Fortuna was an Italic deity and was brought to Rome at an early date. Originally an agricultural

⁵⁴ Corpus, no. 372. This is Isis-Fortuna, a deity in the cult of the Egyptian deities. See Tran Tam Tinh, op. cit., p. 108.

goddess, she became, like the Greek Tychē, a goddess of luck or chance, and was a popular personification during the early empire.⁵⁵ A lararium painting found in a rustic villa outside Pompeii's Vesuvian Gate shows Fortuna and may indicate the luck which farmers hoped for and which represented her earliest meaning.⁵⁶ However, a painting of Fortuna found in a caupona demonstrates her later imperial uses as a goddess of chance and luck.⁵⁷ Her favor was vital in commercial activities and even the games which might have occurred in just such a caupona. Vesta's frequent appearance in the household shrines should not appear too surprising since the goddess of the hearth and the domestic fire had a close affinity with the Roman home. She is pictured with an ass which she either leads on a halter or rides.⁵⁸ One lararium painting depicts Vesta, the two Lares, and Venus Pompeiana directly above the hearth.⁵⁹ Another favorite spot in the house for Vesta is the kitchen and she is portrayed here in lararium paintings.⁶⁰ She also is

⁵⁵Rose, op. cit., p. 238.

⁵⁶Corpus, no. 494.

⁵⁷Ibid., no. 13.

⁵⁸Leading an ass, ibid., no. 77. Riding, no. 420. See Propertius 4. 1. 21.

⁵⁹Ibid., no. 185; De Marchi, op. cit., I, 97, and Plate IV.

⁶⁰Corpus, no. 236.

encountered in the pistrinum lararia and even appears as the patron deity of bakers.⁶¹ Bacchus is the third most popular deity in the lararium painting. His representations vary from a god dressed in chlamys, high boots, and wreathed with ivy to an exceptionally well executed figure whose entire body is covered by an enormous bunch of black grapes.⁶² Occasionally he is shown pouring a libation on an altar with a cantharus or patera. As might be expected, Bacchus is the patron god of wine-making and tavern (taberna) keepers. A lararium painting in a taberna illustrated in Plate II, Figure 6, shows Bacchus on the right and Mercury on the extreme left. Another lararium found in a taberna, contains the figures of Bacchus and Fortuna with the figure of Bacchus depicted nude from the waist up.⁶³ A painting of Bacchus covered with a bunch of grapes was found in the House of the Centenary where the wine-producer Aulus Rustius Verus lived.⁶⁴ The god of wine was also worshipped by workers who labored in a Pompeian fullonica.⁶⁵

⁶¹Ibid., nos. 247 and 240. No. 313 is located in the taberna of a pistor dulciarius (baker of sweet cakes). In no. 318 Vesta appears on a lararium located over an oven.

⁶²Ibid., nos. 498 and 448 respectively.

⁶³Ibid., no. 13. No. 463 shows the head of Pentheus on a thyrsus held by Agave.

⁶⁴Matteo Della Corte, Case ed abitanti di Pompei (Napoli: Fausto Fiorentino, 1965), p. 133, no. 216.

⁶⁵Corpus, no. 171.

The great variety of deities worshipped in the lararia of Pompeii vividly demonstrates the cosmopolitan atmosphere which this commercial town enjoyed. Mercury, the patron god of commerce, finance, and even thieves, appears in many of the household shrines. Like Bacchus, he is one of the favorite Penates of the tavern keepers and appears in lararia with his caduceus and is shown clutching a money bag with his right hand (see Plate II, Fig. 6). A lararium niche in the House of the Cryptoporticus is decorated with a bust of Mercury wearing a winged petasos with a green caduceus over his left shoulder (see Plate IV, Fig. 12).⁶⁶ Two caducei appear in a newly discovered lararium in I. xiii. 12. and possibly refer to the household worship of Mercury. He is also a favorite painted motif for the walls of shops and houses.⁶⁷ His Greek name, Hermes, appears in a lararium found in a caupona which also shows a man pouring out wine into a dolium.⁶⁸ Minerva is represented by three known examples in lararia painting and eleven small lararium statuettes. She appears as the patron goddess of clothmakers and is painted in full armor, with aegis, helmet, spear, shield, and accompanied by an owl.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid., no. 36.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Appendix Two.

