

The Gods of the Roman Family: Domestic Religion and Imperial  
Literature at Rome

By

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M.A., University of Kansas, 2020

B.A., University of Kansas, 2018

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Classics and the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: 4 June 2020

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Date Approved: 4 June 2020

## Abstract

This thesis addresses the deities of domestic Roman religion, i.e. the *lares*, *penates*, and *genii*, and how references to these deities in Latin literature evolved during the first century CE. I chart how domestic religion became discursive as a consequence of Augustan religious reforms and how subsequent Latin authors engage the language of domestic religion to participate in contemporary social discourses. I focus my analysis on key texts from the Neronian and Flavian periods, namely Seneca, Lucan, Valerius Flaccus, and Statius. By exploring how these authors engage with domestic religion, this thesis aims to elucidate the cultural and literary importance of the gods of domestic religion and enhance our incomplete understanding of the importance of domestic religion.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee for their unwavering support, guidance, and mentorship. Gina White, whose passion and dedication to the craft are truly inspiring, always provided a fresh perspective on my work and challenged me to delve deeper. Without her insight and expertise, for which I am exceedingly grateful, this project would be poorer. My thanks also go to Emma Scioli, who not only provided meticulous and incisive comments on my work throughout my time at the University of Kansas but fostered this project in its most infant stages. She alone has been one of the most influential forces on my scholarly life and deserves the credit for any virtues that lie herein. Phil Stinson's dedication to his students and, in particular, the close attention he has paid and the care he has given to my education have been invaluable. I also wish to thank those who have otherwise contributed to the person I am today: Tara Welch, who first introduced me to the joys of Latin; Craig Jendza, who always asks the right questions; and Jonathan Lamb, whose sharp intellect, enthusiasm, and good humor I strive to emulate. A final debt of gratitude is owed to Emma Anderson, without whose love and support I would be utterly lost and bereft of purpose.

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## INTRODUCTION

The ancient gods of the Roman household, family, and individual—the *lares*, *penates*, and the *genii*—played a large role in the quotidian experience of Romans throughout their history. The presence of these gods far outstripped the grander deities of the Roman pantheon, to which so many historians and scholars of Roman religion dedicate their time. Indeed, precious few have turned their attention to the problem of understanding what I will refer to as ‘domestic Roman religion’ despite its prominence in surviving literary sources and visual art from antiquity. While I share the view with many modern scholars of Roman religion that *religion privée* (often translated as “domestic religion”) never existed for the Romans, I use this term to refer to the *lares*, *penates*, and *genii* as deities most closely tied to the Roman household.<sup>1</sup> Those who have attempted to elucidate the nature of domestic Roman religion have often focused their efforts on authors and evidence from the Republican period and the age of Augustus and neglected the plethora of material from the Neronian and Flavian periods.

This project aims to offer a new understanding of how domestic Roman religion was understood, negotiated, and deployed by Latin authors of the first century CE. In what follows, I demonstrate how domestic religion entered public discourse in the Augustan Age and explore how subsequent authors engaged with these deities to participate in contemporary public discourse. Given the limited scope of this project, I narrow my analysis to key texts and authors from the Neronian and Flavian periods, which will serve as a representative sample. To accomplish this, the thesis will consist of three chapters, categorized by chronology of works discussed so as to more effectively chart how authorial engagement with the gods of domestic religion changed over time.

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<sup>1</sup> Most recently Rüpke 2018: 255.

In the first chapter, I lay the groundwork for understanding the changes that took place regarding domestic religion in the first century by examining early mentions of the *lares* and *penates* in Plautus and Cicero, as well as how they were treated by the Augustan poets, namely Vergil. As Harriet Flower and Karl Galinsky have convincingly shown, religion surrounding the *lares* was a complex and multi-faceted part of Roman culture and underwent enlargement and purposeful development under the Augustan religious program at the end of the first century BCE.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I tackle exactly how domestic religion becomes discursive in that authors use it to participate in contemporary public discourses. Only by laying such foundations will we be able to fully chart the development of domestic religion in literature during the first century.

With our footing thus established, I shall turn to examining Seneca's *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, his tragic corpus, and Lucan's *Bellum Civile* in Chapter 2 in order to demonstrate how authors from the Neronian period engage domestic religion. While there has been much debate about how to read Senecan drama in terms of performance and literary value, as well as its philosophy and psychology, I will draw on connections between Seneca's own thoughts about the tragic medium, as evinced in his *Epistulae*, to better understand his references to the household gods in his tragic corpus. A study of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* will then shed further light on Neronian attitudes to domestic religion. His epic will provide further insight for the present study not only because it was a significant contribution to the discourse of its own period, but also because the Flavian poets saw it as a canonical text. In the *Bellum Civile*, the poet places the *lares* and *penates* at the heart of Roman identity and uses the language of domestic religion to nuance his characterizations of Caesar and Pompey. Finally, I will discuss Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* as well as Statius's *Silvae* and his *Thebaid*. These texts are paramount to

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<sup>2</sup> Flower 2017; Galinsky 1996.



understanding how domestic religion functioned at the end of this turbulent century. In Chapter 3, I explore how, for the Flavian poets, domestic religion is linked with notions of family, imperial cult, civil war, and man's relationship with nature.

All these authors engage with domestic religion in different ways and in different contexts. The overarching goal of this thesis is to demonstrate how important these seemingly minor references to the domestic religion are for our understanding of Latin literature in the first century CE. While many have shrugged off the significance of the *lares* and *penates*, I hope to start a more fruitful discussion of their meaning and usage.

## CHAPTER 1: DOMESTIC RELIGION AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Before examining how authors of the Neronian and Flavian periods deploy the language of domestic religion to participate in contemporary discourses, we must lay the groundwork for our interpretation by establishing how domestic religion entered public discourse in the first place. It is helpful to first define more exactly what we take “religion” to mean in this context. In this project, I follow Jörg Rüpke’s definition of “religion” as a system of communication—“a network of practical strategies, experiences, and conceptions, also acts of institutionalization and shared signs, that came into use or had traditionally defined communication in different social spaces.”<sup>3</sup> Denis Feeney’s seminal work on the interactions of Roman literature and religion is additionally helpful for understanding religion as an ever-evolving system of knowledge as well as communication.<sup>4</sup> Literature (especially that of the elite) provides a unique context where authors can use religion to participate in a variety of contemporary discourses.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, I chart how authorial engagements with the gods of domestic religion evolve as we move from early Latin literature to the Republican period and on to the Augustan Age where references to domestic religion are far more frequent and complex.

Rüpke has persuasively argued that Roman religion becomes discursive during the Roman Republic and points to Ennius, Varro, and Cicero as the prime examples of cultural change that Roman religion underwent during this period.<sup>6</sup> He writes that religion becomes discursive through the process of rationalization—that religion was “made the object of a specialized discourse, with its own rules of argument, and institutional loci; and, thus codified

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<sup>3</sup> Rüpke 2018: 255, *per litteras*.

<sup>4</sup> Feeney 1999 *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> On the discourses of elite Latin authors, see Keith 2004: 7-35.

<sup>6</sup> Rüpke 2012: 143-51; see also 152-71 on Ennius; 172-85 on Varro; 186-204 on Cicero.

and elaborated, these then guided future conduct and innovation.”<sup>7</sup> In becoming discursive, religious language becomes available to authors for discussing contemporary issues. Rüpke does not differentiate between spheres of religion, however, which is pertinent to the present study. As we will see, the gods of domestic religion are slower than their state-religion counterparts to take on this new discursive context for which Rüpke argues, and they do not truly become codified in religious discourse until the Augustan Age. Cicero provides the first instance of an author deploying domestic religion in public discourse in his speech *de Domo Sua*, wherein he argues that his house has just as much religious significance as Clodius’ proposed temple to Libertas. The gods of domestic religion are central to Cicero’s argument, yet do not carry as much symbolic weight as they do in later texts such as Vergil’s *Aeneid*. I contend that Augustus brought domestic religion into public discourse through his religious reforms and by using this aspect of Roman religion to secure his own status as divine.<sup>8</sup> With these two actions, Augustus created a conceptual framework that Romans employed to talk about the imperial family, their own families, and their conceptions of cultural identity.

I would like to also address the prevailing notion among scholars that the *lares* and *penates* are most often just synonyms for nouns like *domus* or *tectum*—that Latin authors simply use them for metrical reasons or variance of diction. The names of these gods resist singular translation, for the Latin words themselves encompassed many different ideas in the mind of the Roman reader. Not only were the *lares* tutelary gods of household and home, they represented the physical house and all that resided in it: namely the family, ancestors, slaves, the house, the hearth, and even the earth on which the home was built. They can be equated with the Greek

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<sup>7</sup> Rüpke 2012: 1.

<sup>8</sup> On the melding of religion and philosophy see Rüpke 2012: 143-51.

δαίμονες, or personal guardian spirits. Cicero provides evidence for this correlation in his version of Plato's *Timaeus* but only hesitantly offers such comment on the nature of these notoriously elusive gods:

*Reliquorum autem, quos Graeci δαίμονας appellant, nostri, opinor, lares, si modo hoc recte conversum videri potest, et nosse et enuntiare ortum eorum maius est, quam ut profiteri nos scriber audeamus.*

Of the remaining [deities], those which the Greeks call δαίμονας, I judge to be our *lares*, if only this might seem to be the right translation, to know and to relate their origin is greater than we should dare to endeavor. (Cic. *Tim.* 38)

As Pedar Foss has appropriately and concisely formulated, the *lares* are the gods of the living family and the *penates* are the gods of the ancestors.<sup>9</sup> Martin Stöckinger adds to this that the *penates* are material in nature, as evinced by their descriptions in Vergil's *Aeneid*. The *genius*, in a broad sense, is a *personal* protective spirit, somewhat akin to the modern conception of a guardian angel in the Christian belief. It is most frequently connected with the procreative spirit of the head of the household, or *paterfamilias*. There is another type of *genius*, however, that refers to the serpents often depicted on household shrines. Harriet Flower has recently elucidated the nature of these serpents that often accompany the *lares* in wall-paintings from Campania as representations of the *genius loci*, a guardian spirit of nature whose domain is the land on which the home is built.<sup>10</sup> Many interpret the *lares* and *penates* as synonyms for *domus* and translate them simply as “home” or “house.” Such a choice in translation elides the multiplex meaning that these gods carry and does an injustice to the Latin authors we read. Moreover, it removes all nuance of family, ancestral worship, and collective household that these gods embody—symbolic meaning which was available to Latin authors as well as their audience.

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<sup>9</sup> Foss 1997: 198-9; *contra* Rüpke 2018: 253-4.

<sup>10</sup> Flower 2017: 63-70.

## BECOMING DISCURSIVE

Let us turn first to the earliest surviving instance of domestic Roman religion in Latin literature: Plautus' fragmentary comedy, the *Aulularia*. Given the overall fragmentary nature of early Latin literature, we have very little evidence for domestic religion in authors before Cicero. It is truly regrettable that the end of the *Aulularia* does not survive, for it would likely provide us with a much fuller picture of domestic religion and its role in literature in Plautus' time. In the play as we have it, the prologue is given by the *lar familiaris* who is portrayed in his role as the guardian of the home and family members. The *lar* clarifies his identity in the first lines of the play, saying "I am the *lar* of the family from whose household you just saw me exiting" (*ego Lar sum familiaris ex hac familia | unde exeuntem me aspexistis, prol. 2-3*).<sup>11</sup> He then outlines his main duties as the *lar* of the household including both occupying the house and protecting it for the family that dwells within: "it has been many years now that I have inhabited this home and protected it for the father and grandfather of this man who now lives here" (*hanc domum | iam multos annos est quom possideo et colo | patri avoque iam huius qui nunc hic habet, prol. 3-5*). Plautus' *lar* pays special attention to the ancestral aspect of domestic religion when he relegates the current inhabitant of the house (the father in the play) to a subordinate clause and privileges instead that man's father and grandfather. He then states that his main goal in the play is to protect and provide a fitting mate and dowry for the daughter of this man since she properly venerates him at the household shrine (*ea mihi cotidie | aut ture aut uino aut aliqui semper supplicat, | dat mihi coronas. eius honoris gratia | feci thesaurum ut hic reperiret Euclio, | quo illam facilius nuptum, si uellet, daret, prol. 23-7*). This is the only time the audience hears from

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<sup>11</sup> All translations are my own.

the *lar*, however, since he is absent from the rest of the play. In this short prologue, Plautus seems only to engage with the basic features of the *lares* in that they are tutelary gods of the Roman household and connected with reverence for one's ancestors.

While Plautus' *lar familiaris* is relatively simple, Cicero's use of domestic religion in his speech, the *de Domo Sua*, is more complex and engages the *lares* and *penates* in political discourse. Fully understanding Cicero's position on and use of domestic religion is a complex enterprise and requires more attention than the scope of this thesis allows. For the present purpose, it will suffice to examine the basic role of domestic religion in the *de Domo Sua*. As Rüpke has compellingly argued, Cicero stands as a nexus between religion as practice and religion as discourse: he is the first to connect political and social life as well as philosophy with religion.<sup>12</sup> This nexus is evident in the *de Domo Sua*, where Cicero argues that his house should not be demolished for the purposes of building Clodius' temple to *Libertas* because his ancestral religious claim on the land is just as powerful as that of the state religion. Central to his argument are the *lares* and *penates* of his ancestral home, which Cicero uses to claim that his home is not just his home, but a contested religious site. Clodius consecrated the property for a temple of *Libertas*, but Cicero argues that his (domestic) religious and legal claims outweigh this act. Moreover, he argues Clodius acted criminally and impiously in devoting his house to the goddess *Libertas*:

Ex his igitur bonis, ex quibus nemo rem ullam attigit qui non omnium iudicio sceleratissimus haberetur, di immortales domum meam concupiverunt? **Ista tua pulchra Libertas deos penatis et familiaris meos lares expulit, ut se ipsa tamquam in captivis sedibus conlocaret?** Quid est sanctius, quid omni religione munitius quam domus unius cuiusque civium? Hic arae sunt, hic foci, hic **di penates**, hic sacra, religiones, caerimoniae continentur; hoc perfugium est ita sanctum omnibus ut inde abripi neminem fas sit.

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<sup>12</sup> Rüpke 2012: 186-7.

Therefore, out of these good things (none of them touched anything who was not held to be most impious by the judgement of all) do the immortal gods desire my house? **Did your lovely Libertas drive out my *penates* and familial *lares*, so that she might establish herself there as if in dwellings held hostage?** What is more sacred, what more protected by every religion, than the home of each individual citizen? Here my altars, here my hearths, here my *penates*, here my temples, religions, rituals are kept; it is a sanctuary so sacred to all that it would not be righteous to tear anyone away from it. (Cic. *Dom.* 108-9)

In this passage from the speech, Cicero makes it clear that his house is a religious site and that, by law, it cannot be consecrated to another deity. He paints the image of Libertas forcefully driving out his familial *lares* and *penates* and even describes the home as “dwellings held hostage” by the interceding goddess (*captivis sedibus*). Here the gods of domestic religion become a tool for Cicero to communicate the ancestral, personal, and religious significance of his home. Moreover, he taps into this aspect of Romans’ religious belief system in an effective rhetorical move to defeat Clodius and save the house. In this instance, domestic religion becomes a discursive tool that Cicero uses in a specifically political context.

### AUGUSTUS’ RELIGIOUS REFORMS

As I hope to have shown in the preceding section, there was a marked shift in the literary usage of domestic religion. While Plautus puts a *lar* on stage, the god’s function is only to provide the prologue to the human action and operates only in his widely established capacity as protector of the household. Cicero deploys the *lares* and *penates* frequently throughout his large corpus and often in political discourse but does not employ them for literary purposes. In the Augustan Age, however, we see these gods take on greater symbolic and cultural meaning as references to them in literature are much more frequent. This is clearest in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, where they are central to understanding Aeneas both as a character in the epic and as the ancient ancestor of the Roman people. But why such an expansion in the Augustan Age? What prompted

these authors to engage so much more with domestic religion than their predecessors? I argue that Augustus' religious reforms and subsequent ascent to the status of divine are the root causes for this sudden increase, especially considering the close ties between Augustus and domestic religion in the *Aeneid*. Karl Galinsky noted the connections between Augustus as *divus* and the cult of the *lares* in his 1998 monograph *Augustan Culture* and Harriet Flower has elucidated the many connections between domestic Roman religion and Augustus in more depth in her recent monograph on the *lares*.<sup>13</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, I build on the important work of Flower and Galinsky to demonstrate that, in renewing domestic religion as a part of his aim towards attaining divine status, Augustus enabled domestic religion to become a fully-fledged discourse in Roman society.

Around approximately 7 BCE, a new cult to the *lares Augusti* appear at crossroad shrines in the city of Rome, likely due to Augustus' program of religious reforms. As Flower demonstrates, the *lares Augusti* seem to have evolved from the *lares compitales* upon Augustus' magnification of the *vicomagistri*. Galinsky suggests that Augustus' association with the cult of the *lares compitales* was integral to his ascension to divine status.<sup>14</sup> He briefly mentions that Augustus claimed the title *pater patriae* in 2 BCE, which closely maps onto the role of the *genius* in domestic religion as I outline above.<sup>15</sup> Flower expands heavily on Galinsky's notions, concluding that, even though Augustus did not publicly commemorate the *lares*, "he let the enthusiasm of Rome's newest citizens for him speak for itself, without needing to elucidate the theological implications of the thousands of *lares Augusti* in Rome."<sup>16</sup> Thus, Augustus models

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<sup>13</sup> Galinsky 1996; Flower 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Galinsky 1996: 300-2.

<sup>15</sup> Galinsky 1996: 301.

<sup>16</sup> Flower 2017: 347.



himself as the *paterfamilias* of the entire Roman state through the preexisting framework provided by domestic religion.