⁶⁸ Ibid., no. 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., no. 249.

Venus Pompeiana, the patroness of the city, is depicted in at least six lararium paintings. She also may be a possible favorite of the fullers since she appears in a lararium painting inside a fullonica.⁷⁰ She appears in both tabernae and houses, and is occasionally shown with Amor and other figures.⁷¹

The cult of the Egyptian dieties is well represented in the Pompeian house shrines. Isis-Fortuna is depicted in three lararium paintings along with the Alexandrian deities worshipped at the Temple of Isis in Pompeii.⁷² Isis alone is shown in three examples also, the most famous being the shrine painting in the House of the Golden Cupids.⁷³ Also painted on this shrine were representations of Harpocrates, Anubis, Serapis, and the Uraeic serpent. An Egyptian alabaster statuette of Horus was found within the shrine itself. Isis, Harpocrates, and Osiris also appeared in the household shrine erected on the east wall of the small garden in the House of the Amazons.⁷⁴ Each of the three figures was

⁷⁰Ibid., no. 171.

⁷¹Taberna, ibid., no. 271; House no. 383.

⁷²Ibid., nos. 372, 409, and 415.

⁷³Ibid., no. 220. For all lararia with Isis depicted on them, see Tran Tam Tinh, op. cit., pp. 108-190.

⁷⁴Corpus, no. 141.

painted with a lotus flower on his forehead but unfortunately the painting has disappeared. A small sacellum-like room with vaulted ceiling contained a number of paintings referring to the cult of the Egyptian deities.⁷⁵ This building also was connected with the Iuventus of Pompeii.⁷⁶ A sistrum (the rattle associated with Isis worship), is shown in a niche lararium found in I. xiii. 12.

Hercules is encountered in a number of lararia and is easily identified since he is usually shown with a club and lion-skin (see Plate II, Fig. 4).⁷⁷ Jupiter is portrayed in seven lararium paintings and is shown either standing or seated on a throne. His attributes are the eagle and thunderbolt and he is often depicted holding a scepter and resting his feet on a footstool, a symbol of royalty.⁷⁸ Mars, Sol, Victoria, and Epona, are known by one example each.⁷⁹ Epona, an ancient Italic deity, is depicted on a lararium painting on the wall of

⁷⁵Ibid., no. 471. ⁷⁶Della Corte, op. cit., no. 821.

⁷⁷Corpus, nos. 68, 108, 118, 273 and with attributes only (lion's skin, club, etc.), nos. 261 and 479.

⁷⁸Ibid., eagle and thunderbolt, no. 118, scepter and footstool, no. 226.

⁷⁹Ibid., 303, 99, 118, and 403 respectively.

a stable.⁸⁰ Vulcan is encountered occasionally in the lararia with one example probably representing the shrine of a worker in bronze, a trade which the lame craftsman patronized.⁸¹ The River Sarno is also shown on Pompeian lararia as a patriarchial figure emptying his waters out of a large jar.⁸² A fine unpublished aedicula located in I. xiv. 7. vividly shows Sarnus (The Sarno River) in this guise (see Plate VIII, Fig. 22).⁸³ Scenes of boats plying up and down on the river, men unloading and loading amphorae and baskets, and even the weighing of goods are depicted on this unique lararium. A marine decoration with dolphins and shells covers the front of the shrine. Finally, this list of Penates is concluded with one of the most mysterious deities represented in the household shrines. This unknown goddess is called "Enigma" by Boyce and is shown reclining on a klinē with cornucopia and patera, a small table usually painted just in front of her (see Plate VIII, Fig. 19). Statuettes of this strange

⁸⁰Epona is painted on the wall of a stable since this ancient Italic deity was associated with horses and mules. OCD, s.v., "Epona", p. 334. See also Juvenal 8. 157.