While Flower's examination of the *lares Augusti* is persuasive, she misses the mark slightly when she writes that "it was the very ubiquity and popularity of the august *lares*...that was met by silence in elite texts."<sup>17</sup> Here, Flower gestures at the lack of specific references to the *lares augusti* in Latin literature, but as we will see in the case of Vergil's *Aeneid*, there is anything but "silence in elite texts." I contend that the sudden spike in frequency of allusions to the *lares* in Augustan literature must be due to the explosion of popularity surrounding the new cult to the *lares Augusti*. Vergil's *Aeneid* provides the clearest example of how complex references to domestic religion took shape after Cicero and amidst Augustus' new religious program. Though the *lares* with which Aeneas engages in Vergil's epic are not spelled out to be the *lares Augusti*, it is difficult not to associate them with Augustus and his renewal of domestic religion at Rome. As many scholars have argued, the *Aeneid* is an epic primarily concerned with *pietas* and social responsibility among other aspects of Augustan culture.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, as a national epic commissioned by Augustus, the *Aeneid* is permeated by the many reforms and changes Augustus made in his new role as *princeps* and *pontifex maximus* and thus reflects the dominant cultural ideologies at play during its period.<sup>19</sup> Of these cultural aspects to the epic poem, its focus on *pietas* is central to our present concern since, as many have scholars have demonstrated, Aeneas' *pietas* is a virtue most often attributed to Augustus and the most significant of those listed on Augustus' shield.<sup>20</sup> While Aeneas is often described as *pius* in many

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<sup>17</sup> Flower 2017: 347.

<sup>18</sup> See most recently Stöckinger 2013 and Scheid 2005; cf. Galinsky 1996: 247-8, Gottlieb 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Zanker 1988; Galinsky 1996: 244-5.

<sup>20</sup> Zanker 1988: 91-104; Harrison 1997: 70; West 1990; Drew 1927: 26-31.

different contexts, this characteristic of the hero rests on his relationship with his father, his son, and most importantly, his household gods. I use the term “household gods” here because the *Aeneid* is specific differentiating between the *penates*, which Vergil uses to describe the physical, ancestral artifacts that Aeneas carries from Troy to Italy, and the *lares*, to which Aeneas sacrifices after arriving in Sicily.

As mentioned above, Stöckinger has convincingly shown that the *penates* were understood to be material objects related to one’s ancestors. This makes sense given the great amount of evidence for the *penates* on Augustan coins depicting Aeneas and the literary evidence adduced in Stöckinger’s argument. What has gone unexamined, as far as I am aware, is the fact that Vergil does not mention the *lares*, the natural counterparts to the *penates*, until Aeneas and his crew reach Sicily in Book 5 and pay homage at Anchises’ grave:

haec memorans cinerem et sopitos suscitāt ignis,  
**Pergameumque Larem et canae penetralia Vestae**      745  
 farre pio et plena supplex veneratur acerra.

Remembering this, he rekindles the ash and the sleeping flames, and, as a suppliant, venerates the **Trojan Lar** and the **most sacred places of bright Vesta** with pious grain and a full incense-box. (*V. A.* 5.744-6)

This passage contains the first reference to the *lares* and *penates* in the *Aeneid*. Though the *penates* are not explicitly stated in this passage, the phrase “most sacred places of bright Vesta” (*canae penetralia Vestae*) refers to them. For, as Varro relates in his *de Lingua Latina*, the temple of Vesta in Rome likely had its own *penates*, which some think are the *penates* of Aeneas.<sup>21</sup> Based on their location in Sicily, some have taken this to mean that the *lares* were part of some native Italian religion, especially considering that both the *penates* and the *lares* are

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<sup>21</sup> Gransden 1976: 176; Zanker 1988: 201–2. For a more sobering discussion, see Flower 2017: 108-12.

brought to the fore here and in the house of Evander later in Book 8.<sup>22</sup> This is likely mistaken however, since this *lar* is specifically labelled as being from Pergamum and is most closely associated with Anchises' ghost that appears to Aeneas in the preceding lines. Vergil's reference here engages the aspect of the *lares* which protected the family members of a household in addition to the physical home, much like the *lar familiaris* in Plautus' *Aulularia* aims to protect and provide for the daughter. I contend that the *lares* appear once Aeneas and his crew reach Sicily as an indication that they are ever closer to their destined home and are in greater need of protection from their ancestors. The aforementioned passage from Book 8 similarly comes directly after the moment Aeneas recognizes Venus' portents in the sky and realizes that the impending war for their new homeland is upon them at last. Thus, the connections here are strongest between the gods of domestic religion and (divine) ancestors. In referencing the *lares* and *penates* at these two key instances, Vergil accesses their associations with house and home for his Roman readers and engages in the discourses of family, ancestry, and Roman identity.

A more powerful example of engaging domestic religion in political discourse occurs, however, when Vergil deploys the gods of domestic religion in the ecphrasis of Aeneas' shield in book 8. Ken Gransden elucidates how this passage explicitly connects Aeneas with Augustus but does not discuss the meaning behind Vergil's charged use of the *penates*.<sup>23</sup> Lee Fratantuono and Alden Smith provide some interesting, yet inconclusive commentary in their new commentary on these lines.<sup>24</sup> Other scholars, however, do not seem to have found the presence of domestic religion on the shield worthy of discussion.<sup>25</sup> Vergil writes:

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<sup>22</sup> V. A. 8.540-2.

<sup>23</sup> Gransden 1976: 176-7.

<sup>24</sup> Fratantuono and Smith 2018: 697-99.

<sup>25</sup> This aspect to Vergil's depiction of Augustus is not mentioned by Harrison 1997, Hardie 1986, or West 1975.

hinc **Augustus** agens Italos in proelia **Caesar**  
 cum **patribus populoque, penatibus et magnis dis,**  
 stans celsa in puppi, **geminas** cui tempora **flammas** 680  
 laeta vomunt **patriumque** aperitur vertice **sidus**.

On this side, **Augustus Caesar** driving the Italians into the fray with the **fathers**, the **people**, and the **great penates**, standing on the lofty stern, his happy temples emit **twin flames** and his **ancestral star** appears on his head. (V. A. 8.678-81)

These four lines that depict Augustus are densely packed with religious and propagandistic imagery. Vergil's use of the title "Augustus" is marked in that it appears only here and in book 6 when Anchises points out Octavian as Aeneas' famous heir in the underworld.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, Vergil employs the title to explicitly remark on the ancestral connection between Aeneas and Augustus. The poet further achieves this by repeating the phrase *penatibus et magnis dis* from Aeneas' relation of his travels to Dido in book 3: "I was born across the deep, an exile, with my comrades, my son, and my great *penates*" (*feror exsul in altum | cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis*, V. A. 3.11-12). The differences between the tricola of these two passages reflect Augustus' appropriation of domestic religion.<sup>27</sup> Whereas Aeneas is accompanied by his comrades, son, and household gods, all of which effectively make up his household, Augustus' household is the Roman state because he is the *pater patriae*. Instead of *socii*, Augustus has the Senate; instead of a son, the people of Rome.

The connections between Aeneas and Augustus go further. Augustus position on the lofty stern (*stans celsa in puppi*) mimics Aeneas' position later in book 10 as he arrives to the battle (*stans celsa in puppi*, 10.261). Moreover, as Gransden points out, the "double flame" (*geminas flammas*) refers to the "Julian star," the comet which appeared as Augustus hosted funeral games

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<sup>26</sup> V. A. 6.792.

<sup>27</sup> Lloyd 1956 notes the significance of this parallel, but without critical attention to the nature of domestic religion; mentioned briefly by Coleman 1982: 146-7.

for Julius Caesar and was taken to symbolize Augustus' divinity.<sup>28</sup> Nandini Pandey complicates past arguments that this sign was intentional on Augustus' part, but writes that this "account of the deification...itself testifies to the prevalence and strength of belief in Augustus."<sup>29</sup> It is not necessary to argue that these moves towards deification and propagandistic images were intentionally constructed by Augustus, for it is clear based on the work of Zanker, Pandey, and Flower, that Augustus received unprecedented support from the *populus*. Lastly, the "paternal star" (*patrium...sidus*) was yet another programmatic and widely used image of divinity for Augustus which he himself propagated, as Zanker has shown.<sup>30</sup> The combination of all this imagery focused on the divinity and divine ancestry of Augustus is heightened by Vergil's reference to the *penates*, which he intentionally deploys in the repeated line from book 3 to activate the connection between Aeneas and the *princeps*. Augustus' appropriation of domestic religion as part of his ascent to *divus* marks out the territory for authors to engage the *lares* and *penates* in literary discourses where they had not previously.

I hope to have shown how the new religious programs of Augustus and his appropriation of domestic religion as a framework for his apotheosis enabled domestic religion to become discursive. As we have seen, early references to the gods of domestic religion, such as in Plautus' *Aulularia*, are simple and only engage with the basic aspects of these deities. Cicero indeed deploys domestic religion in legal discourse, thus engaging their symbolic associations with the household and family in Roman society, but limits these references to a legal context. It is only during the age of Augustus that domestic religion becomes discursive and is deployed in a wide variety of discourses. Vergil's *Aeneid* provides a clear example of the ties that exist

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<sup>28</sup> Suet. *Iul.* 88;

<sup>29</sup> Pandey 2013: 445.

<sup>30</sup> Zanker 1988: 34-7.

between the gods of domestic religion and Augustus as well as how Augustan Age authors engage domestic religion on entirely new levels than we saw in Plautus and Cicero. Here, references to these gods are multiplex and take on new meanings related to discourses on imperial cult, family, ancestry, and politics to name a few. The new Augustan religious program and the creation of imperial cult opened new discursive avenues which Latin authors discussed and commented on through the language of domestic religion. In what follows, I explore how authors after the Augustan Age deploy domestic religion and engage these deities to discuss contemporary issues.

## CHAPTER 2: THE NERONIAN PERIOD

In this chapter, I closely examine several of Seneca's tragedies and Lucan's *Bellum Civile* to demonstrate how perceptions of domestic religion began to change during the Neronian period. As both a philosopher and tragic poet who stands as a nexus between Roman and Greek thought, Seneca provides us with an intellectually varied and immensely fruitful corpus.<sup>31</sup> I argue that Stoic philosophy is paramount to understanding his plays and that we can see Seneca's philosophy encoded within them.<sup>32</sup> Seneca aims for these plays to be didactic and thus invests his representations of domestic religion with serious meaning. This chapter, then, will establish Seneca's views as an example of an elite attitude toward domestic religion in the Neronian period. There has been much debate about how to read Senecan drama in terms of performance and literary value, as well as its philosophy and psychology. This thesis seeks to draw on connections between Seneca's own thoughts about the tragic medium, as evinced in his *Epistulae*, to better understand his tragic corpus and how his own brand of Stoic philosophy underlies the moral exempla of the plays.

A study of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* will shed further light on elite Neronian attitudes to domestic religion, especially given Lucan's popularity among his peers and the later Flavian poets. His epic will provide further insight for the present study not only because it was a significant contribution to the discourse of its own period, but also because the Flavian poets saw it as a canonical text. Lucan was an innovative epic poet and is recognized as such by the belated Flavian authors discussed in chapter 3. In the *Bellum Civile*, the poet often employs the gods of domestic religion as markers of character and to demarcate the Roman from the un-Roman.

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<sup>31</sup> On the breadth of Seneca's corpus, see Ker 2006 and Vottero 1998.

<sup>32</sup> *contra* Fitch 1979 *passim* and von Albrecht 2014 *passim*.

While in Seneca's works these domestic gods serve as focal points of engagement for the poet's audience, Lucan associates them almost entirely with the bygone golden era of the Roman Republic. In the works of both authors, however, their contemporary readers are invited to contemplate how each narrative relates to their own understanding of family and ancestors. These domestic deities thus become a vehicle for understanding one's place in the cultural milieu of the empire.

### SENECA

Given the persistence and gamut of the gods of domestic religion, i.e. the *lares* and *penates*, that we saw in chapter 1, one would expect mention of them in the philosophical works of the first century—especially those of cosmology which seek to explain the natural world and the gods. They are, however, largely absent from the Roman philosophical corpus. Why would these gods, which figure so prominently in the general Roman conception of the natural world in the first century, receive no treatment by philosophers of the period? Central to this discussion are the diverse works of Seneca the Younger, both his philosophical (i.e. *Quaestiones Naturales*, *Epistulae Morales*, et al.) and dramatic works (i.e. *Hercules Furens*, *Medea*, *Thyestes*, et al.). The gods of domestic religion appear only briefly in the *Epistulae Morales* and not in any of Seneca's other philosophical essays. Their absence is most notable in his *Naturales Quaestiones*, which take cosmology as one of their central themes—yet the author gives the *lares* and *penates* a prominent seat in his *fabulae*.<sup>33</sup> Counting the appearances of these minor gods within the Senecan corpus is tricky given that the disputed plays, *Hercules Oetaeus* and *Octavia*, account

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<sup>33</sup> The *penates* do appear in Seneca's *de Beneficiis* but seem to only refer to their physical aspect as family heirlooms, rather than their role in ancestor worship which is more properly part of domestic religion.



for a significant portion of the total occurrences of *lares* and *penates* within Senecan tragedy.<sup>34</sup> The noun *lar* occurs exactly 28 times throughout the Senecan corpus: 27 times in his *fabulae* (17 if *Hercules Oetaeus* and *Octavia* are excluded) and once in the epistles, but not at all in any of his other works. The noun *penates* appears less frequently: 36 times throughout the corpus, 26 times in his *fabulae* (15 if *Hercules Oetaeus* and *Octavia* are excluded). The remaining 10 instances of the *penates* that occur outside Seneca's tragic corpus can be found in the *de Beneficiis*, *de Clementia*, *de Consolatione ad Marciam*, and the *de Consolatione ad Polybium*. In this chapter, I focus specifically on the *Hercules Furens* and *Thyestes*, both of which provide clear and concise examples of Seneca's larger aims in using the gods of domestic religion. Further, these particular plays had an immense impact on Statius, especially his epic poem the *Thebaid*, which I discuss in chapter 3. Before analyzing the plays, however, let us first examine the evidence for reading Senecan drama as didactic.

### Reading Senecan Drama as Didactic

Thomas Rosenmeyer and others have claimed that Seneca imbued his dramatic corpus with as much fervor for Stoic natural science as he demonstrates in his dialogues and epistles.<sup>35</sup> If Senecan drama is indeed as philosophical and as concerned with cosmology as his essays and

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<sup>34</sup> For an overview on authorship of the *Hercules Oetaeus* and its relationship to Seneca, see Schubert 2014: 74, who sees the *Hercules Oetaeus* as a critical response to the *Hercules Furens*. Rozelaar 1985 and Nisbet 1995: 209-12 defend the *Hercules Oetaeus* as a genuine Senecan tragedy. See Zwierlein 1986: 313-43, Axelson 1967, and Barnes 1982 for arguments against its inclusion in the Senecan corpus. For the most up to date discussion on the authorship of the *Octavia* see Ginsberg 2017.

<sup>35</sup> For a neutral overview, see Fischer 2014. In support of reading the plays as Stoic, see especially Rosenmeyer 1989, Littlewood 2004: 15-102, and Chaumartin 2014, but also Tarrant 2006, Wiener 2006 *passim*, and Marti 1945. Though some oppose reading Senecan philosophy into the tragedies. See Liebermann 2004: 21-27, 2014: 415-16.

epistles, and the gods of domestic religion are largely absent from the philosophical works, why does Seneca discuss the gods of domestic religion almost exclusively in the tragic context? One might argue that the easiest solution to this problem is that these *fabulae* were simply meant to be nothing other than entertainment and do not contain any elements of Stoic philosophy.

Though attractive, this argument fails to explain the many instances of Stoic philosophy that scholars have already identified. This paper, then, presupposes that Seneca's *fabulae* were indeed created as an exploration of Stoic thought and meant as didactic works of Senecan philosophy.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, this paper assumes that Seneca's works were meant to be read by an elite audience and interacted with as literature, though they could be performed at times.<sup>37</sup> While Rosenmeyer has already given a persuasive account of the philosophizing aspect of the Senecan corpus, I would like to further expand on ways in which we can read the *fabulae* and the *Epistulae Morales* together and thus gain further insight into the didactic nature of Seneca's extant corpus.

Central to analyzing these two disparate genres is what Seneca himself might have thought about their reception. John Schafer has convincingly explained the pedagogical nature of the *Epistulae*, writing that "the Letters teach teaching by example; they are a literary case-study, an articulated, carefully drawn *exemplum* of Stoic and Senecan pedagogy."<sup>38</sup> He goes on to explain how these letters are "dramaticized" in that the work as a whole provides a contextualized approach to philosophical discussion and enforces Seneca's pedagogical belief that teaching by *exempla* constitutes best practice.<sup>39</sup> The letters, then, provide us as modern

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<sup>36</sup> Much ink has been spilled over this problem, especially given the spurious authorship of *Hercules Oetaeus* and *Octavia*. This paper follows Rosenmeyer 1989 and Chaumartin 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Conte 1994: 418, Coffey and Mayer 1990; *contra* Slaney 2016, Davis 1993.

<sup>38</sup> Schafer 2011: 33; cf. Nussbaum 1994: 340.

<sup>39</sup> Schafer 2011: 32. In this way, Seneca's *Epistulae* are much like Jacques Derrida's own work in that they aim to convey their arguments by exemplifying the argument in their modalities.

readers a philosophical toolkit, as it were, to better understand Seneca's approach to education and tragedy. In her analysis of Stoic theories of cognition, Julia Wildberger convincingly argues that Seneca champions the use of impression-inducing stimuli to inspire his readers to act morally as Stoics.<sup>40</sup> She writes:

It is obvious that Seneca does not content himself with the theoretical exposition of a subject; he also gives *praecepta*, directions how to act. And it is very important to see what exactly this means: it means that Seneca causes impulse-generating impressions in his readers, impressions which are meant not only to inform his readers about some fact, but to set them in motion. This in turn means that readers must realize that what is said is not just some universal truth, but concerns themselves as well.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, Wildberger is only discussing Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* here, but more importantly, she is in search of a better explanation for how the author imagined people would read his texts. Her analysis is doubly fitting for the present purpose: by understanding how Seneca expected his *Epistulae* to be received, we may also explore his strategies for his *fabulae*, especially given the author's focus on the relevance of sensory experience to cognition. Indeed, Wildberger stresses that Seneca focuses on that which is manifest before the eyes as well as what his audience might hear.<sup>42</sup> The latter comes from her analysis on *Ep.* 108, where Seneca specifically discusses what purposes theater might serve for a philosopher. In sections 7-11, Seneca describes why theatrical verse is so capable a means for communicating with the masses, essentially illustrating Lucretius' 'honeyed-cup' tactic.<sup>43</sup> About the benefits of employing theatrical verse, Seneca writes to Lucilius:

Non vides, quemadmodum theatra consonent, quotiens aliqua dicta sunt, quae publice adgnosimus et consensu vera esse testamur?