⁸¹Corpus, no. 283.

⁸²Ibid., nos. 79, 99, and 171.

⁸³Ibid.

deity have been discovered in precisely the same overall position.⁸⁴ An unpublished lararium in I. xiv. 12. also appears to represent this unidentified deity (see Plate VIII, Fig. 20). It is difficult to ascertain who this deity is, but some things can definitely be established. The figure seems to have the attributes of a fertility deity since it is represented with cornucopia and depicted on a klinē, suggesting some hints of the Genius and the marriage-bed. Agatha Tychē might be advanced as a possible candidate for the "Enigma's" identity since it too has these attributes. However, the variety present in the extant examples (one "Enigma" even is shown nude from the waist up) disproves this and keeps the controversy alive. The "Enigmas" of Pompeii will probably remain so for some time to come.

Many small statuettes of bronze and terracotta found in the Pompeian shrines give additional evidence for the deities worshipped among the Penates. Deities not represented in the painting but present in the lararia in the form of small figures include Aesculapius, Hygieia, Neptune, and Persephone.⁸⁵ Some lararia even contained figures of non-religious association and these may indeed represent the

⁸⁴Corpus, nos. 132, 218, 330.

⁸⁵Corpus, no. 106.

portraits of ancestors.⁸⁶

The Pompeian lararia also suggest vestiges of the ancient Italic and Oscan deities. An ancient lararium found in the Villa of the Mysteries was decorated in a primitive style quite similar to Oscan painting which was discovered in South Italian tombs.⁸⁷ Below the niche was represented a procession made up of two horsemen, a crowd of people and a trumpet player, and with a painted altar in the center. A strange figure (Lar?) pouring wine from a rhyton is seen on a layer of plaster which is even older.⁸⁸ An unusual and ancient shrine is found in the south-west corner of the peristyle in the House of Menander (see Plate X, Fig. 26).⁸⁹ In this shrine stood five figures of some type of perishable material, probably wood, which left impressions in the volcanic ash. The excavators made plaster casts of these figures which seem quite crude when contrasted with the fine lararium that once held them. These images do not appear to be the normal household deities since their rude form represents the real

⁸⁶ Ibid., nos. 13, 168, 202, 329, 446, and 500.

⁸⁷ NS (1910), p. 141.

⁸⁸ Amedeo Maiuri, La Villa dei Misteri (Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1932), p. 80.

⁸⁹ Corpus, no. 49.



Figure 25
IX. ii. 6.



Figure 26
I. x. 4.



Figure 27
VII. ix. 28.

character of the original sculptures. Maiuri and de Franciscis agree that the single statuette on the shrine represents the Lar Praestes of the Republican period and the other four heads symbolize the four imagines maiorum.⁹⁰ If this is true, this probably is the only archaeological evidence for the masks of the ancestors (or busts) known to have been worshipped in the atrium of the Roman house. An interesting statue from the first century B.C. shows a patrician carrying busts of his ancestors in a funeral procession.⁹¹ The lararium must have been the repository for ancestral busts and masks and this strange lararium may suggest this tradition.

A great variety of symbols are found either painted on the Pompeian lararia or included within the shrines in the form of statuettes. In the same lararium which contained a painting of two confronting serpents with an altar upon which were two eggs and a pine cone, a bronze conca or sea shell was discovered.⁹² Perhaps this is an indication to suggest

⁹⁰Amedeo Maiuri, La casa del Menandro e il suo tesoro di argenteria (Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1933), pp. 98-106. See also Alfonso de Franciscis, Il ritratto Romano a Pompei (Napoli: Macchiarolli, 1951), p. 19, for a discussion of these images in connection with the Lar Praestes.

⁹¹Mortimer Wheeler, Roman Art and Architecture (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 163, Fig. 142. Mention of these masks is made by Pliny N.H. 35. 2.