Desunt inopiae multa, avaritiae omnia.

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<sup>40</sup> Wildberger: 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Wildberger 2006: 87.

<sup>42</sup> Wildberger 2006: 87 n. 29.

<sup>43</sup> Sen. *Ep.* 108.7-11.

In nullum avarus bonus est, in se pessimus.

Ad hos versus ille sordidissimus plaudit et vitiis suis fieri convicium gaudet; quanto magis hoc iudicas evenire, cum a philosopho ista dicuntur, cum salutaribus praeceptis versus inseruntur, efficacius eadem illa demissuri in animum imperitorum?

Do you not see how the theater resounds whenever some things are said which we acknowledge and confirm to be true publicly and by consensus?

“The poor lack many things; the greedy lack all.  
The greedy man is good in no affair; he is bad to himself.”

At these verses, even the basest man applauds and rejoices that an insult is made about his own vices; how much more do you think this happens when those things are said by a philosopher, when the verses are woven with salutary precepts, how much more efficaciously he might immerse those same things into the mind of ignorant men?  
(Sen. *Ep.* 108.8-9)

In this passage, Seneca is making fun of those who do not study philosophy or those who have subscribed to the wrong philosophical school (*sordidissimus*) for senselessly applauding some insult aimed at themselves (*ad versus...plaudit et vitiis suis fieri convicium gaudet*). What is of more importance, however, is the rhetorical question that Seneca poses to Lucilius, imploring him to consider how much more beneficial, effective, and fruitful didactic plays are when they contain philosophical (and especially Stoic) precepts and succeed in immersing the minds of the ignorant in moral philosophy. Seneca thus makes it abundantly clear that, much like Lucretius, he sees value in making his philosophy more easily digestible by lay audiences through such means as theatrical verse.

By putting certain plots and figures on stage, Seneca creates a heuristic environment for a theatrical audience to grasp the merits of Stoicism. Wildberger further claims in her own analysis that Seneca did not advocate for “a purely theoretical instruction” since it “would not change the reader’s life, which consists of actions.”<sup>44</sup> A performance, then, forces the audience to actively

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<sup>44</sup> Wildberger 2006: 88.

engage with the underlying Stoic precepts of the play and provides better instruction than theoretical teachings. Given tragedy's popularity during the Neronian period, no other genre would be more accessible to Seneca's audience. Schafer lends further support to this argument, writing that material for Stoic education "can be found everywhere: in philosophical study, for sure, but also in history, in poetry, in the banalities of daily life" and that the *Epistulae* as a whole are "not only an argument for Stoicism but also an argument within Stoicism, against partisans of purely doctrinal, technical, rational instruction."<sup>45</sup> Strabo offers even further insight about the function of *fabulae* in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, claiming they are the nexus between philosophers and the populus and serve to teach the masses about virtue and vice. He explains that

οὐ γὰρ ὄχλον γε γυναικῶν καὶ παντὸς χυδαίου πλήθους ἐπαγαγεῖν λόγῳ δυνατὸν φιλοσόφῳ καὶ προσκαλέσασθαι πρὸς εὐσέβειαν καὶ ὀσιότητα καὶ πίστιν, ἀλλὰ δεῖ καὶ διὰ δεισιδαιμονίας· τοῦτο δ' οὐκ ἄνευ μυθοποιίας καὶ τερατείας.

a crowd of women and multitudes of every ordinary man cannot be taught by reason or urged towards piety, reverence, and trust, but there is also a need of god-fearing: this cannot be achieved without mythmaking and storytelling. (Strabo *Geog.* 1.2.8)

Strabo, a Stoic himself, confirms this practice among Stoic philosophers, writing that his school claims "only the wise man is a poet" (μόνον ποιητὴν ἔφασαν εἶναι τὸν σοφόν) and that the Greeks educate their young by means of poetry for the sake of moral-instruction (σωφρονισμοῦ).<sup>46</sup> François-Régis Chaumartin has included Strabo's statements in his larger treatment of Seneca's "philosophical tragedy."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, one may also consider Seneca's maxim, "long is the journey through precepts, but short and effective through examples" (*longum iter est per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla*), as a testament to the philosopher's view on the best pedagogical approach.<sup>48</sup> From what Seneca relates about his own philosophy of

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<sup>45</sup> Schafer 2011: 50.

<sup>46</sup> Strabo *Geog.* 1.2.3.

<sup>47</sup> Chaumartin 2014: 657.

<sup>48</sup> Sen. *Epist.* 6.5.

pedagogy and what Strabo has written about the function of *fabulae* from his own Stoic viewpoint, we can confidently read Seneca's *fabulae* as didactic materials for educating the poet's readers in Stoic philosophy.

As a few scholars have pointed out, however, there are pitfalls in imagining that Seneca actively wrote his tragedies to be didactic, namely that the audience might come to the wrong conclusions from such a heuristic educational environment. Seneca's own statement about the tragic medium in *Ep.* 108, which I discussed earlier, provides an answer to this problem. He writes that there are many who come to philosophical lectures to listen and not actually learn, just as there are those who go to the theatre to please their ears instead of appreciating the performance.<sup>49</sup> He goes on to argue that humans are naturally attracted to virtue and compressing wisdom into metrical verses is the most effective way of teaching moral precepts.<sup>50</sup> All the better, then, to weave in philosophy with dramatic performance so that the audience might learn. Wildberger identifies another key argument for how Seneca's plays seek to teach their audience by means of moral exempla. She writes:

“By generating such harmless fantasies [Seneca's] text can prepare its readers effectively to face the real thing...the reader can learn to endure real pain. The reader can find out and train the right reaction to the first impulse to become agitated about what may cause a passion in him, because the pressure exerted by a convincing fantasy is much weaker than the pressure exerted by a convincing impression. Both urge the mind on to assent and to move accordingly, but whereas the impression might not be resisted, the fantasy can. Regular training with fantasies can thus help build up structures which will later resist the convincing power of the actual object.<sup>51</sup>

Though Wildberger is here discussing the *Epistulae Morales*, the same principle applies to Senecan tragedy. Since they engage more directly with the audience, I claim that Seneca's

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<sup>49</sup> Sen. *Epist.* 108.4-7.

<sup>50</sup> Sen. *Epist.* 108.7-12.

<sup>51</sup> Wildberger 2006: 93.

*fabulae* provide a more enhanced experience with moral exempla and thus a more realistic impression for Stoic education.

Richard Tarrant has artfully brought to light Seneca's tendency to discuss and depict vice rather than to portray virtue. Put another way, Seneca includes more negative exempla than positive ones in his *fabulae*. In this discussion, Tarrant, agreeing with Wildberger's argument, aptly notes that such an inclination likely explains Seneca's favoring of the tragic medium to depict plots which can be connected to lived realities as opposed to the ideal Stoic perception of how life should be.<sup>52</sup> Tarrant goes even further, however, writing that the tragic genre "offered scope for representing the disordered animus from the inside out" and foregrounding the importance of monologues within the tragedies.<sup>53</sup> In this case, the tragic genre, coupled with long monologues, offered an opportunity for Seneca to display the corrupted soul and was thus the ideal medium for demonstrating the downfalls of a life lived without the salutary benefits of Stoic philosophy—negative exempla by which Seneca might have provided easily digestible Stoic teachings, e.g. Megara. I examine several of these negative exempla in the following sections. These exempla need not only be negative, however, as Chaumartin has pointed out. He separates the Senecan tragic corpus into two main categories: the apotropaic plays (*Phaedra*, *Agamemnon*, *Medea*, *Atreus*, and *Thyestes*) which sway the audience away from passion and other vices, and the parenetic plays (*Troades* and *Hercules Furens*) which provide exempla to be imitated.<sup>54</sup> While I cannot entirely agree with Chaumartin's reading of the *Hercules Furens* as a parenetic play given the character's many (Stoically) immoral acts, this play is of specific interest given its prominence within the corpus and its treatment of domestic religion. The

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<sup>52</sup> Tarrant 2006: 5.

<sup>53</sup> Tarrant 2006: 13.

<sup>54</sup> Chaumartin 2014: 660-64 on apotropaic plays; 664-5 on parenetic plays.

*Hercules Furens* provides several exempla, both positive and negative, of Stoic figures for the audience, as I will explore the following section. Before examining the play, however, let us briefly examine the sole mention of domestic religion in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*.

If we accept Seneca's *fabulae* as another medium through which he sought to teach his audience about the morals of Stoic philosophy, then what role does his use of domestic religion play in this educated effort? Seneca's sole mention of domestic religion outside his *fabulae* comes in epistle 90. Here, Seneca advises his addressee, Lucilius, on the merits of *sapientia* and cites the numerous things that it teaches us, the totality of which culminates in a state of happiness (*ad beatum statum*).<sup>55</sup> Seneca writes the following about *sapientia*:

[Sapientia] totius naturae notitiam ac suae tradit. Quid sint di qualesque declarat, quid inferi, quid lares et genii, quid in secundam numinum formam animae perpetuatae, ubi consistant, quid agant, quid possint, quid velint.

[Wisdom] teaches the whole of nature and of her own nature. She declares what the gods are; what sort they are; what the infernal gods are; what the *lares* and the *genii* are; why eternal souls are placed into the second class of divinity; where they are; what they do; what their powers are; what they want.<sup>56</sup>

Aldo Setaioli claims that here Seneca seeks to adapt "ideas from the old Roman religion to beliefs accepted by the Greek Stoics."<sup>57</sup> However, Setaioli goes too far in suggesting that Seneca is *only* modifying *old* Roman religious practice to fit his modern arguments. The religious practices concerning the *genii/iunones* and the *lares* were alive and well during the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, as evidenced by the many extant shrines in the Campanian region as well as those at Rome and elsewhere in the empire.<sup>58</sup> Though these minor gods may not have figured into academic

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<sup>55</sup> Sen. *Ep.* 90.27.

<sup>56</sup> Sen. *Ep.* 90.28.

<sup>57</sup> Setaioli 2014b: 392 n. 113. Yet again at 2006-7: 358. It should also be noted that the author's main goal in this passage is to note an incorrect reading of the same passage in Mazzoli 1984: 960.

<sup>58</sup> Flower 2017: 145-59.



discussions on cosmology and philosophy, their significance to the populus had not yet deteriorated, nor would it for a few centuries. Perhaps Setaioli thinks of Cicero's translation of Plato's *Timaeus*, where he renders δαίμονες as *lares*.<sup>59</sup> Although, then, Setaioli is right to point out that this tripartite division of intermediary gods does not conflict with Stoicism, there is more to be said about this short passage.<sup>60</sup>

If *sapientia* teaches us cosmology and the varying gods that exist, how does it do so? As Setaioli himself writes, this letter is located in the latter half of the *Epistulae Morales* which is more generally concerned with theoretical investigations than codified *paraenesis*.<sup>61</sup> Claiming that *sapientia*, which is of course the ultimate Stoic good, is the means through which humans can achieve the best life is not disputed by the Stoics. What is unexpected in this passage is Seneca's claim that *sapientia* can teach human beings about religion both of the state and of the household. Clearly the gods that Seneca says we can learn about are not the Stoic god, but rather sub-deities which are subordinate to the Stoic god. He seems to be toying with the question of how these domestic deities fit into greater schema of Stoic cosmology. Let us now examine how Seneca employs domestic religion in his *fabulae*.

#### Hercules Furens

It is fitting, then, to turn to a play which Chaumartin has described as parenetic, the *Hercules Furens*. This play is of particular interest since the mythic character, Hercules, is often described by the Stoics as possessing *magnitudo animi* and is named by Davis as a paragon of

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<sup>59</sup> Cic. *Tim.* 38.

<sup>60</sup> cf. *SVF.* II 1101-1102.

<sup>61</sup> Setaioli 2014a: 192.

Stoic wisdom.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, he possibly featured in Chrysippus' work.<sup>63</sup> Although some scholars prefer to keep a strict division between Seneca's philosophical works and his tragedies, several have noticed distinct parallels between the author's thoughts expressed in his philosophical works and the *Hercules Furens*.<sup>64</sup> Vessey has convincingly shown how Seneca's opinions on ancestry and *nobilitas* manifest themselves within the play through the character of Lycus.<sup>65</sup> Emily Wilson also notes that the character Amphitryon provides a sententious statement of what seems to be Stoic philosophy when he claims that "When you see that he is brave, deny that he suffers" (*quemcumque fortem videris, miserum neges*).<sup>66</sup> She goes on to note Lycus' marked use of the noun *virtus* in line 340, writing that "the play is, among other things, a sustained meditation on what *virtus* really is."<sup>67</sup> Additionally, Chaumartin and Davis have both analyzed the play for its use of Stoic precepts.<sup>68</sup> In what follows, I will expand upon Seneca's didactic purpose in mentioning the *lares* throughout the play.

The first instance of the *lares* occurs in line 198 inside the first choral ode after Juno's lengthy introduction to the play. The chorus discusses the benefits of living a "simple life" which

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<sup>62</sup> Davis 1993: 126-7. Seneca himself declares Hercules' Stoic wisdom at *de Cons. Sap.* II.1. See Davis' 1993: 126 n.8 on other evidence for Hercules' popularity among the Stoics.

<sup>63</sup> Chaumartin 2014: 656-7.

<sup>64</sup> For arguments opposed to reading the *Hercules furens* as a didactic play, see primarily Fitch 1979 *passim*, but also von Albrecht 2014: 737. For arguments in favor, see O'Kell 2005 *passim*; Chaumartin 1998 *passim*; Motto and Clark 1981 *passim*; Zintzen 1972 *passim*; Edert 1909: 29-33. See Fischer 2014 *passim* for a sober analysis on the systematic connections between these two genres.

<sup>65</sup> Vessey 1973: 336-7.

<sup>66</sup> Sen. *Herc.* 463; Wilson 2010: 234 *op cit.* "Amphitryon's position is similar to the central Stoic tenet that virtue alone is sufficient for happiness. A perfect wise, brave, and virtuous man must, in Stoic thought, be happy—regardless of the misery or torment of his external circumstances."

<sup>67</sup> Wilson 2010: 233 *op cit*; see Fitch 1987: 216 for how the play might take a negative view of *virtus*.

<sup>68</sup> Chaumartin 1998 and Davis 1993 *passim*.

is often a feature of moralizing Latin literature, yet scholars debate whether this passage—and especially its final sentence—is Epicurean or Stoic.<sup>69</sup> Seneca writes:

Alium multis Gloria terris  
 tradat et omnes  
 Fama per urbes garrula laudet,  
 caeloque parem tollat et astris;  
 alius curru sublimis eat:  
 me mea tellus  
**lare secreto** tutoque tegat  
 venit ad pigros cana senectus,  
 humilique loco sed certa sedet  
 sordida parvae fortuna domus;  
**alte virtus animosa cadit.**

Glory gives another [man] over to many lands. Fame might praise him throughout all cities and raise him equal to both heaven and the stars; Another might be high up on his chariot: Let my land safely cover me with a **secret *lar***. White old age comes to the unambitious and the unimpressive fortune of a small home sits in a humble but certain place; **proud virtue falls from on high.** (Sen. *Herc.* 192-201)

Davis writes that the chorus of the *Hercules Furens* is largely at odds with the character Hercules in their philosophical values.<sup>70</sup> He reads Hercules as a stoic sage who has acquired the *virtus animosa* that Seneca lauds and the chorus as proponents of Epicureanism.<sup>71</sup> Though I must concede that Davis’ reading of *alte virtus animosa cadit* is likely correct and that the chorus is in some way casting a negative light on Hercules’ stoic characterization, this passage seems to maintain some seeds of Stoicism.

A comparable passage is found in book 5 of Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, where he praises the ‘simple life’ in an apostrophe: “O the safety and ease of a poor man’s life and his meager *lares*! O the gifts of the gods, still unknown!” (*O vitae tuta facultas | pauperis angustique lares! o*

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<sup>69</sup> Cincinnatus and Horace’s “golden mean” for example. See Fitch 1987: 180-1 for how this passage resists being read against the background of Horace’s poem. On its Epicurean tone, see Davis 1993: 126-36. For this passage as Stoic, see Rosenmeyer 1989: 7 and Zwierlein 1984: 27.

<sup>70</sup> Davis 1993: 132-3.

<sup>71</sup> Davis 1993: 133; Sen. *Ep.* 71.18.

*munera nondum | intellecta deum!*, 5.527-9). Barratt claims that “these lines are in accord with the Stoic doctrine on the beauty of the frugal life” and that he implicitly argues against luxury here.<sup>72</sup> Her analysis seems especially fitting given the poor man’s later dialogues with Caesar in which he exhibits a markedly Stoic rhetoric. Seneca’s passage cannot be wholly Epicurean while Lucan’s is labelled as Stoic, for they are too similar in content and message. Chaumartin’s recent analysis of the chorus in Senecan tragedy sheds some light on this issue. He writes that the Senecan chorus sometimes expressed specifically Stoic thoughts but were first and foremost “common men following the tragic action’s course and frequently referring to philosophical thoughts,” whether they were Stoic or otherwise.<sup>73</sup> The chorus, then, is not educative, but rather serves as the receptor of Seneca’s teachings. In this case it is perfect acceptable, and perhaps expected that the chorus not provide Stoic monologues in the tragedies. Rather, they must exhibit some non-Stoic beliefs so as to instigate a lesson on Stoic philosophy.

Seneca further connects the chorus to the audience in his use of the *lares*. As we have seen, the gods of domestic religion do not befit the Stoic doctrine explicated by Seneca in his many prose works, yet they are present in this choral ode and must represent the importance of domestic religion to Seneca’s intended audience. They believe that the best life is one lived simply and according to the ways of their ancestors, with the implied worship of domestic gods such as the *lares*. This particular notion harkens back to one of the main subjects in epistle 90—the very same epistle in which he writes that *sapientia* teaches mankind about the gods.<sup>74</sup> At the end of that letter, Seneca says that the ancestors of contemporary Romans were not at fault regarding their morality for they did not know that they erred. He writes that “before you refine

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<sup>72</sup> Barratt 1979: 172.

<sup>73</sup> Chaumartin 2014: 659.

<sup>74</sup> cf. Van Nuffelen and Van Hoof 2013 *passim*.

[man], there are the materials of virtue, not virtue itself' (*antequam erudias, virtutis materia, non virtus est*).<sup>75</sup> Seneca was focused on helping others cultivate their understanding of philosophy and educating them in the Stoic doctrines. He is only able to bring this about by meeting his audience at their level of understanding, and moreover, by using institutions such as domestic religion and the tragic stage—as he wrote in epistle 110.

Megara's speech in lines 372-96 holds the next two mentions of the *lares*. Lycus has just offered her marriage and a place by his side as he continues to rule Thebes. Megara forcefully denies his offer, and, in her indignation, she says to Lycus:

patrem abstulisti, regna, germanos, **lares**,  
 patriam—quid ultra est? una res superest mihi  
 fratre ac parente carior, regno ac **lare**:  
 odium tui, quod esse cum populo mihi  
 commune doleo—pars quot ex isto mea est!

You have stolen my father, kingdom, brothers, *lar*, fatherland—what is left? One thing remains for me that is dearer than my brother and father, kingdom and *lar*: [My] hatred for you, which it pains me to share with the whole community—what a little part of that is mine! (Sen. *Herc.* 379-83)

Here, Megara quite literally equates the *lares* with other institutions that were paramount in Roman culture: one's father (*patrem/parente*), fatherland (*patriam*), brother (*germanos/fratre*), and state (*regna/regno*). Moreover, as Seneca repeats this list, *lar* is the only noun to not be replaced by a synonym and remain unchanged in number. The steadfastness of the *lares* in this description, then, coupled with their prominent place at the end of each line points to them as a nexus of the entire list: family, state, and country are all concisely expressed by this god of domestic religion. Seneca's diction here is clearly anachronistic with the Greek narrative, but not unexpected given the poet's frequent use of Roman institutions to make Greek settings and plots

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<sup>75</sup> Sen. *Epist.* 90.46.

more accessible to his audience. All of these examples point to traditional Roman values of family and piety, but the noun *germanos* is a particularly Roman designation for family members. Writing all of these Roman values into the speech of Megara not only makes this Greek *topos* accessible to a Roman audience, but the *lares* specifically represent a Roman nexus of all these things: they are the gods of the household, big or small, and familial relationships. Though he is reluctant to see any Stoicism in Seneca's plays, Fitch even points out the emphasis here on hatred, grief, and sorrow, all of which are sources of pain in Seneca's Stoicism and should be strictly avoided.<sup>76</sup> Megara is clearly demonstrating the type of passion that the Stoics oppose. In effect, she becomes a negative *exemplum* both by simply having *odium* but even more so for thinking that her *odium* is more important than these cultural values. She lets anger get the better of her, which Seneca, as all good Stoics should, repeatedly warns against.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, according to Senecan philosophy, her resulting words and actions should all be seen as irrational since they stem from passion.<sup>78</sup> Seneca draws his audience's attention to Megara's excessive emotion through her subordination of these shared cultural values to her anger. By repeating the list of Roman cultural values, but employing them as ablatives of comparison, Megara emphasizes her rejection of them. Thus, Seneca deploys these domestic gods as a vehicle for the audience to recognize Megara as a negative philosophical *exemplum* and to reflect on their own passions.

The last mention of the *lares* occurs after Hercules kills Lycus and proceeds to thank the gods for his victory. He tells Theseus, who has just given Amphitryon a lesson on the

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<sup>76</sup> Fitch 1987: 225.

<sup>77</sup> For a recent overview on Seneca's perceptions of *ira*, see Monteleone 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Vogt 2006: 73-4.

underworld and why one should not fear death, that he must venerate the founders of the city, the woodland shrines of Zethus, the famous stream of Dirce, and the *lar* of Cadmus:

populea nostras arbor exornet comas,  
 te ramus oleae fronde gentili tegat,  
 Theseu; Tonantem nostra adorabit manus,  
 tu conditores urbis et silvestria  
 trucis antra Zethi, nobilis Dircen aquae  
**larem**que regis advenae Tyrium coles  
 —date tura flammis.

Let the poplar tree adorn my hair, may a wreath of the olive branch cover you, noble Theseus; My hand will supplicate the Thunderer, you will worship the founders of the city and the forested caves of harsh Zethus, noble Dirce's spring, and the Tyrian *lar* of the foreign king—give the incense to the flames. (Sen. *Herc.* 912-18)

Fitch sees this speech as a simple device to remove Theseus from the stage before the imminent madness of Hercules comes in full force and notes that these all relate to popular landmarks described by Pausanias.<sup>79</sup> Rosenmeyer, on the other hand, is not sure what to make of Theseus' involvement with these local divinities.<sup>80</sup> I argue, however, that the description of Theseus here establishes him as a positive *exemplum* of Stoic philosophy. Theseus has already shown himself to be closely associated with Stoic precepts: he provides a long description of the underworld and why humans should not fear death,<sup>81</sup> proclaims the ideal Stoic king as a feasible possibility,<sup>82</sup> and is a good friend to Hercules in his time of need.<sup>83</sup> Seneca thus closely ties Theseus to the *lares* and other examples of religious piety as a cue for the audience that he is a positive *exemplum* in direct contrast to Megara. While the *lares* are not the only indicator of

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<sup>79</sup> Fitch 1987: 358-9.

<sup>80</sup> Rosenmeyer 1989: 175.

<sup>81</sup> Sen. *Herc.* 709-829.

<sup>82</sup> Sen. *Herc.* 745-7; Rosenmeyer 1989: 22.

<sup>83</sup> Sen. *Herc.* 1372-7, 1341-4. Though *amicitia* is a “preferred indifferent” to the Stoics, it demonstrates that one contains *virtus* and is directly relevant here in evaluating Theseus' moral character.

piety in this passage, Seneca gives them special emphasis by placing them last in this list of pious deeds and at the very start of line 917. Moreover, the *lares* are directly linked with *conditores* in line 915 by chiasmus: *conditores* (A), *antra* (B), *aquae* (B), *larem* (A). This connection further strengthens their association with ancestors. We cannot ignore that, in this instance, we are discussing the “Tyrian *lar* of a foreign king”—a very un-Roman context for the *lares*. I propose that Seneca here uses the *lares* to yet again make accessible a non-Roman story. There is no evidence that the Tyrians (or Thebans) had *lares* and so Seneca’s application of these Roman divinities to the Tyrians makes them more accessible and amenable to his Roman audience. The *lares* have become a touchpoint for alerting the audience to *exempla*. It should be noted that while Theseus is not necessarily the Stoic sage, *per se*, he embodies several of the salutary characteristics of a good Stoic and this is fitting for Seneca’s purpose in the tragedies. In these *exempla*, Seneca has used the gods of domestic religion to engage his audience on the Stoic views of the frugal life, anger, and friendship.

### Thyestes

While the *Hercules Furens* provides both positive and negative *exempla* of Stoic philosophy, Seneca uses domestic religion in the *Thyestes* only to emphasize the utter *nefas* of Atreus’ decision to feed to Thyestes his own children. Thus, Atreus occupies the role of negative exemplum, like Megara, but Seneca spends more time characterizing him as such, offering no positive counterpart. The connections between *nefas* and domestic religion in this play will be integral to the discussion of Statius’s *Thebaid* in chapter 3. This section, then, will not only provide further insight for Senecan conceptions of domestic religion, but will also lay the groundwork for our understanding of Statian *nefas*. The play begins with two concurrent



mentions of the *penates* by the Fury, which bookend the moralizing content of the tragedy.

Seneca employs these domestic gods to create a literary structure within the play. In the beginning, the *penates* are more or less in their usual state, but by the end, they are covered in a cloud of smoke from the cooked children and polluted by *nefas*. By engaging these gods, Seneca clearly situates the plot of this tragedy against the background of familial and ancestral piety:

Perge, detestabilis  
 umbra, et **penates impios** furiis age.  
 certetur omni scelere et alterna uice                    25  
 stringatur ensis; nec sit irarum modus  
 pudorue, mentes caecus instiget furor,  
 rabies parentum duret et longum nefas  
 eat in nepotes.  
 ...  
 nox alta fiat, excidat caelo dies.                    51  
 misce **penates**, odia caedes funera  
 accerse et imple Tantalos totam domum.

Go on, you detestable shade, and torment the **impious penates** with your rage. Let every crime participate and let each draw their own sword. Let there be no shame or limit to anger. Let blind fury instigate their minds. Let the madness of the parents persist and let there be a long *nefas* in their grandchildren.

...  
 Let there be deep night. Let day fall away from heaven. Confuse the *penates*; hatred, slaughter, death—summon them! And fill the whole house with Tantalus!  
 (Sen. *Thy.* 23-53)

The Fury utters these wishes in response to the ghost of Tantalus appearing in the house of Atreus. She specifically labels the *penates* of Atreus as impious (24) before cursing his family line with a long *nefas* (28-9). The fury here perverts something typically sacred for the Roman reader. As I have argued, the *penates* symbolize a person's ancestors and their spiritual presence or guardianship.<sup>84</sup> By employing the *penates* specifically here, Seneca emphasizes the role of Tantalus and the ancestral *nefas* present within the House of Atreus—these characters are

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<sup>84</sup> See my discussion of the *penates* in chapter 1.

doomed from the beginning. Towards the end of the speech, the fury goes as far as to suggest perverting any religious aspects of this house altogether (*misce penates*, 52), preferring hate, fear, and death instead. Such a perversion of domestic religion helps Seneca to engage with his audience in contemplating the morality of the House of Atreus and the consequences of amoral actions.

Seneca's focus on making these themes accessible for his audience becomes clearer in the second act, where Atreus realizes just how amoral his plans are. In a conversation with his slave, Atreus describes how the *lares* turn away from him as he plans to feed Thyestes his own children:

Fateor. Tumultus pectora attonitus quatit penitusque voluit; rapior et quo nescio, sed rapior. Imo mugit e fundo solum, tonat dies serenus ac totis domus ut fracta tectis crepuit et moti <b>lares</b> vertere vultum: fiat hoc, fiat <b>nefas</b> quod, <b>di</b> , timetis.	260      265
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I confess. A thundering tumult shakes my heart and my soul yearns for it; and I am seized, by what I do not know, but I am seized. The earth bellows from its deepest depth. The serene day thunders and my palace with all its roofs rattles as though broken and the *lares* are moved to avert their gaze: let it happen, let this *nefas* come to pass, which you fear, o **gods**. (Sen. *Thy.* 260-6)

Atreus specifically recognizes that his own gods of hearth, family, and household cannot bear to witness the moment in which he resolves to commit the *nefas* that defines the play. As opposed to the *penates* who represent one's ancestors, the *lares* govern the present household of a living person. Thus, Atreus' acknowledgement of the *lares*' emphatic turning away suggests that he is entirely destitute of the salutary and protective forces which pervaded Roman society. Further, Seneca's use of the *lares* here looks back to the *penates* from the beginning of the play. In this family that is doomed from the very beginning, Seneca locates the cyclicity of their downfall in

the *penates* of the previous generation and the *lares* of Atreus' current household. Tarrant writes that "Seneca often (14 times) uses *Lar* as an equivalent for *domus*...but this is one of the few passages that clearly refers to the *Lares* as household gods."<sup>85</sup> Tarrant helpfully points out, however, that this scene with the *lares* averting their gaze both prefigures the averted gaze of the sun later in the play and finds a neat parallel with Lucan's description of Rome just before civil war breaks out in the *Bellum Civile*.<sup>86</sup> We shall return to the latter in the next section, but the connection between the actions of the *lares* here and Phoebus at the end of the play warrants further investigation.

Toward the end of the play, the messenger engages with the chorus and gives a speech detailing how Thyestes' children were killed, cooked, and served. He describes how the sun (Phoebus) set in the middle of the day because it was suffering. In a sort of ring composition with the beginning of the play, he also invokes the *penates* here. Seneca writes:

Piceos ignis in fumos abit;  
 et ipse fumus, tristis ac nebula grauis,  
 non rectus exit, seque in excelsum levat—  
 ipsos **penates** nube deformi obsidet.           775  
 O **Phoebe** patiens, fugeris retro licet  
 medioque raptum merseris caelo diem,  
 sero occidisti.

The fire drifted into pitch-black smoke. And that smoke, a heavy and sad cloud, could not rise out or raise itself into the sky—it covered the very *penates* themselves in a misshapen cloud. O suffering **Phoebus**, although you fled back and plunged the stolen day in the middle of the sky, you fell too late. (Sen. *Thy.* 771-5.)

The deformed smoke from the cooking of Thyestes' children literally obscures the *penates*, preventing them from witnessing this *nefas* or being seen by those committing it. Tarrant comments on the associations here with negative omens and even concedes that these *penates* are

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<sup>85</sup> Tarrant 1985: 128.

<sup>86</sup> Tarrant 1985: 128.

likely the actual household gods and not simply a synonym for *domus*.<sup>87</sup> However, he does not connect them with those mentioned by the Fury at the very beginning of the play. The Fury curses the *penates* of the House of Atreus to be replaced by hatred, fear, and death, all of which Seneca's reader might see embodied in the smoke described above. In the end, the Fury's curse is fulfilled. Thus, Seneca uses the *lares* and *penates* to emphasize the generational *nefas* associated with the family of Atreus, make a Greek myth accessible for his Roman audience, and invite them to engage with the characters.

## LUCAN

While Seneca uses domestic religion to bolster the didactic effect of his plays and his overall project on teaching Stoicism, Lucan is much more concerned with employing domestic religion to define what it means to be Roman and using the *lares* and *penates* to enhance the characterizations of his characters as Roman or un-Roman.<sup>88</sup> In his epic poem, the *Bellum Civile*, Lucan uses domestic religion to characterize Julius Caesar in a negative light while simultaneously recuperating the character of Pompey. He uses this traditional Roman value system (e.g. Aeneas carrying the *penates* to Rome as an exemplar of *pietas*) to enforce the absolute un-Romanness both of the witch Erichtho and the civil war at hand. The poet accomplishes this through various means, of which his mentions of the *lares* and the *penates* form a part. This section is primarily concerned with Lucan's use of domestic religion to characterize Caesar, Pompey, and the witch Erichtho. First, I will examine the representations of domestic religion in the two prayers uttered by Caesar in the poem before turning to the

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<sup>87</sup> Tarrant 1985: 201.

<sup>88</sup> I follow Masters 1992 with this labelling schema.

characterizations of Pompey and his men. Finally, I provide a brief analysis of Erichtho and how Lucan describes her in terms of domestic religion as a coda to my larger arguments about Caesar and Pompey.

### The Prayers of Caesar

Julius Caesar delivers two monumental prayers in the *Bellum Civile* which invite comparison by the reader and have drawn the attention of several scholars. In both speeches, Lucan's Caesar deploys the gods of domestic religion to bind himself and his descendants to a Trojan heritage. While Lucan portrays Caesar as a genuine Roman on the surface, the poet ultimately undercuts the rhetorical effect of his prayers in the surrounding passages. Caesar might sound Roman by invoking the gods of the hearth and household, yet his actions are anything but. The first speech in Book 1 characterizes Caesar as the forerunner to the political and religious systems of the Julio-Claudian empire. Caesar utters this prayer just before crossing the Rubicon and entering Rome with his legions:

“O magnae qui moenia prospicis urbis	195
Tarpeia de rupe, Tonans, <b>Phrygii</b> que <b>penates</b>	
<b>gentis Iuleae</b> , et rapti secreta Quirini,	
et residens celsa Latialis Iuppiter Alba,	
Vestalesque foci, summique o numinis instar	
Roma, fave coeptis. Non te furialibus armis	200
persequor: en, adsum victor terraque marique	
Caesar, ubique tuus (liceat modo, nunc quoque) miles.	
ille erit ille nocens, qui me tibi fecerit hostem.”	

“O, you who watch over the walls of this great city from the Tarpeian rock, Thunderer, **Phrygian penates of the Julian clan**, and you, mysteries of stolen Quirinus, and Jupiter, Father of Latium, reclining on lofty Alba, Vestal hearths, and you, peer of the highest divinity, Rome, favor these beginnings. I do not pursue you with arms of the Furies. Behold, I am here, victor on both land and sea, Caesar, everywhere your solider (now as always, if only it is allowed). He will be culpable, he who has made me your enemy” (Luc. *BC*. 1.195-203).

This first instance of the *penates* in Lucan's poem characterizes Caesar and his exploits in light of the tutelary, ancestral gods of Rome. As I have discussed in chapter 1, these domestic gods exploded in literary popularity after the Augustan religious reforms of 7 BCE. It is important to note how Lucan places as many names of these deities and important locations in the first or last position of their respective lines as possible (*penates* | *gentis Iuleae, Quirini, Alba, Vestales, Roma*). This enforces Caesar's arrogance in placing his name at the beginning of line 202, likening himself to the plethora of gods he has just mentioned. Indeed, Grimal notes that Caesar's invocation of these tutelary gods of Rome is anachronistic and thus prefigures the future Julio-Claudian emperors.<sup>89</sup> Roche and Feeney have also examined how Lucan here builds on the final prayer of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (15.861-70), lending support to Grimal's earlier claim.<sup>90</sup> These scholars neglect to mention, however, the longstanding importance of the domestic gods (*penates, lares, and genii*) in addition to the fact that they prefigured the Julio-Claudians.