⁹²Corpus, no. 94. NS, IV (1896), p. 439.

the worship of Venus in the household cult. Besides numerous statuettes of deities found in Pompeian lararia, there exist statuettes of a bird and even human assistants of the Genius.⁹³ Tragic masks appear five times in Pompeian lararium painting attesting to the religious nature of drama.⁹⁴ Trees have great symbolic significance in Pompeian lararia and there exist seven examples of their inclusion in the lararium painting.⁹⁵ Trees, moreover, are extremely important in Pompeian wall painting and are frequently seen as part of the idyllic landscape used by Campanian painters. There seems to be every indication that these trees were sacred and worshipped as a distinct cult.⁹⁶ The lararium trees are usually adorned with fillets and garlands, occasionally with birds flying above them, and are sometimes painted in pairs on either side of an altar. One slender green tree has been identified as a pine tree.⁹⁷ The best example for a sacred tree cult suggested by

⁹³Corpus, p. 107.

⁹⁴Ibid., nos. 1, 25, 162, 273, and 432.

⁹⁵Ibid., nos. 47, 146, 200, 410, 427, 432, and 489.

⁹⁶A full explanation of these "rustic sacro-idyllic" landscapes and their use as sacred trees is in A. Maiuri, Roman Painting (Geneva: Skira, 1953), pp. 121-122.

⁹⁷NS, XI (1933), 281.

the lararium paintings is found in the southwest corner of a cultivated area in the center of a peristyle of a house in Region VII.⁹⁸ Large holes in the earth near an altar located here have been interpreted as evidence for an arbor sacra (sacred tree) which must have stood on this site and which was honored by sacrifice. Other botanical material, besides trees, are visible in Pompeian lararium painting.

Plants and flowers are constant representations in the painted lararia of Pompeii. Flowers were connected with many Roman religious observances and also constituted some of the highest rewards for military service and public eminence. From Rome's earliest period, flowers and sprays of trees, twined into garlands, appeared in religious rites.⁹⁹ The most ancient form of crown is possibly the corona spicea (crown of wheat ears) which was dedicated to the goddess Ceres and was worn by the Arval priesthood.¹⁰⁰ This crown appears on a lararium painting in connection with a representation of Ceres.¹⁰¹ Garlands decorated the lararia on festive days and the domestic

⁹⁸NS, VII (1910), pp. 466-467.

⁹⁹Archibald Geikie, The Love of Nature among the Romans (London: John Murray, 1912), p. 113.

¹⁰⁰Pliny N.H. 18. 2. 2.

¹⁰¹Corpus, no. 112.

hearth was crowned with flowers on the calends, nones, and ides of each month.¹⁰² Pompeian lararia are not only decorated frequently with garlands but there is evidence that provision was made in the lararia for the hanging up of actual floral wreaths and garlands.¹⁰³ Laurel was sacrificed on the altar and it was a good omen when it crackled well.¹⁰⁴ Chaplets of flowers were worn on numerous occasions and Ovid¹⁰⁵ comments that a man was rich if he could afford chaplets made out of violets. Rosemary and myrtle were humble offerings to the household deities; the latter also sacred to the goddess Venus.¹⁰⁶ Certain deities were represented by particular plants and flowers. Oak, for example, was the tree of Jupiter.¹⁰⁷ Apollo is possibly associated in the lararium

¹⁰²Geikie, op. cit., pp. 112-113. Cato R.R. 143. 2. Painted garlands are seen in illustrations on Plate II, Fig. 6, Plate III, Fig. 9, Plate VIII, Figs. 19 and 20, and Plate XII, Fig. 30.

¹⁰³Nails driven into the wall to hold taeniae and garlands are found in Corpus, nos. 213, 349, and 459. Juvenal 9. 137, states that the Lares were offered floral wreaths.

¹⁰⁴Tibullus 2. 5. 81.

¹⁰⁵Fasti 1. 345-346.

¹⁰⁶Horace Carmina 3. 23. 16. For myrtle sacred to Venus, see Caspar, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁰⁷Vergil Georg. 3. 332.

painting by the depiction of laurel.¹⁰⁸ The god of wine, Bacchus, is commonly represented with a wreath of ivy and also with a thyrsus entwined with ivy.¹⁰⁹ Minerva's olive tree, Hercules' poplar tree, and the myrtle of Venus are not definitely established in the Pompeian house shrines.