After Caesar prays and famously crosses the Rubicon into Rome, Lucan writes that the youth of Ariminum "snatched down the arms from their fixed place among the sacred *penates*, which long peace allowed" (*rupta quies populi, stratisque excita iuventus* | *diripuit sacris adfixa penatibus arma, | quae pax longa dabat,*" 1.239-41). Commentators are relatively silent on this line. Roche points out only that we should compare passages from Silius Italicus, Horace, and Ovid, but provides no insight about how to read this specific reference to domestic religion.<sup>91</sup> I propose that this passage should be read in response to Caesar's prayer. Lucan specifically uses the *penates* again when describing the Roman citizens standing up against Caesar's invasion in order to emphasize the similarities between both sides of this new civil war. Here at the

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<sup>89</sup> Grimal 1970: 56-9.

<sup>90</sup> Roche 2009: 210-11; Feeney 1982: 293-5.

<sup>91</sup> Roche 2009: 226.



ignis adhuc Phrygius, nullique aspecta virorum  
 Pallas, in abstruso pignus memorabile templo,  
**gentis Iuleae** vestris **clarissimus** aris 995  
 dat pia tura **nepos** et vos in sede priore  
 rite vocat. date felices in cetera cursus,  
 restituam populos; grata vice moenia reddent  
 Ausonidae Phrygibus, Romanaque Pergama surgent.”

“Gods among the ashes, whoever of you all cultivates these Phrygian ruins, and the **Aenean lares of mine**, which the Lavinian realm and Alba now preserve, and on whose altars burns a fire still Phrygian, and you Pallas, gazed on by no men, the memorable pledge in a hidden temple: the most famous descendant of the Julian clan gives pious incense to your altars and duly calls on you in your previous dwelling. Bless the rest of my courses; I shall restore the populus. Ausonians shall return grateful walls to the Phrygians and a Roman Pergamum shall rise” (Luc. *BC.* 9.990-9).

In this prayer, Caesar draws on the religious connections between Pergamum and Rome established through Aeneas’ act of transporting the household gods to Italy. Lucan specifically references Vergil’s story in Caesar’s speech (*Aeneae...lares*) but gets the reference a bit wrong. Vergil almost exclusively refers to the household gods that Aeneas brought to Rome as the *penates*, the physical heirlooms which symbolize one’s ancestors, and only mentions the *lares* after the hero arrives in Italy. This collocation (*Aeneae...lares*), then, does not refer to ritual worship handed down by Aeneas, but rather portrays the propagandized connection between the Julio-Claudians and Aeneas through the ancestral gods they both share. While Julius Caesar aims to engage this connection with his ancestors, Lucan’s sardonic portrayal diminishes all seriousness of the scene. After making the prayer, Caesar makes an abrupt exit from Troy and heads for Egypt, making the whole affair seem propagandistic and exploitative to Lucan’s readers. Neil Bernstein has already gestured to this connection, comparing Caesar’s use of the *penates* in both prayers and writing:

In both episodes, the narrative highlights the disjunction between Caesar’s words and actions. Caesar displays the all-encompassing possessiveness associated with tyranny: his claim to possess the Penates supports the narrator’s earlier contention that “Caesar was everything” (3.108 *omnia Caesar erat*). Through these scenes, Lucan sets the foreground



for the contradiction in Caesar's self-presentation as the true heir of Rome's founder even as he creates a new and wholly different society in the blood of Rome's people. Caesar's speech amid the ruins of Troy shows how the living may appropriate memories of the ancestral dead to serve ideological purposes at odds with the deceased's own wishes.<sup>94</sup>

While Caesar's speeches and prayers sound Roman and call upon traditional values as well as the tutelary deities of his descendants, his actions convey an entirely different message of exploitation and tyranny. Indeed, others have recognized Caesar's exploitative behavior throughout the epic, especially as it relates to landscape and space (e.g. desecrating the grove).<sup>95</sup> In some ways, these two speeches simply fit in with previous literary depictions of Caesar and his Trojan ancestry in Vergil and Ovid, but a deeper reading exposes Lucan's explicit use of domestic religion to characterize him in a markedly negative light. It is neither accidental nor formulaic that in the prayer from book 1, the *penates* are *Phrygian* (*Phrygiique penates*, 1.196) and in book 9 the *lares* are *Aenean* ("Aeneaeque mei, quos nunc Lavinia sedes Servat et Alba, lares," 9.992). Lucan's purpose in using these adjectives with the gods of Roman domestic religion is to emphasize the propagandized lineage of the Julio-Claudians and negatively characterize Caesar.<sup>96</sup>

#### Marking Roman and un-Roman

Lucan further uses the gods of domestic religion to convey how acutely Roman or un-Roman his characters can be. This is particularly clear if we compare those associated with Julius Caesar and those associated with Pompey. For instance, as Curio reports in a speech from book 1, all of Caesar's supporters have been exiled from Rome (1.273-91). Lucan is careful in crafting

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<sup>94</sup> Bernstein 2011: 267.

<sup>95</sup> See Augoustakis 2006; Masters 1992: 25-9.

<sup>96</sup> On the Julio-Claudian's use of images in political propaganda, see Zanker 1988.

Curio’s speech, however, when he says “but since the laws have been driven to silence by the war, we are pushed away from our paternal *lares* and willingly suffer exile: may your victory make us citizens” (*at postquam leges bello siluere coactae | pellimur e patriis laribus patimurque volentes | exilium: tua nos faciet victoria cives*, 1.277-9). As Roche comments, Curio’s speech is purposefully constructed. The reference to laws being silenced looks ahead to book 5, where they shall be silenced again when Caesar enters Rome.<sup>97</sup> The paradox created by the phrase “*patimur volentes exilium*” emphasizes how willing Caesar’s supporters are despite being exiled from Rome—from their *lares*. In fact, Roche notes that the participle *volentes* should be taken adverbially here, as it is often used in Roman prayer formulae.<sup>98</sup> Curio and Caesar’s supporters might have been driven from their *lares*, but that is apparently a small price to pay in order to establish Caesar’s power. To willingly abandon one’s hearth, household, and ancestors seems categorically un-Roman.

Later in book 1, as Caesar spreads his forces throughout Italy, all of Rome flees. Lucan writes that not a single citizen has the time or care to give due reverence to their household gods nor to their parents and family members:

sic urbe relicta  
in bellum fugitur. nullum iam languidus aevo  
evaluit revocare **parens coniunx**ve maritum                    505  
**fletibus**, aut **patrii**, dubiae dum vota salutis  
conciperent, tenuere **lares**; nec limine quisquam  
haesit et extremo tunc forsitan urbis amatae  
plenus abit visu: ruit inrevocabile volgus.

Thus, they flee into war with their city left behind. No **parent** weak with old-age or **wife** in **tears** was strong enough call back their son, their spouse, nor could the **lares of their fathers** hold them long enough to utter a vow of safety. Not a single person clung to their threshold and all left with what was perhaps their last glimpse of their beloved city: the mob rushed out, unable to be recalled (*BC* 1.503-9).

<sup>97</sup> Roche 2009: 238; see *BC* 5.31 and Barrat 1979: 16-17.

<sup>98</sup> Roche 2009: 239, citing Harrison 1991.

Here, Lucan describes the abandonment of family, hearth, and home in the context of Aeneas and his flight from Troy. In fact, as Roche notes, there are several verbal echoes between this passage and lines 635-751 of *Aeneid* book 2.<sup>99</sup> His image of the old parent (*parens languidus aevo*) and the weeping wife (*coniunx fletibus*) beckoning their loved ones to return and save them is a marked allusion to Vergil's description of Anchises as the "progenitor" (*genitor*, 2.635, 657) of Aeneas' family and Creusa as the "wife in tears" (*coniunx lacrimis*, 2.651). Aeneas, who carries his aging father and the household gods out of his own beloved city and, at one point, returns to retrieve his wife, Creusa, is the highest of Roman exempla. Caesar, to whom Lucan attributes no familiar markers of Roman values, thus infects the *populus* of Rome with his blatant disregard for the many aspects of domestic religion that Romans hold dear. They are unable to retain their traditional Roman values in the face of such tyranny. Civil war, then, and the nefarious acts of Julius Caesar are, according to Lucan, the unmaking of Rome and Roman values.

Some characters are portrayed in a much more favorable light, however. In an apostrophe to Pompey in book II, Lucan writes that he "drags all his *penates* into war" (*totosque trahens in bella penates*, 2.729). While scholars often read Cato as the "hero" of Lucan's epic, Pompey occupies a sort of middle ground between the evil Julius Caesar and the legendary Stoic Cato.<sup>100</sup> Masters explicitly describes Pompey as representative of tradition and the past—"an old oak that is honoured because of its antiquity."<sup>101</sup> Unlike the *populus*, who leave behind their wives, parents, and domestic gods, Pompey carries his *penates* with him into war along with his wife

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<sup>99</sup> Roche 2009: 312-3.

<sup>100</sup> Feeney 1986.

<sup>101</sup> Masters 1992: 9.

and children (*cum coniuge pulsus, | et natis, 2.728-9*). Lucan thus uses domestic religion to characterize Pompey in a relatively positive light as compared with Caesar. The poet draws further parallels, though, between Pompey's men and those of Rome in book 7, as Pompey makes his second of three speeches to his troops. In this great exhortation to battle, Pompey inspires his soldiers by appealing to their wives, children, and *penates*: "anyone who seeks their fatherland, their dear *penates*, offspring and marriage beds, deserted family members—let him take up his sword: god has placed all these in the middle of the field" (*quiquis patriam carosque penates, | qui subolem ac thalamus desertaque pignora quaerit, | ense petat: medio posuit deus omnia campo, BC 7.346-7*). While Roche is apt in citing Thucydides' remark that appeals to family and national gods are to be expected in pre-battle exhortations, it is important to note that the *penates* are not national gods by nature, but rather gods of the individual.<sup>102</sup> Pompey is here not only encouraging his men to fight on behalf of their fatherland (*patriam*), but more importantly for their own ancestry and households (*penates, deserta pignora*) While the noun *pignus* has several applicable meanings, I take it here as "family members" because it functions as a gloss for "offspring and marriage beds" (*subolem ac thalamus*), all of which are wrapped up in the notion of the *penates*.

This stands in stark contrast to Caesar's parallel speech from earlier in book 7, which contains no mention of domestic religion or the families of the soldiers. He even goes as far as to exclaim "let no image of piety impede you!" (*non vos pietatis imago | ulla... | commoveant, BC 7.321-3*). Caesar's use of the noun *imago* here likely alludes to the *imagines maiorum*, representations of deceased ancestors that Romans put up in their household shrines. Caesar, then, exhorts his men to cast off the piety and familial honor of his ancestor Aeneas, preferring

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<sup>102</sup> Roche 2019: 151.

instead that they trust in his self-proclaimed, tyrannical power. Lucan thus traditional Roman values and domestic religion in his characterizations. Lucan portrays Caesar as an arrogant tyrant, bent on exploiting his self-proclaimed ancestry and domestic gods to claim ultimate power over Rome, while Pompey appears to the reader as a more traditional Roman befitting of the morals and familial piety exemplified by Aeneas, to whom he is often compared throughout the poem.

#### Erichtho and the Death of the Gods

Finally, I would like to briefly examine Lucan's description of the Thessalian witch Erichtho in book 6 and how the poet frames her in opposition to the *lares*.<sup>103</sup> This small example serves to illustrate how the analysis that I have provided above can be applied elsewhere in the poem to better understand Lucan's references to domestic religion. To enforce just how ghastly and un-Roman Erichtho is, Lucan writes that "to her, it would be a crime to submit her feral head to the roof of a city or to the *lares*" (*illi namque nefas urbis submittere tecto | aut laribus feroale caput, BC 6.510-1*). In these brief two lines, Lucan squarely defines her not only as un-Roman, but inhuman and unable to be civilized. Erichtho can never be contained by societal structures like the household or domestic religion. To the Romans, *lares* were the natural space for humans who are pious and respect the gods appropriately and are explicitly differentiated from a normal house in this passage since they are parallel with *tectum*. Erichtho, then, is completely othered in this passage and represents what Erker refers to as *superstitio*.

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<sup>103</sup> For a thorough analysis of Erichtho's importance to the *Bellum Civile*, see Clauser 1993: 127-36, esp. 133-6.



deification. I read this passage, and Lucan's epic as a whole, as reactions to this monumental moment in Roman history. The gods of domestic religion have at this point become verbal tools with which authors participate in the discourse of national identity, negotiating what is Roman and what is un-Roman. While Erichtho is markedly un-Roman in Lucan's eyes, Caesar's attempts to claim Roman identity by deploying the gods of domestic religion falls flat. His anachronistic mention of the *penates* that I discuss above as well as the many ways in which Lucan uses domestic religion to characterize and comment upon Caesar, Pompey, and Erichtho further demonstrate the centrality of domestic religion to understanding the imperial cult and emphasize the importance of the *lares* and *penates* in Latin literature.

#### ROMAN IDENTITY AND LITERARY INTERACTION

Seneca uses the gods of house and home as a means for communicating with his intended audience. He departs from his Stoic predecessors by not including the δαίμονες/*genii/iunones* in his cosmology yet mentions them freely throughout his tragic corpus. As I hope to have shown, Seneca retains the *lares* and *penates* in his tragedies as a concession to his overarching goal of influencing the public and guiding them towards Stoicism. He does this because they are part of the language of the masses—the non-philosophers to whom our author wishes so desperately to impart Stoic wisdom. The first instance of the noun *lar* in the *Hercules Furens* associates domestic religion with the chorus, and thus Seneca's audience. The second and third, however, play a part in Seneca's discussion on anger and description of Megara as a negative *exemplum*. The final instance is associated with Theseus, whose role in the play as a positive *exemplum* and nearest to a Stoic sage: he is a good friend to Hercules and seeks to teach both Amphitryon and the audience why they should not fear death. In the *Thyestes*, Seneca uses a different approach in

utilizing the gods of domestic religion to frame the downfall of the house of Atreus. He focuses entirely on Atreus as a negative exemplum and vividly portrays the damage done to his household gods as a result of his actions. Thus, Seneca employs domestic religion when he wishes to connect the audience with a specific point or *exemplum* of Stoic philosophy. Seneca's goals in these tragedies are clearly different than the goals of his philosophical essays and letters, as he has made abundantly clear in his discussions on pedagogy. As Seneca would have it, intellectuals should work to better educate the public and lead them towards more moral lives. For Seneca, this imperative takes the shape of tragedies which make some concessions about Stoic philosophy with the larger goal of reaching more of the lay audience and helping them to lead moral lives according to the basic tenets of Stoicism.

Lucan, on the other hand, employs the language of domestic religion to nuance his characterizations of Caesar and Pompey for his Roman audience. Throughout the *Bellum Civile*, Lucan constructs a negative portrayal of Caesar as an arrogant and exploitative tyrant. Overall, he becomes un-Roman in his quest for power as he neglects all the standard virtues that make for a good Roman. Lucan pointedly describes this lack of virtue in terms of domestic religion, which is appropriate given its intimate relationship with Caesar's ancestor, Aeneas, and the foundational myths of the Julio-Claudians. In contrast with Caesar, Pompey is often portrayed as respecting these traditional religious institutions, both in his own actions and in the speeches to his soldiers. While Pompey may not garner the same respect given to Cato by the poet, he is clearly more virtuous than Caesar by far. Overall, it seems that Pompey makes for a better inheritor to Aeneas' legacy than Caesar. But how do these characterizations inform further readings of the poem? This same analysis can be applied elsewhere in the *Bellum Civile*. As we have seen, Lucan uses the same tactics with domestic religion in his introduction of the witch,



Erichtho. With a single phrase about her view of the *lares*, Lucan marks her as categorically un-Roman. The gods of hearth and household thus occupy an important space both in the mind of the Roman reader and in the definition of what it means to be Roman.

Although both Seneca and Lucan use domestic Roman religion to different ends, together they embody a marked departure from the treatment of these gods in the works of Augustan and Republican authors. Scholars have long missed the importance of these religious references in Neronian literature and I hope to have foregrounded how a better understanding of domestic religion benefits our analysis and reading of these authors. The Flavian poets, which are the focus of the next chapter, are heavily influenced by these two prolific authors. Both Statius and Valerius Flaccus engage with the texts I have analyzed here and craft allusions to them for their own purposes. Let us now turn our attention to these poets in Chapter 3 and examine the different discourses to which they apply domestic religion.

### CHAPTER 3: THE FLAVIAN PERIOD

The writers of Flavian Rome were universally concerned with notions of family—especially the imperial family. The Flavians built on the Augustan religious ideology we saw in the opening chapter and they employ those connections between the imperial cult and domestic religion to explore relationships between family members, ancestors, and the natural world. As we shall see in our discussion of his epic poem, the *Argonautica*, Valerius Flaccus frames the character Medea as an elite Roman daughter. While scholars argue as to whether he characterizes her as a positive or negative exemplum, she is undoubtedly portrayed in terms of her conflicting relationships with her father, Aetes, and her lover, Jason. As I will argue in this chapter, Valerius employs the language of domestic religion to draw the reader’s attention to these themes of familial relationships, especially in regard to Medea’s marriage at the end of the poem.

I then turn to Statius’ *Silvae* and his *Thebaid* to see how he engages domestic religion in texts that are still concerned with elite families, but to a greater extent, mankind’s relationship with the natural world. The *Silvae* are a unique collection of poems in Latin literature in that they focus on the properties and estates of elite families in Italy (mainly around Rome and Campania). Statius seems to deploy the *penates* more frequently than the *lares* in the *Silvae*. As we shall see, this is likely due to the poems’ fascination with material culture and their focus on the physical aspects of villas as well as the ancestral artifacts that reside within. What is important to note in the passages I discuss below is how Statius uses the language of domestic religion to point his readers toward the virtues and piety that the villas represent with respect to their owners. This is especially apparent in Statius’ treatment of Domitian and his palace in poem 4.2. The poet makes more of this relationship between mankind and nature, however, in his epic poem, the *Thebaid*. In book 5 of the poem, I contend that Statius purposefully depicts the Nemean serpent as a

*genius loci*, or guardian spirit of place. As I will demonstrate in what follows, both authors deploy the gods of domestic religion to discuss the pressing issues of their time: elite families, the imperial cult, civil war, and man's relationship with the environment.

## VALERIUS FLACCUS

Valerius Flaccus reframes many aspects of the *Argonautica* tradition through the lens of Roman cultural values. The work of Leo Landrey has shown that Valerius rewrites the account of Hypsipyle and the women of Lemnos in terms of civil war narratives.<sup>109</sup> Tim Stover elucidates how the poet attempts to recuperate Jason as a Roman epic hero.<sup>110</sup> Lazzarini's work demonstrates how the marriage of Medea and Jason is portrayed with symbols of Roman marriage ritual.<sup>111</sup> Further, Andrew Zissos and Clair Stocks argue that he even recasts Medea as an exemplary Roman woman.<sup>112</sup> While scholars have been quick to point out these irruptions of Roman culture into a Greek mythological narrative, they have overlooked the important role of domestic Roman religion in Valerius' reframing. In this section, I explore how Valerius sets domestic religion at the heart of his definition of Roman identity, much like Lucan, but uses it to portray the foreign characters of the *Argonautica* in distinctly Roman terms. While Roman domestic religion intrudes on the Greek setting in several passages throughout the poem, there are three important instances where Valerius' purposes in calling on the *lares* and *penates* are clearest. First, I discuss how the poet connects the Lemnian narrative to themes of family and ancestry in book 2. I then examine the simile likening Hercules and Hylas to the kingfisher in

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<sup>109</sup> Landrey 2018.

<sup>110</sup> Stover 2003.

<sup>111</sup> Lazzarini 2012: 237-45.

<sup>112</sup> Zissos 2012, Stocks 2016.



away what I've said about you in my **song**, as long as the Latian *fasti* endure, and the Ilian **lares**, and the **palaces** of so great a kingdom. (V.Fl. 2.242-6)

Reading the Lemnian narrative against the civil war of 69 CE, Landrey makes an important observation about how Valerius does not mention the temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline hill as expected from this passage's Vergilian and Horatian models.<sup>114</sup> Instead, Valerius fills that gap with *palatia*, the imperial palaces on Palatine hill, which Landrey argues is symptomatic not only of the destruction of the Capitolium, but also the shift in power since the end of the Republic.<sup>115</sup>

What Landrey misses, however, is that these three icons of Roman cultural identity are all physical, tangible objects that represent the three central aspects to Roman religion in brief: imperial cult, state religion, and domestic religion. The *palatia* refer to the physical residences of the emperors on the Palatine, which Domitian notably expanded. Domitian was closely tied to the imperial cult even while he was alive, given his position as the son and brother of gods.<sup>116</sup> Further, as we shall see in our discussion of Statius' *Silvae*, the imperial residence on the Palatine was marked by traditionally religious architecture.<sup>117</sup> In light of these associations, the *palatia* are easily recognized as symbols of the imperial cult during Valerius' time. The *fasti* were inscribed tablets set up in the forum and perhaps even on the Capitoline that tracked state-

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<sup>114</sup> In discussing the longevity of their own works, Vergil invokes the "immovable stone of the Capitoline" (*Capitoli immobile saxum*, V. A. 9.448) while Horace writes that his work shall endure "as long as the priest ascends the Capitoline" (*dum Capitolium | scandet...pontifex*, Hor. *Carm.* 3.30.8-9). Landrey argues that this marked innovation would remind readers familiar with Valerius' Augustan Age predecessors of the political and religious changes that have occurred in the past century. Landrey 2018: 235-6.

<sup>115</sup> Landrey 2018: 236-7.

<sup>116</sup> Blevins 2013: 178-93; for more on the origins of the Palatine as a religious space, see Miller 2009 on the religious associations of the Palatine with Augustus and Apollo.

<sup>117</sup> Newlands 2002: 267; Darwall-Smith 1996: 186, 213; Cancik 1965.

sanctioned religious events and festivals.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, Mary Beard describes the *fasti* as a “religious and political instrument for shaping Roman cultural memory.”<sup>119</sup> The *lares*, which were always represented by paintings or bronze statuettes in household shrines and on street-corners, represent the religion of the household and familial ancestry. Valerius calls these *lares* “Ilian” (*Iliaci*) to reference Rome’s Trojan ancestry, much like Aeneas does when venerating the *lar* of Pergamum at Anchises’ grave in Sicily in Book 5 of Vergil’s *Aeneid*.<sup>120</sup> While these are not the categories of Varro’s tripartite division of religion, they do encompass Roman religion in the imperial period as it may be divided between emperor, state, and family.<sup>121</sup> This passage clearly includes domestic religion with the other monumental symbols of Rome in terms of importance for Valerius and should inform our reading of passages elsewhere the epic poem where the language of domestic religion is deployed.<sup>122</sup>

Valerius’ direct association of Hypsipyle’s story with domestic religion goes further than merely asserting the cultural importance of these deities, however. Domestic religion provides the perfect imagery for Valerius’ framing of Hypsipyle’s story in terms of family and specifically father-daughter relationships. Scholars have already suggested how Valerius’ Hypsipyle can be understood as a model for Medea within the epic.<sup>123</sup> Claire Stocks in particular explores Valerius’ Hypsipyle as a problematic exemplar of filial piety and specifically points to the passage quoted above as evidence. Moreover, the story of Hypispyle focuses on a ruling elite

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<sup>118</sup> On the physical *fasti*, see Feeney 2007: 167-211, especially 209-11.

<sup>119</sup> Beard 1987. The quotation is Feeney’s summary of Beard’s argument, 2007: 209.

<sup>120</sup> *V. A.* 5.743-5. See discussion on this passage in Chapter 1.

<sup>121</sup> Survives only in August. *De civ. D.* 6.5. For a discussion on Varro’s *tria genera theologiae*, see Rüpke 2012: 172-85.

<sup>122</sup> On the importance of this passage to the rest of the epic, see Landrey 2018: 234-40; Stocks 2016: 48-51, esp. 50.

<sup>123</sup> Hershkowitz 1998: 182; Zissos 2012: 107; Stocks 2016: 50-2.

family, much like the story of Medea, and Valerius casts her as an Aeneas figure in that she escapes the burning city with her father in her “pious hands” (*pias manus*, 2.249).<sup>124</sup> By departing from the Vergilian and Horatian models in his use of *lares* and *palatia* and casting Hypsipyle as an Aeneas figure, Valerius paints the image of familial and imperial piety as equals in the minds of his readers—even blending the two—before launching into the Lemnian narrative. On this episode, Stocks writes that “Hypsipyle’s act, then, stands-out as a beacon of filial piety” and Vessey goes as far as to say that Hypsipyle “is an *exemplum pietatis* in respect to Thoas as *paterfamilias*.”<sup>125</sup> Clearly, the *Argonautica* is centrally concerned with familial piety as it relates to elite, imperial families. Valerius’ lexical choices here prepare the reader to understand the rest of the epic in terms of familial piety specifically as this theme relates to the elite father-daughter relationship that Stocks has already explicated. This first instance of the *lares* thus sets the stage for the poet’s future commentary on familial piety via references to domestic religion.

#### Hercules & Hylas: The Father-Son Relationship

Before examining the poet’s use of domestic religion to shape Medea’s narrative in books 7 and 8, it is important to note that Valerius does not exclusively use the *lares* and *penates* in the case of father-daughter relationships. As Murgatroyd has shown, the Hercules-Hylas simile in book 4 comments on father-son relationships in the Flavian period.<sup>126</sup> In a gender-bending

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<sup>124</sup> Stocks 2016: 50. For further parallels between Hypsipyle and Aeneas, see Bernstein 2008 *passim*, Hershkowitz 1998: 136-8, and Poortliviet 1991.

<sup>125</sup> Stocks 2016: 50; Vessey 1985: 335.

<sup>126</sup> Murgatroyd 2009: 50-1.

simile, Valerius compares Hercules to a mother kingfisher who loses her offspring when the ocean waves smash her nest against a rock. Valerius characterizes the nest as a *lar*:

fluctus ab undisoni ceu forte crepidine saxi  
 cum rapit halcyones miserae **fetumque larem**que, 45  
 it super aegra parens queriturque tumentibus undis  
 certa sequi, quocumque ferant, audetque pavetque,  
 icta fatiscit aquis donec **domus** haustaque fluctu est;  
 illa dolens vocem dedit et se sustulit alis:  
 haut aliter somni maestus labor. 50

Just as when by chance a wave from the base of a wave-resounding rock steals the **offspring** and *lar* of the miserable kingfisher. The sick parent goes over the swelling waves and laments, determined to follow wherever they went. She is daring, terrified, while she grows weary, beaten by the tides, and her **home** has been swallowed by a wave. She calls out in pain and rises up on her wings. Hardly otherwise was the sad labor of his dream. (V.FL. 4.44-50)

While there is much at play here in terms of gender, that reading is beyond the scope of this thesis and remains a fruitful avenue for future work. This passage is pertinent to the current project in that it deviates from the pederastic relationship hinted at in Apollonius' version and instead paints the picture of devastating familial loss that is markedly non-sexual.<sup>127</sup> While there are several indications that Valerius seeks to dissuade his readers from reading the relationship of Hercules and Hylas as sexual, one that stands above all the others is Valerius' application of the noun *lar* to the kingfisher's nest in the simile. Murgatroyd passingly mentions that Valerius' use of the *lares* here enhances the *pathos* of the whole simile, but this requires further examination.<sup>128</sup> Murgatroyd is right to note that the noun *lar* is very rarely used to describe the homes of animals. It does much more than heighten the *pathos* of the simile, however. Valerius' deployment of domestic religion here binds the simile to the father-son aspect of Hercules' and

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<sup>127</sup> For Hylas in Apollonius, see Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.1161-1344, Garson 1963 provides a helpful overview of both episodes.

<sup>128</sup> Murgatroyd 2009: 51.



Hylas' relationship and abruptly precludes any sexual reading of their interactions. According to Valerius, Hercules' laments for Hylas are entirely those of a father who has lost his son—not an abandoned lover. As we shall see, this reading is confirmed by Valerius' other lexical choices throughout the passage.

While some might read *questus* as describing the lament of a lover, I propose that Valerius' choice of noun here is nothing more than a nod to past elegiac depictions of the pair. Let us not forget that Hylas has already referred to Hercules as *pater*, an appellation that does not necessarily indicate familial ties, but great respect nonetheless, at the beginning of this book.<sup>129</sup> Valerius' collocation *fetumque laremque* specifically emphasizes how the wave (*fluctus*) not only steals the child of kingfisher, but her entire *lar*—that is to say, given my analysis on the lares thus far, her home (nest), children, safety, and entire household. The miserable kingfisher loses everything of importance to this wave, just as Hercules loses Hylas and everything the boy signifies to him. It is doubly fitting that in both cases the children are snatched by aqueous agents: a wave in the case of the kingfisher and a water nymph in the case of Hylas. In this passage, Valerius seems to use the noun *domus* as a gloss for the combination of *fetum* and *larem*. Indeed, Murgatroyd writes that it “suggests ‘family’, which brings out further the magnitude of the loss.”<sup>130</sup> This is a significant inversion of the scholarly opinion that the noun *lar* is simply a synonym for *domus*, as I previously discussed in Chapter 2 concerning Tarrant's commentary on Seneca's *Thyestes*.<sup>131</sup> Here, we can see that *domus* is a more general and less emphatic term for *lar*, which more properly suggests the notion of family as Murgatroyd has pointed out. Valerius' gloss, then, combined with textual evidence from Chapters 1 and 2, further

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<sup>129</sup> V.FL. 4.25. See also Murgatroyd 2009: 43.

<sup>130</sup> Murgatroyd 2009: 52.

<sup>131</sup> Tarrant 1985: 201.

demonstrates that *lar* is not always—or even often—just a synonym for *domus*, but rather has specific meaning all its own. Lastly, by using the simile with the kingfisher and comparing Hercules to a mother bird, Valerius implicitly genders Hercules as feminine and maternal, thus further dissuading an elegiac reading of this passage. Valerius’ use of the lares in the kingfisher simile thus emphasizes a familial connection between Hercules and Hylas as opposed to their erotic portrayal in Apollonius’ *Argonautica*.

### Medea’s Marriage: The Father-Daughter Relationship

With the connection between domestic religion and the discourse of family firmly established in the preceding sections, we can now turn to the complex relationship between Medea, Aeetes, and Jason. To return briefly to Stocks’ compelling account, it is possible to understand this relationship in light of the complex family dynamics of elite Romans during the Flavian period.<sup>132</sup> Stocks specifically demonstrates how Valerius characterizes Medea as one of the “paradoxical daughters” of Roman literature who in some cases conforms to her ascribed gender role, but often deviates from it.<sup>133</sup> Valerius’ portrayal of Medea, then, serves as an exploration of what it meant to be the daughter of an elite Roman during the Flavian period and it does so through the lens of domestic religion and its place in Roman marriage ritual. Several other scholars have written more broadly on the “narratives of kinship” and familial relations within Flavian epic, though none have looked at how these authors use Roman domestic religion as a means by which to explore such narratives and relationships.<sup>134</sup> I propose that we can push

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<sup>132</sup> Stocks 2016.

<sup>133</sup> Stocks 2016: 57.

<sup>134</sup> I draw the phrase “narratives of kinship” from the title of Bernstein 2008. See also Maniotti 2016.

this blossoming analysis further: Valerius' Medea offers an unparalleled example of a woman characterized not only by the cultural milieu of Flavian Rome but also, as I argue, the language of Roman marriage ritual. We can identify this characterization in passages where Valerius deploys the language of domestic religion to describe Medea and her marriage to Jason.

Hersch and Johansson have already compiled evidence to show that the gods of domestic religion, namely the *lares*, *penates*, and the *genius*, were present during marriage rituals and often paraded from the bride's old home to her new one.<sup>135</sup> Further evidence for the importance of domestic religion in Roman marriage ritual is found in Plautus' *Aulularia*, which I discussed in Chapter 1. In this comedy, the *lar familiaris* of an elite household favors the daughter of the *paterfamilias* and aims to help her find a suitable, elite husband.<sup>136</sup> Though the play is fragmentary, its themes seem to resonate with Valerius' characterization of Medea as a woman in conflict, torn between her father and her potential husband. While Valerius does not provide a direct description of the domestic deities at the actual wedding ceremony on the island of Peuce, he uses their presence in earlier passages to foreshadow the wedding and provide the reader a window to Medea's inner turmoil. Although such references are lost on us as modern readers, Valerius' audience would have been keen to pick up on such allusions.<sup>137</sup> These irruptions of domestic religion serve to emphasize the tension Medea feels between her familial ties to her father, Aeetes, and her nuptial ties to Jason. Building on the work of Alessandro Perutelli, who has already pointed out the very "Roman" attributes of the wedding between Medea and Jason in Book 8, I would like to examine how Valerius foreshadows the Roman wedding with several

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<sup>135</sup> Hersch 2010: 278-9; Johansson 2010.

<sup>136</sup> On Plautus' *Aulularia* and Roman marriage, see most recently Flower and Diluzio 2019: 222.

<sup>137</sup> For the widespread importance of the *lares* to Roman marriage ritual, see Hersch 2010: 278-9, and Flower and Diluzio 2019 *passim*.

references to the *penates* throughout the epic and, more specifically, how these references augment the reader's understanding of Medea.<sup>138</sup>

Early on in Book 7, Valerius compares Medea to a pet dog maddened and on the verge of fleeing its home. He uses this simile to describe her anxious demeanor after Jason has left Aetes' palace:

tum comitum visu fruitur miseranda suarum  
 implerique nequit; subitoque parentibus haeret  
 blandior et patriae circumfert oscula dextrae.  
 sic adsueta toris et mensae dulcis erili,  
 aegra nova iam peste canis rabieque futura,                   125  
 ante fugam totos **lustrat** queribunda **penates**.

Then the miserable woman delights in gazing at her companions, but she cannot be sated. Suddenly, she clings to her parents in flattery and plants kisses all over her father's hand. So too does a pet dog, accustomed to its master's table and already sick with a new disease and onset rabies, *lustrat* over all the *penates*, wailing, before it flees.  
 (V.FL. 7.121-6)

In his commentary on book 7, Perutelli claims that this intrusion of the domestic sphere into the epic poem is highly characteristic of the Alexandrian poets, writing that “la creazione rispecchia il gusto alessandrino di introdurre nell'epos similitudini che costituiscano quadretti di vita quotidiana, con temi umili.”<sup>139</sup> I contend, however, that there is more at play in this passage than Hellenistic style, especially since Perutelli goes on to write that this stylistic feature is extremely rare for Valerius.<sup>140</sup> The link between the dog's *rabies* and Medea is almost certainly meant to characterize Medea as ‘love sick’ since the word is commonly used in elegiac contexts.<sup>141</sup> The

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<sup>138</sup> Perutelli 1997.

<sup>139</sup> Perutelli 1997: 228.

<sup>140</sup> Perutelli 1997: 228. “Tale orientamento alessandrinescente non pare in linea con la tendenza generale di Valerius, il cui uso della similitudine è proiettato verso il sublime, a meno che non si voglia privilegiare il fattore stilistico e sottolineare che il quadretto domestico è reso con linguaggio elevato.”