Animals also appear in the lararia either alone or as attributes accompanying deities. Birds are the most common of these and a great variety of species are known.¹¹⁰ Cocks (Aesculapius?), peacocks (Juno?), eagles (Jupiter?), and owls (Minerva), appear alone without their accompanying deity.¹¹¹ One lararium has the painting of the head of a stag and the worship of Diana is probably suggested within this shrine.¹¹² Another shrine has the image of a panther which

¹⁰⁸Corpus, p. 104.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., no. 118 shows him flanked by grape vines. No. 463 depicts him wearing violet boots. No. 498 shows him with wreath of ivy leaves and a bunch of grapes. Plate II Fig. 6, extreme right figure shows Bacchus with his panther.

¹¹⁰Ibid., nos. 4, 36, 68, 83, 99, 110, 118, 141, 149, 219, 229, 249, 253, 334, 382, 404, 425, 432, 448, 461, 463, and 496.

¹¹¹Ibid., Cocks nos. 2, 4, 118, 285, 318, 449, 479. Peacocks 36, 118, 141, 162, 182, 253, 318. Eagles 118, 253. Owls 339, 448.

¹¹²Ibid., no. 271.

is the accompanying animal of Bacchus.¹¹³ Marine monsters, dolphins, hippocamps, and sea motifs are known from a number of lararia and may indicate that the owner was involved in fishing or trading since no definite deities are known in these shrines.¹¹⁴ Two rams are painted on one lararium and are seen flanking the figure of Bacchus.¹¹⁵ Hogs and bulls appear in the painting either in sacrificial scenes or alone.¹¹⁶ One such sacrificial procession shows a man carrying a hog over his shoulder.¹¹⁷

A domestic sacrifice is illustrated by Plate XI, Fig. 28 and is included to give some idea of the actual worship which surrounded these shrines on festive days. The Genius is seen pouring a libation on the altar and holding a cornucopia in his left hand. Boyce feels that this representation of the

¹¹³Corpus, no. 13.

¹¹⁴Ibid., Hippocamps no. 48, 404. Dolphins nos. 399, 404, and Plate V, Fig. 14. Sea Monsters nos. 203, 399, and 432.

¹¹⁵Ibid., no. 498.

¹¹⁶Ibid., For the hog alone see nos. 68, 108, 118, and 273. For the bull see nos. 385 and 463. For the hog in a sacrificial scene see Plate XI, Fig. 28.

¹¹⁷Ibid., no. 271.

PLATE XI



Figure 28
VII. iv. 20.
(Boyce, Corpus, Plate 18, Fig. 2)

Genius possesses strong portrait features.¹¹⁸ A tibicen (trumpet blower) stands on the other side and is dressed in a white garment. A small camillus (acolyte in the Roman household cult) is directly behind the tibicen and is depicted carrying a shallow dish and pitcher. A man wearing a knife and carrying a hog (the proper sacrifice to the Genius) appears next in the procession and is followed by two men carrying poles which terminate in what appears to be pine cones. A brick structure (oven?) stands at the right of the panel and reflects the fact that the lararium painting itself is located in the kitchen of a taberna.

Finally, small shrines appear in various places of business which are closely associated with the Pompeian homes. We have already seen the popularity of the tabernae in Pompeii as places where shrines are located, many of these having more than one shrine. Boyce catalogues over a hundred examples of small shops possessing lararia.¹¹⁹ Shrines are also found in latrines.¹²⁰ Bakeries (Pistrina) account for twenty-one examples throughout the city, some of these being converted from small shops

¹¹⁸Ibid., no. 271.