<sup>141</sup> Perutelli 1997: 228-9; *OLD rabiēs* 2, 2b.

poet's use of the verb *lustrō* in this passage is key to understanding how the dog is interacting with the *penates* and thus what relevance the simile holds for Medea's current predicament in the narrative. The problem lies in the possible interpretations of *lustrō* that apply here: either 1) to purify ceremonially (with cathartic or apotropaic rites, usu. including a procession); 2) to move over or through (a place), traverse, roam, scour; or 3) to cast one's eyes over or round, scan, survey.<sup>142</sup> While most modern translators prefer the second sense because of their inclination to read *lar* as a metonym for the home, it will be helpful to explore how the first and third definitions might change our understanding of the passage in light of the *penates* as the direct object.<sup>143</sup>

The first definition can be applied to the *penates* in a strictly religious sense. Tibullus provides a precedent for the use of the verb *lustrō* in the context of domestic religion:

vos quoque, felicitis quondam, nunc pauperis agri  
custodes, fertis munera vestra, **lares**;  
tunc vitula innumeros **lustrabat** caesa iuencos,  
nunc agna exigui est hostia parva soli.

You also, *lares*, now the guardians of poor fields, which were once fertile, accept your offering; then a slaughtered heifer **purified** countless young bulls, now a lamb is the small sacrifice for my meager land (Tib. *Eleg.* 1.1.19-22).

Here, Tibullus sets out his ideal rural life and discusses sacrificing a lamb to the relevant gods, among which he includes the *lares*. This passage is in keeping with other passages that associate the *lares* with rural life, such as Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, which I discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>144</sup>

Though Valerius' use does not likely represent religious sacrifice in line with this instance in Tibullus, its associations with domestic religion are perhaps in the reader's mind. The last

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<sup>142</sup> OLD *lustrō* 1, 3, 5.

<sup>143</sup> Mozley 1936: 369; Slavitt 1999: 135-6.

<sup>144</sup> On the association of *lares* with the rural life, see Hor. *Epod.* 2.66; Maltby 2002: 129 on this passage; Scheid 1990 *passim*.

definition is more likely the case. If we take *lustrat* to mean “scans,” the line takes on new meaning that harkens back to Apollonius’ description of Medea in her room the night before she leaves with Jason. As Medea wakes up from her dream in which she is torn between her parents and Jason, she scans the room frantically with her eyes, shaking with fear (χαλλομένη δ’ ἀνόρουσε φόβῳ, περί τ’ ἀμφί τε τοίχους | πάπτηνεν θαλάμοιο, Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.633-4). Valerius’ and Apollonius’ passages are more similar than they may at first appear. Both come directly after Aeetes gives Jason the tasks of yoking the fire-breathing oxen, tilling the field with his adamantine plow, and slaughtering the earthborn men. This passage preempts Valerius’ later description of Medea’s dream. It is not out of character for Valerius to change up the order of certain details from Apollonius’ version. For example, Medea’s anxious pacing comes after her dream in Apollonius, but Valerius writes it before. Thus, the dog simile is likely Valerius’ innovation upon the Apollonian passage. In this case, the crazed dog and, by extension, Medea frantically *gaze* over the *penates*, calling the reader’s attention to the ancestral aspects of Aeetes’ house. Further, by deploying the *penates* in this instance, Valerius stresses the fact that Medea will be leaving her ancestral home should she choose to help, and eventually marry, Jason.

Just a score of lines later, the poet uses the *penates* again to subtly allude to the impending nuptials. In this scene, Valerius purposefully modifies the well-known scene from Apollonius’ version. As Medea awakens from the dream in which she is torn between Aeetes and Jason, Valerius writes that she recognizes her “dear *penates*”:

supplex hinc sternitur hospes,  
 hinc pater. illa nova rumpit formidine somnos  
 erigiturque toro; famulas **carosque penates**                      145  
 agnoscit, modo Thessalicas raptata per urbes.

On this side, the stranger reached out as a suppliant, on the other, her father. She breaks free from her dreams in newfound fear and sits straight up in bed. She recognizes her

**dear *penates*** and slaves, only having just been whipped through the Thessalian cities.  
(V.Fl. 7.143-6)

Valerius here recreates the description of Medea's dream from book 3 of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, which also has resonances of marriage ritual.<sup>145</sup> Yet, where Apollonius focuses on the walls and physical features of Medea's room when she wakes up, Valerius emphasizes her *penates*, which are the physical representations of a Roman's ancestors.<sup>146</sup> Placing these emblems of domestic religion so close in proximity to the clearest description of how Medea feels torn between her father and her future husband is telling, especially given their significance in the rituals of Roman marriage. Valerius wants his readers to depict the tug of war happening in Medea's mind against a backdrop of familial piety—her sense of duty to both her living family and her ancestors clearly factors into the decision at hand. Valerius draws our (and Medea's) attention to the *penates* in these passages to illuminate Medea's subconscious desire—or perhaps her destiny—to marry Jason. These two passages, then, directly foreshadow the marriage of Medea and Jason on Peuce where the ceremony is marked by distinctly Roman ritual practice.<sup>147</sup> Emma Buckley analyzes Medea's characterization as a Roman *virgo* in relation to the marriage scene, writing that “the wedding serves as a kind of microcosm for a much deeper reflection on the role of marriage in constituting Roman epic” and that it is a “‘Roman’ Medea who confronts Jason at the end of the *Argonautica*, fighting for her rights as a Roman wife.”<sup>148</sup>

Since these deities, which are emblematic of one's ancestors and current familial bonds, weigh so heavy on Medea's mind and are drawn to our attention by Valerius, we must consider how they affect our reading of Medea's family and her choice to marry Jason. Stocks has already

<sup>145</sup> Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.616-32; see especially the note on εισαγάγοιτο in Hunter 1989: 165.

<sup>146</sup> Foss 1997: 198-9.

<sup>147</sup> See Lazzarini 2012: 237-45 for the Roman ceremony and ritual.

<sup>148</sup> Buckley 2016: 63, 85.

artfully explained that Valerius characterizes Medea as both conforming to and deviating from her prescribed gender roles as an elite Roman *filia*.<sup>149</sup> In the service of Stocks' argument, we can add the evidence from our previous analysis. Valerius clearly ties the gods of domestic Roman religion into his definition of Roman identity and uses them to frame Hypsipyle's narrative in book 2. As the member of an elite ruling family who also saves her royal father, Hypsipyle serves as an example of Roman filial piety against which the reader should consider Medea's character. Her connection with the gods of domestic Roman religion further enforce this comparison. As I have shown, the Hercules-kingfisher simile of book 4 uses domestic religion as a vehicle to focus the readers' attention on father-son relationships. In book 7, Valerius uses the *penates* twice to portray Medea's inner turmoil regarding her decision to leave her ancestral homeland and her father Aeetes to marry Jason. Explicating Valerius' deployment of the *penates* in the discourse of elite family relationships not only reveals Medea's inner conflicts and foreshadows the marriage at Peuce, but it strengthens Stocks' argument for Medea as an example of an elite daughter in Flavian Rome.

## STATIUS

Statius provides an interesting case with which to conclude this project in that the realms of discourse in which he participates by deploying domestic religion in his writing are trifold: that of elite families, as we just saw in the case of Valerius Flaccus, but more interestingly, the discourses surrounding the imperial cult and man's relationship with the environment. As a well-educated man from Campania, closely tied to the emperor Domitian, Statius is perhaps predisposed to participating in these discourses. Indeed, his youth was spent in the Campanian

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<sup>149</sup> Stocks 2016 *passim*.



region, long renowned for its natural environment, and under the tutelage of his father, a prominent Greek academic who worked for aristocratic families both in Campania and at Rome.<sup>150</sup> His firsthand experience with the eruption of Vesuvius likely contributes to his concern for man's relationship with the natural world.

As Carole Newlands has shown, Statius maintained strong links to his home city, Naples, as well as the visual art of the Campanian region.<sup>151</sup> She writes that Statius “put art and literature at the centre of a definition of Roman identity that was shaped by close contact with separate regional identities, specifically that of Naples.”<sup>152</sup> As we will see, art and visual experience both shape Statius' poetry and his engagement with domestic religion. From his intense focus on architectural detail in the *Silvae* to his portrayal of the Nemean serpent as a *genius loci* from *lararia* shrines, Statius is ever concerned with aesthetics. That is not to say, however, that the visual is his only concern. In what follows, I discuss the nexus of understanding that Statius creates between visual art and architecture, virtue, the politics of elite families, imperial cult, and the environment and how domestic religion is the glue which holds all these together.

### The *Silvae*, Campania, and Domestic Religion

Statius' collection of poems, the *Silvae*, occupies an intermediary position between discourses on elite families, which I discussed in the section on the *Argonautica* above, and the natural environment, which I explore in the subsequent section on the *Thebaid*. As a work primarily concerned with noteworthy political families and their estates in Campania and Rome,

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<sup>150</sup> On Statius' relationship with Campania and the Flavian emphasis on the natural world, see the wonderful new volume Augoustakis and Littlewood 2019.

<sup>151</sup> Newlands *per litteras*.

<sup>152</sup> Newlands 2012: 2

the *Silvae* straddle the boundary between these two discourses. Throughout these poems, Statius employs the language of domestic Roman religion to characterize villas and locales in terms of their relationship to the families that inhabit them. As a poet who endured the eruption of Vesuvius, which he mentions in scattered places throughout the *Silvae*, Statius had a deep interest and concern for the interactions and relationship between mankind and the natural world. In the *Silvae*, Statius uses the gods of domestic religion to explore this relationship and praise the wisdom of his elite friends and patrons. In this section, I provide close readings of several passages from the *Silvae*, which best demonstrate Statius' engagement with domestic religion. I first treat Statius' description of Domitian's palace in poem 4.2, which ties together the present concern of virtue and elite families with my previous discussion of the relationship between domestic religion and imperial cult in chapter 1. I then explore Statius' deployment of the language of the domestic religion in his description of the homes of Violentilla and Stella in 1.2 and Manilius Vopiscus in 1.3. These poems exemplify how Statius associates wisdom and virtue with proper treatment and cultivation of the natural world and forms a bridge to the subsequent discussion of the natural order in *Thebaid*.

The significance of the *penates* and *genius* to the imperial cult and elite families is perhaps most emphatic in *Silvae* 4.2, where Statius praises the elegant palace of Domitian. In this poem, Statius describes his first dinner feast with the emperor, who also happens to be his patron, borrowing language from Vergil's *Aeneid* to characterize both Domitian and his palace in terms of Rome's imperial epic past:

regia Sidoniae convivia laudat Elissae  
 qui magnum Aenean Laurentibus intulit arvis  
 Alcinoique dapes mansuro carmine monstrat  
 aequore qui multo reducem consumpsit Ulixem:  
 ast ego cui **sacrae Caesar** nova gaudia **cenae**  
 nunc primum dominamque dedit contingere mensam,

**qua celebrem mea vota lyra**, quas solvere gratis  
 sufficiam? non si pariter mihi vertice laeto  
 nectat adoratas et Smyrna et Mantua lauros,  
 digna loquar. **mediis videor discumbere in astris**  
**cum Iove et Iliaca porrectum sumere dextra**  
**immortale merum.** sterilis transmisisimus annos:  
 haec aevi mihi prima dies; hic limina vitae.  
 tene ego, **regnator terrarum orbisque subacti**  
**magne parens**, te, **spes hominum**, te, **cura deorum**,  
 cerno iacens? datur haec iuxta, datur ora tueri  
 vina inter mensasque, et non assurgere **fas** est?

He who brought great Aeneas to the Laurentine fields lauds the regal banquets of Sidonian Elissa. He who wearied returning Ulysses with much sea shows the feasts of Alcinous with a lasting song: but I, to whom **Caesar** has now granted the novel delights of a sacred dinner and that I approach my master's table for the first time, **with what instrument should I honor my vows**, what thanks will I be able to repay? Not even if both Smyrna and Mantua should bind the adored laurel branches atop my elated head would I utter anything worthy. **I seem to recline amidst the stars with Jupiter and take immortal wine poured by the hand of Ganymede.** We've crossed over the barren years: this is the first day of my lifetime; here the threshold of my life. As I recline, do I not discern *you*, **sovereign of nations and mighty father of the subjected world**, *you*, the **hope of humanity**, *you*, **the charge of the gods**? Is our meeting permitted? Is it permitted that I look on your face amidst the wine and tables? And is it not right to stand? (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.1–17)

Statius begins this poem about Domitian with epic language, not only to associate himself with Vergil and Homer (*qua celebrem mea vota lyra*), as Vessey writes, to remark that “even if he were endowed with the genius of both at once, his powers would still be inadequate” for singing Domitian’s praises.<sup>153</sup> Vessey further explicates Domitian’s status as divine in this passage, calling attention to the narrowest demarcation between Domitian and Jupiter in lines 10-17.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, Statius’ description of Domitian as the “sovereign of nations and mighty father of the subjected world” (*regnator terrarum orbisque subacti* | *magne parens*), the “hope of humanity” (*spes hominum*), and the “charge of the gods” (*cura deorum*) coupled with the poet’s emphatic

<sup>153</sup> Vessey 1983: 208.

<sup>154</sup> Vessey 1983: 209-10.

repetition of *te* all contribute to an image of the emperor as a god among men. Further, Statius explicitly calls this feast “sacred” (*sacrae...cena*). If this were not enough, Statius even comments on his own position in the company of a god and compares Domitian to Jupiter when he writes “I seem to recline amidst the stars with Jupiter and take immortal wine poured by the hand of Ganymede” (*mediis videor discumbere in astris | cum Iove et Iliaca porrectum sumere dextra | immortale merum*). On the religious imagery of this passage, Newlands writes that Statius “articulates a new concept of imperial majesty that is concentrated on the sacredness of the emperor’s figure and on the monumentality of the setting in which he is placed.”<sup>155</sup>

I would add that Statius is purposeful in first addressing Domitian by his title *Caesar* after his mention of Vergil at the beginning of the poem. This must call to mind for Statius’ reader the origins of imperial cult that happened barely a century ago and received critical comment in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Lucan sardonically casts Julius Caesar as Jupiter’s replacement—what seems to be a still relevant line of thought for Statius’ portrayal of Domitian. As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, Vergil’s *Aeneid* had an integral role in Augustus’ ascension to divine status and the formation of the early imperial cult, the effects of which are felt in this passage. Moreover, Statius characterizes himself as self-conscious of his own actions in the presence of the godlike Domitian in patently religious terms when he asks, “is it not right to stand?” (*non assurgere fas est*). As Kathleen Coleman notes in her commentary on the passage, Statius’ use of the word *fas* here contributes even more to the religious flavor of this passage.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Newlands 2002: 263.

<sup>156</sup> Coleman 1988: 88.

While Vessey has convincingly explained the significance of Domitian's divinity and his representation in this poem, he and other scholars have missed the key mentions of domestic religion that further characterize the emperor as divine. In the very next section of the poem, Statius begins to describe the palace and all its grandeur. He connects Domitian with the palace in the terms of domestic religion:

**Tectum augustum**, ingens, non centum insigne columnis  
 sed quanta superos caelumque Atlante remisso  
 sustentare queant. **stupet hoc vicina Tonantis**  
**regia teque pari laetantur sede locatum**  
**numina** (nec magnum properes escendere caelum):  
 tanta patet moles effusaeque impetus aulae  
 liberior campi multumque amplexus operti  
 aetheros et tantum domino minor: **ille penatis**  
**implet et ingenti genio gravat.**

This **august building**, huge and marked not by a hundred columns, but by how many are needed to sustain heaven and the gods above when Atlas is away. Next door, **the temple of the Thunderer gapes at it** and **the gods rejoice that you've a similar dwelling** (but don't hurry up to high heaven just yet): so great a structure opens before me, the onslaught of so vast a hall, larger than the rolling plain, embracing so much of the open sky, and only paling in comparison with its master: **He fills the penates and weighs them down with his mighty genius.** (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.18-26)

Statius continues his characterization of Domitian and the palace in terms of imperial cult, calling the building "august" (*tectum augustum*), an adjective associated only with imperial cult at this point, and writing that the temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline is in awe of Domitian's palace (*stupet hoc vicina Tonantis | regia*) and even describes the palace as Domitian's temple (*te pari laetantur sede locatum | numina*). Coleman claims that Statius' naming of Jupiter's temple as *Tonantis regia* is meant to recall the god's role as *rex deorum* and that its comparison to Domitian's palace implies "Domitian has the status of *rex* on earth."<sup>157</sup> Newlands complicates this reading by bringing to light the dangers of using the word *rex* in

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<sup>157</sup> Coleman 1988: 90.

imperial panegyric. She argues that Statius deploys this word not only to more closely align Domitian with Jupiter, but also to challenge the reader's preconceptions of kingship in this new age.<sup>158</sup> It should be noted that Statius's emphasis here on the displacement of the cult to Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline in favor of the imperial palace on the Palatine further supports our previous discussion in this chapter of Valerius Flaccus' similar replacement of the Capitoline with *palatia*. As in the example from Valerius' *Argonautica*, the language of domestic Roman religion in this passage has been overlooked.

Statius' reference to the *penates* and the *genius* here further enforces these themes of imperial cult that we have been discussing. Before examining how exactly Domitian "fills the *penates* and gratifies them with his mighty *genius*" (*ille penatis | implet et ingenti genio iuvat*), we must first establish how Domitian is otherwise framed with religious architectural imagery. The connections at play between Statius' description of Domitian and his description of the palace are important for understanding how he engages domestic religion in the discourses with which this poem is concerned. Newlands and Macdonald have already explicated the performative aspects of Domitian's palace. Given the archaeological evidence from the Flavian palace, it seems that, as Macdonald writes, "the general appearance would have been that of stage-building architecture, for the *aula* is both theatre and temple, the place where Domitian puts himself on display in front of his guests to be worshipped."<sup>159</sup> Newlands further comments that many of the rooms featured an apse, which was a distinctly religious architectural element.<sup>160</sup> Given these arguments that Domitian's palace was constructed as both a religious

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<sup>158</sup> Newlands 2002: 265-6.

<sup>159</sup> Macdonald 1965: 201.