¹¹⁹Corpus, p. 105

¹²⁰Ibid., nos. 77, 122, and 442.

late in the city's history.¹²¹ Two public buildings, the Stabian Baths and the Macellum, also possess lararia.¹²²

The problem of dating the lararia of Pompeii is too complex to be included in this study. Perhaps the correct dating of the shrines will never be known with any certainty due to the mixing of painting styles within the Pompeian houses and also the numerous repairs made in the first century A.D. Lararia which can be attributed to all four of the major painting styles are known. The First Style of painting is shown in a lararium which is decorated with a painted pattern of small blocks.¹²³ This lararium was largely covered up when the atrium in which it was located was redecorated in the Fourth Style. The lararium illustrated in Plate I, Fig. 3 is in the Second Style; at least it was constructed after the walls of the atrium which were in Second Style. In fact, this shrine contrasts strongly with the Second Style atmosphere which surrounds it.¹²⁴ The interior of a niche lararium in V. iii. 7.¹²⁵ is elegantly done in Fourth Style designs with

¹²¹Ibid., p. 106

¹²²Ibid., Macellum no. 473. Stabian Baths no. 472.

¹²³Corpus, no. 244.

¹²⁴Maiuri, Las casa del Menandro, pp. 99-100.

¹²⁵Boyce, Corpus, no. 112.

a floor painted in imitation of red and yellow marble. However, the dating of these shrines, despite their definite painting styles is a subject of considerable dispute.

Pompeii also has numerous examples of the street shrines dedicated to the Lares compitales.¹²⁶ Two of these lararia are illustrated on Plate XII, Figs. 29 and 30. These are probably associated with the Imperial Cult and were not concerned with purely domestic activities. One example is of the niche form (Plate XII, Fig. 29), while the other is a wall painting with portable altar. Another interesting niche located in I. xii. 5. is included here although it too falls outside the subject of this work (see Plate VII, Fig. 17). This niche consists of a corbelled arch, with projecting ledge (altar?), and contains a stone. Perhaps this refers to the worship which surrounds the Syrian goddess Cybele since a sacred stone was her distinguishing attribute.¹²⁷

Pompeii contains by far the greatest number of extant household shrines in the Roman world. However, examples of lararia have been discovered at other Roman sites. Nearby

¹²⁶Supra, p. 6, n. 10.

¹²⁷Rose, op. cit., p. 273; Franz Cumont, Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 116. Originally a Phrygian deity, Cybele picked up much litholatry in Syria.

PLATE XII

Pompeian Street Shrines

Figure 29
VII. iv. 17.



Figure 30
I. xi. 1.

Herculaneum has lararia, many of which are similar to those of Pompeii. One unique lararium preserved in Herculaneum is constructed entirely of wood.¹²⁸ This shrine is of the aedicula type with a top consisting of two Corinthian columns in prostyle and a bottom which is fashioned into a cupboard, complete with domestic utensils, sacrificial implements, and statuettes of household deities. One exotic lararium in the Casa del Mobilio is covered with marine shells and appears very similar to a fountain house. Ostia, the port of Rome in the Empire, also has examples of domestic shrines. The houses and shops on via Epagathiana, an Ostian street which marked the outer pomerium of the oldest section of the city and united the Tiber with the main street (Decumanus), contain many lararia. On the western front of this street there was a portico paved in mosaic pilasters under which were various houses with stairs and shops.¹²⁹ On the opposite side, beside the stores, there existed a number of shops built up against the tufa walls of the ancient city. Some little niches in the back walls of these shops are considered to have been humble shrines to the

¹²⁸Amedeo Maiuri, Herculaneum (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1963), p. 111.

¹²⁹Guido Calza, Ostia (Rome: Bestetti and Tumminelli, 1926), p. 145.

Lares.¹³⁰ Inside one of the warehouses of Ostia was found a small vestibule, covered with an open roof. On the walls were two graceful, little shrines in brickwork formed by moulding little yellow and red bricks and placing inside the niches triangular pieces of pumice stone.¹³¹ These shrines, similar to the Pompeian aediculae, are repeated in the end wall of the courtyard.¹³² A domestic altar found near here was dedicated to the numen of Serapis, to Silvanus, and to the Lares.¹³³ One of the Ostian houses, the House of the Lararium, is also noteworthy. The court of this house has a fountain in the center and a well. There is a little niche in the wall which is flanked by two grooved pilasters with composite capitals.¹³⁴ This niche is surmounted by a tympanum built of small round bricks (also yellow and red) and over the little arch were placed small pieces of pumice stone which give the entire lararium a distinctively polychrome appearance.¹³⁵ Again, as in Herculaneum, the serpent is present in Ostian religious iconography. A small serpent carved on a terracotta tablet

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 146.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Russell Meiggs, Roman Ostia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 369.

¹³⁴ Calza, op. cit., p. 152.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 152-153.

found in the market and placed on the western side is said to represent the Genius of the place.¹³⁶

Lararia which seem closely related to those in Pompeii and which in fact may antedate them are those found in the Roman homes on Delos. The paintings found on the Delian shrines follow closely and even duplicate religious patterns known in the Pompeian lararia.¹³⁷ Examples of Lares Praestites, Lares Compitales, and even Lares Ludentes (patrons of the games) are found in Delos.¹³⁸ Hercules, Liber, Silvanus, Juno, Ceres, and Mercury are the Penates most frequently encountered in Delos.¹³⁹ The famous House of the Dolphins clearly demonstrates a similarity to the Pompeian lararia since it contains two domestic altars and a round pillar-shaped altar with rectangular lararium.¹⁴⁰ This latter monument combines a niche and altar which Bulard¹⁴¹ feels is quite similar to those of Pompeii. The garlands which are painted on this lararium are almost identical to similar ones found in Pompeian house

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 144.

¹³⁷ Bulard, op. cit., p. 51.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 434, 162, and 331 respectively.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 421-423.

¹⁴⁰ Marcel Bulard, Peintures murales et mosaïques de Delos (Paris: Piot, 1908), p. 12.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 15.

shrines.¹⁴² Another painting fragment shows a sacrificial scene with a hog being sacrificed before a lighted and garlanded altar. This painting is important also because it contains the painted letters AGAT in front of the altar, a possible reference to the cult of the Agathos Daimon which was well established at Delos.¹⁴³ Bulard¹⁴⁴ believes that the Agathos Daimon was the equivalent of the Roman Genius which he feels was worshipped in this lararium. Another house, the House of the Sacred Lake, has a lararium to the right of the main entrance of the home and upon which are painted several rhytons.¹⁴⁵ Lares are also depicted in Delian lararia and their representations closely parallel those of Pompeii. A house near the theater quarter has a painting which depicts a Lar dressed in short skirt, Phrygian cap, and holding a brimming rhyton.¹⁴⁶ A bas-relief found in Delos shows two Lares and Bulard suggests that it might be an example of a Lararium Compitales.¹⁴⁷ Floral crowns of Pompeian type are also seen in the painting of the Delian lararia and Bulard feels that

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 20, n. 1.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 28. See also De Marchi, op. cit., I, 138. The pig is the most frequent sacrifice to the domestic deities.

¹⁴⁴Peintures murales, p. 28, Fig. 8.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 37

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 41, Figs. 13, 14.

this suggests a close relationship with Pompeii.¹⁴⁸ Serpents appear in the Delian painting also, one depiction shows a snake coiled around an omphalos, a motif which is represented at Pompeii.¹⁴⁹ Another bas-relief from the theater quarter also represents a serpent coiled around an omphalos.¹⁵⁰ Bulard also argues that the figure of Hercules in the House of the Sacred Lake is closely related to his representations at Pompeii since both are attired with a club and covered with similar garlands.¹⁵¹ He also describes a figure found in a storeroom which closely resembles the lararia images of the Genius in Pompeii.¹⁵² Although obscure in its definite meaning, the painting also contains two figures of Tychēs, one in the act of crowning herself, and Bulard feels that it is related to the cult of the Lares.¹⁵³ Bulard maintains that these Delian shrines are similar to those found in Pompeii and that

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 50, Figs. 17 and 18. Also p. 51.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 69. Bulard feels that the serpents are the symbols of the Genius. An omphalos with entwined serpents is shown directly associated with Apollo in a mural painting found in the triclinium of the House of the Vettii in Pompeii. See Alfonso de Franciscis, La pittura Pompeiana (Florence: Sadea, 1965), Plate 16.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., Fig. 20, Insula Six, House H. For a Pompeian example of the identical motif see supra, p. 86.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 69. ¹⁵² Ibid., p. 78. ¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 79.

they are products of identical commercial atmospheres.¹⁵⁴ The Delian houses date from the early first century B.C. and late second century B.C. and this also indicates that they may have exerted some artistic influence on Campanian representations. Both Pompeii and Delos seem to be drawing on a larger reservoir of eastern and Greek religious concepts and the art of their household shrines reflects this.

Emporiae, a Roman colony in eastern Spain, has also yielded important evidence reminiscent of that found at Pompeii. In the garden of a Roman house is an altar covered with stucco and with a most interesting painting.¹⁵⁵ Two crested serpents are depicted on this altar above a painted altar.¹⁵⁶ Professor Almagro believes these to be chthonic interpretations of the cult of the dead and also indications that the altar is in fact a herm.¹⁵⁷ However, the serpents seem to complement those Genius reptiles seen in both Delos and Pompeii.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁵⁵Martin Almagro, Ampurias (Barcelona, 1966), p. 35.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Letter from Martin Almagro, Director, Instituto Espanol de Prehistoria, Madrid, Spain, November 11, 1966.

A crude lararium was also excavated in Roman Silchester in Britain. In House Two, a platform was unearthed which lay at the north end of an enclosed courtyard.¹⁵⁸ A structure on this platform had walls which were covered with plaster and painted blue with a panel of mosaic in front of it. Small figures were also discovered here although none, unfortunately, were identifiable.¹⁵⁹ The excavator believed that an aedicula type shrine, similar to those found at Pompeii, once stood here. A fine bronze statue of a Lar also has been unearthed in Silchester and probably once reposed in just such a lararium. The figure stands four and one half inches high and holds a mappa and patera.¹⁶⁰ A dancing Lar with short skirt and ram's head rhyton has also been discovered in Britain. This figure is posed in precisely the same manner as those illustrated on Plate II, Fig. 5.¹⁶¹ Both of these statuettes date from the late empire period and both are of very fine workmanship.

There are several examples of Roman lararia from North Africa. A primitive and badly preserved one from the town of Volubilis contained bronze figurines of Mercury and

¹⁵⁸G. C. Boon, Roman Silchester (London: Max Parish, 1957), p. 124.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain (London: Trustees of British Museum, 1964), p. 60, Plate 24.

Isis.¹⁶² It is important to note that these two deities, popular with both the merchants of Pompeii and Delos, are in evidence in yet another commercial town. A domestic altar also is known from Volubulis.¹⁶³

Roman domestic religion was much in evidence all over the Mediterranean world and the Roman took his household cult wherever his travels might lead him. It is true that the eclectic nature of the Roman enabled him to acquire new deities to place in his household shrines but the basic roots of his religious heritage remained constant. The lararia of Pompeii demonstrate the basic conservatism of the Roman in his religious practices. Future excavations at Pompeii will probably uncover more examples of lararia. Many details regarding the origin and exact nature of the Lares, Genius, and Penates are still largely unknown. Nevertheless, the importance of the domestic religion of the Romans must not be disregarded if we are to understand properly their civilization.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶²Robert Etienne, Le quartier nord-est de Volubulis (Paris: Boccard, 1960), p. 57.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁶⁴Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, The Ancient City, trans. by Willard Small (New York: Doubleday, 1955), p. 396. Reprint of the 1874 Edition. Fustel de Coulanges argued that when the domestic worship of the Romans was abolished the constitution of the family also vanished. He also states that the Roman law of property was altered, the formalities of ancient laws were abolished, and the absolute authority of the paterfamilias was lost as a result of the displacement of Roman domestic religion by Christianity.

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