<sup>160</sup> Newlands 2002: 267. See Darwall-Smith 1996: 186, 213 on the apses of the Villa Domitiana; also, Cancik 1965: 71-4.

and performative space, we must explore how the *penates* and *genius* contribute to this carefully constructed image of the emperor.

Central to our understanding of how Statius deploys these gods of domestic religion are the forces of the verbs *gravat* and *impleo*. This passage has some textual issues, specifically whether the text should read *gravat* or *iuvat*, so a discussion of their merits is necessary. In her edition of the poem, Coleman rightly prefers *gravat* to *iuvat* but writes that the *penates*

“after meaning ‘household’ with *implet*, would have to be taken with *iuvat* as ‘household gods’; this is somewhat strained, and confusing. *gravat* continues the physical metaphor in *implet*: if Domitian’s palace is full of his personality it must be weighed down by it.”<sup>161</sup>

Yet again we see a commentator that does not engage with the full semantic value of the *penates*. Given the nature of these gods both as ancestral spirits and material objects, as I argue, this distinction should not be necessary. We must alter our reading of this sentence. The phrase *implet penatis* not only means that Domitian “fills” or “takes up space” in the palace, but rather that he fills this performative, religious space—what is essentially his temple—with all the weight of his godhead. In this way, Domitian is connected with the palace on a divine level and Statius engages the ancestral aspect of the imperial cult. Statius engages the inherent connection between the *penates* and one’s ancestors to place Domitian in a long line of divine emperors that began with Augustus. As Coleman comments, *gravat* follows this meaning in that it indicates the weight of divine bodies.<sup>162</sup> She cites several examples for this literary phenomenon including Aeneas embarking on Charon’s boat in book 6 of Vergil’s *Aeneid* and Statius’ description of Apollo in the *Thebaid*.<sup>163</sup> I do not wish to suggest that the physical metaphor, which Coleman describes, is not at work here, but rather I hope to demonstrate how a fuller understanding of the

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<sup>161</sup> Coleman 1988: 91.

<sup>162</sup> Coleman 1988: 91; see also Wagenvoort 1947.

<sup>163</sup> *V. A.* 1.726; *Stat. Theb.* 7.750.

domestic religion provides a more nuanced reading: Statius does not only write that Domitian *fills* the palace with his presence, but that he fills it as a god fills their temple—as the *genius* of the *paterfamilias* fills the house.

The *Silvae* are not entirely concerned with Domitian and the imperial cult, however, and Statius spends much time discussing other elite families and their relationships with their homes and the natural environment. In poem 1.2, Statius writes of the marriage between Violentilla and Stella through the lens of Venus. The poet describes the goddess' arrival at their home:

iam Thybris et arces  
Iliacae: **pandit nitidos domus alta penates**  
claraque gaudentes plauserunt limina cycni.

Already here are the Tiber and the Ilian citadels: **the high home reveals its shining penates** and the rejoicing swans applaud at the famous threshold (Stat. *Silv.* 1.2.144-6).

Statius often describes these famous villas as *penates* in addition to regular words for house such as *domus* and *tecta*. The contexts for their use differ, however, and further dissuade us from reading the gods of domestic religion as simple synonyms for “dwelling.” Such a distinction is clearly made here, where the “home reveals its *penates*” (*pandit...domus...penates*). Newlands persuasively explains how Statius' description of the house in the terms of domestic religion not only connects the Roman home with traditional conceptions of virtue, but more importantly elaborates upon Violentilla's economic and moral status, framing her as a paragon of Roman virtue.<sup>164</sup> While the *penates* are clearly deployed to portray the house, they are simultaneously described as features to be displayed, fitting our definition of the *penates* as physical, ancestral artifacts. As several scholars have shown, the Roman house (especially in the Flavian period) was a complex social and political instrument.<sup>165</sup> Newlands summarizes this, writing that

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<sup>164</sup> Newlands 2002: 96-7.

<sup>165</sup> Newlands 2002: 89-92; see also Saller 1984 and Wallace-Hadrill 1997.



“Stattius’ descriptions of houses interpret the social and indeed religious and moral value that the Romans put on their houses—that revered place where the honour of the family was preserved and displayed.”<sup>166</sup> Let us turn to other examples of the villa poems to see how Statius employs the language of domestic religion to interpret the homes of these elite families.

In the very first full-length villa poem to grace Latin literature (*Silv.* 1.3), Statius introduces the remarkable home of Manilius Vopiscus as “twin *penates* threaded by the Anio river” (*inserto geminos Aniense penates*, 1.3.2). His use of *penates* here is obviously metonymic in that *penates* refers to the physical structure of the home, but it also sets up the reader to understand the villa in a much different light than if he had written *inserto gemina Aniense tecta*. Statius’ allusion to domestic religion frames Vopiscus’ home as a religious site where there is a close relationship between the owner, the house itself, and the land on which it sits. Statius’ message here is marked by his consistent allusion to Horace’s *Odes* and his overall argument that mastery over nature and luxury should be counted as moral bonuses. The *penates* appear again slightly later in the poem as the crux of Statius’ point about the harmony of nature and human needs. The poet describes a tree at the heart of the villa:

Quid nunc iugentia mirer  
aut quid partitis distantia tecta trichoris?  
Quid te, quae **mediis servata penatibus, arbor**  
tecta per et postes liquidas emergis in auras,  
quo non sub domino saevas passura bipennes?  
at nunc ignaro forsitan vel lubrica Nais  
vel non abruptos tibi debet Hamadryas annos.

Why should I now wonder at the ridges or your rooms divided in three parts? Why should wonder at you, **Tree, who are preserved in the midst of the *penates*** and rise up through roofs and doorposts into the liquid breezes, you who would suffer the savage axe under any other master? But now perhaps some slippery nymph or hamadryad owes you their unbroken years, though you don’t know it. (Stat. *Silv.* 1.3.57-63)

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<sup>166</sup> Newlands 2002: 92.

This passage demonstrates Statius' conception of harmony between Vopiscus' villa and its natural setting. They are not at odds with one another, but rather in a mutually beneficial relationship. The fact that Vopiscus spared such a tree in the midst of his villa contributes to his moral integrity and his understanding of the proper ways in which man should interact with the natural world. Nature is compliant and submissive to Vopiscus, who in turn, is portrayed as a gentle and proper caretaker of the environment. Statius uses the language of domestic religion to convey this sense of moral harmony between nature and man.

#### The Nemean Serpent as a *Genius Loci*

While the example of Manilius Vopiscus' villa is a positive one, Statius engages domestic religion in the *Thebaid* to portray a negative relationship between nature and mankind. In this section, I explore how Statius depicts the Nemean serpent from book 5 of the *Thebaid* with visual attributes from the programmatic wall-paintings in Roman *lararia* (household shrines to the gods of domestic religion). As we shall see, Statius' Nemean serpent bears a striking resemblance to the serpents depicted on these shrines, which Flower has identified as *genii loci*, guardians spirit of place which closely resemble the *genius* of Roman *paterfamilias*.<sup>167</sup> The serpent appears in what scholars have named the 'Hypsipyle epyllion,' an inset tale where Hypsipyle relates the story of the Lemnian women to the Argives. As she describes her past woes, the serpent, upset by the recent draught brought about by Bacchus to delay the Argives, unknowingly kills the infant Opheltes, whom Hypsipyle was charged with protecting. Opheltes' death serves not only as an *aetion* for the Nemean games, but as the first casualty in the horrific

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<sup>167</sup> Flower 2017: 63-75.

civil war that occupies the latter half of the epic.<sup>168</sup> I argue that Statius purposefully evokes the wall-paintings from Campanian *lararia* in his description of the serpent not only to further Romanize the Greek *topos* of his epic poem, but more importantly to participate in the discourse on man's relationship with the environment that I discuss above. By portraying the serpent with familiar imagery from domestic religion, Statius creates empathy for the family of Lycurgus as well as the natural world and its denizens, who experience great strife and destruction because of the civil war.

A brief discussion of these household shrines and their wall-paintings will inform our reading of the serpent and how it functions as a representation of domestic religion. The meaning and purpose of these serpents that were depicted on Roman *lararia* have long mystified scholars.<sup>169</sup> These types of shrines are typically located near the hearth of a home or in the atrium and are mostly extant in the Campanian region of Italy at Pompeii and Herculaneum. Flower convincingly argues that these serpents should be identified as *genii loci*. As I discuss in Chapter 1, the traditional *genius* is an ancestral guardian spirit whose domain is the household and family affairs, while the *genius loci*, however, does not preside over any mortal activity, but rather the natural landscape on which the physical *lararium* rests.<sup>170</sup> Thus, the combination of the *genius* and the *genius loci* in a Roman *lararium* represents the close ties that the Romans conceived of between their ancestors and the natural world which they inhabited. As Flower notes, corroborating literary accounts of these serpents can be found in Vergil and Cicero, which I will further explore in this section.<sup>171</sup> No one to my knowledge, however, has examined Statius'

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<sup>168</sup> On Opheltes' death, see Ganiban 2013.

<sup>169</sup> It has of course received some prior treatment. See Boyce 1937, 1940, 1942; Fröhlich 1991; Orr 1969, 1972, 1978, 1988; Tybout 1996; Giacobello 2008.

<sup>170</sup> Flower 2017: 63-70; Boyce 1942: 21.

<sup>171</sup> Verg. *A.* 5.84-96; Cic. *de Div.* 1.72.

description of the Nemean serpent in light of these wall paintings which were so pervasive in the author's home region. While scholars have traditionally seen the Nemean serpent as an intertextual nod to Ovid's Theban serpent in book 3 of the *Metamorphoses*, I focus on how Statius' description is innovative in its reference to Campanian wall-paintings and why he engages domestic Roman religion to characterize the serpent.<sup>172</sup>

Let us first investigate how Statius illustrates the Nemean serpent using the aesthetics of *lararia* paintings before exploring how the serpent serves as a literary representation of the *genius loci* from domestic Roman religion. The reader is first introduced to the serpent in the middle of Book 5 after the Argives have arrived at Nemea on their way to Thebes. Statius connects the serpent to the *genii loci* of the wall-paintings with three main identifiers: the physical appearance of the serpent, the farmers' offerings, and the serpent's movement:

<b>interea campis, nemoris sacer horror Achai,</b>	505
<b>terrigena</b> exoritur <b>serpens</b> tractuque soluto	
inmanem sese vehit ac post terga relinquit.	
livida fax oculis, tumidi stat in ore veneni	
spuma virens, ter lingua vibrat, terna agmina adunci	
dentis, et <b>auratae crudelis gloria fronti</b>	510
<b>prominet.</b> Inachio sanctum dixere Tonanti	
agricolae, <b>cui cura loci et siluestribus aris</b>	
<b>pauper honos; nunc ille dei circumdare templa</b>	
<b>orbe uago labens,</b> miserae nunc robora siluae	
atterit et uastas tenuat complexibus ornos.	515

**Meanwhile in the fields, a sacred horror of the Achaean grove, the earth-born serpent** rises and draws its immense body in a loose track, leaving behind its back. There is livid fire in its eyes and the green foam of swelling venom in its mouth. It flicks its three tongues across three rows of hooked teeth and **a cruel glory juts out from his golden brow.** The farmers said he was sacred to the Inachian Thunderer, **for whom there was care of the place and a poor offering upon woodland altars. Now it encircles the shrines of the god, gliding in a wandering circle,** now it wears away the oaks of the miserable forest and shaves the devastated ash trees with its embraces. (Stat. *Theb.* 5.505-13)

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<sup>172</sup> Soerink 2014: 109–21; Sauvage 1975 *passim*; Lehaneur 1878: 248-9.

Stattius immediately casts his audience into a natural setting in which the *genius loci* is typically portrayed (*interea campis, nemoris...*). The poet describes this serpent as a “sacred horror,” that is, something sacred which inspires fear or awe (*sacer horror*), signaling to the attentive reader that this is no ordinary snake, but one that has certain religious connotations. Stattius then describes the “cruel glory that juts out from his golden brow” (*auratae crudelis gloria fronti | prominet*), mimicking the red crests painted onto the yellow serpents from *lararia* paintings (fig. 1). Of course, not every serpent on all *lararia* shrines was painted with gold and red, but this is true for a large majority of extant paintings in Campania. Jörn Soerink aptly notes in his commentary on these lines that the *gloria crudelis* harkens back to the snakes of the Laocoön episode from Book 2 of the *Aeneid* and specifically connects them to the serpents of Pompeiian *lararia*.<sup>173</sup> Vergil uses much of the same vocabulary as Stattius when he describes the serpents that attack Laocoön:

ecce autem gemini a Tenedo tranquilla per alta (horresco referens) immensis orbibus angues incumbunt pelago pariterque ad litora tendunt;	205
<b>pectora quorum inter fluctus arrecta iubaeque sanguineae superant undas.</b> pars cetera pontum pone legit sinuatque immensa volumine terga. fit sonitus spumante salo; iamque arva tenebant ardentisque oculos suffecti sanguine et igni	210
sibila lambebant linguis vibrantibus ora.	

But behold: twin snakes (I shudder to tell of them) with immense coils press on through the deep, tranquil sea from Tenedos and, neck and neck, they strive toward the shores. **Their chests raised high over the tide; their bloody crests top the waves.** The rest of them follows behind through the sea and their immense backs curve into a coil. A roar emits from the frothing sea. Now they were reaching the fields; their burning eyes filled with fire and blood and they were licking their hissing faces with vibrating tongues. (V. A. 2.203-11)

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<sup>173</sup> Soerink 2014: 110-11; 116.

Here, the snakes are literally described as having specifically “bloody crests” (*pectora quorum inter fluctus arrecta iubaeque | sanguineae superant undas*).<sup>174</sup> Vergil even gives special emphasis to the nature of the serpents’ crests by delaying the adjective *sanguineae* by enjambment. With this literary reference in mind, an image of a cruel, bloody crest jutting out from the snake’s golden brow begins to form for the reader of Statius’ passage, which strikingly evokes the serpents typically depicted on *lararia* shrines. Given this clear reference to the *Aeneid*, Statius’ *crudelis gloria* is just as red as Vergil’s *iubae sanguineae*.

Beyond the descriptions of the serpents coloring, however, Statius provides their physical context, writing that they are the caretakers of woodland shrines and that farmers give them poor offerings (*Inachio sanctum dixere Tonanti | agricolae, cui cura loci et silvestribus aris | pauper honos*). In their respective commentaries on this passage, Kaspar von Barth and Soerink both take Jupiter to be the antecedent for the relative pronoun *cui*.<sup>175</sup> Barth even goes as far to say that “others construe this towards the serpent, but unintelligently” (*alii referunt haec ad Draconem, sed incogitanter*, Barth *ad* 5.511-13). I propose that the reader is perfectly capable of taking *cui* with the serpent and, moreover, that the antecedent for *cui* is purposefully ambiguous. Since the serpent is sacred to Jupiter, it stands in as the god’s representative—the two are directly linked. If Jupiter has responsibility for this grove, so too does the Nemean serpent. There is no grammatical reason to deny such a reading. If we understand *cui* as referring to the Nemean serpent, even if only through its link with Jupiter, this passage takes on new meaning and invokes the sense of the *genius loci*. Obviously, the serpent having care of the place (*cura loci*) provides linguistic evidence for this connection, but there is a subtler allusion here. The poor

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<sup>174</sup> Soerink 2014: 116.

<sup>175</sup> Barth *ad* 5.512; Soerink 2014: 117.

offering (*pauper honos*) must also be taken with *cui*. Thus, *cui* functions as a dative of possession and modifies both *cura* and *honos* within the relative clause. In nearly every painting of the *genii loci* on household shrines, the serpents approach an altar with the simple—one might say poor—offerings of eggs and pinecones (figs. 1, 2).<sup>176</sup>

The paintings of these serpents are usually composed in one of two ways: either one or two serpents converging on a single altar (fig. 1) or one serpent encircling the altar where it emerges from the foot of the shrine (fig. 2). We also see in figure 2 that the serpent is explicitly described as the *genius loci*.<sup>177</sup> While there are exceptions, this is the general paradigm for serpentine *lararia* paintings. Statius describes the movement of the Nemean serpent in a similar way, writing that “it now encircles the shrine of the god, slithering in a wandering circuit” (*nunc ille dei circumdare templa | orbe vago labens*). The force of the verb *circumdare* and the ablative phrase *orbe vago* here parallels the circular movement shown in the latter type of these paintings (fig. 2). The evidence for these connections is not only material, however. There are two further literary accounts that demonstrate such movement and squarely define this type of serpent as the *genius loci*. Let us now turn to the arrival of the serpent at Anchises’ tomb in book 5 of the *Aeneid*.

Vergil’s description of the propitious serpent that appears at Anchises’ grave matches the sense of movement present in Statius’ description of the Nemean serpent, though Vergil employs slightly different language:

dixerat haec, adytis cum lubricus anguis ab imis  
 septem ingens **gyros**, septena **volumina** traxit  
**amplexus** placide tumulum lapsusque per aras,  
 caeruleae cui terga notae maculosus et **auro**  
**squamam incendebat fulgor**, ceu nubibus arcus

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<sup>176</sup> Flower 2017: 63.

<sup>177</sup> Boyce 1942: 15.

mille iacit varios adverso sole colores.  
 obstipuit visu Aeneas. ille agmine longo 90  
 tandem inter pateras et levia pocula serpens  
 libavitque dapes rursusque innoxius imo  
 successit tumulo et depasta altaria liquit.  
 hoc magis inceptos genitori instaurat honores,  
 incertus **geniumne loci famulumne parentis** 95  
 esse putet.

He had spoken these words, when a giant slippery serpent drew seven **circles** in seven **coils** from the bottom of the tomb, peacefully **surrounding** the tomb and gliding through the altars, whose back was dappled with blue markings, and **his scales gleamed with gold**, just as a rainbow casts a thousand different colors among the clouds when hit by the sunlight. Aeneas was awestruck by the sight. Finally, slithering in a long line among the bowls and polished cups, it tasted the feast, and entirely harmless it returns to the depths of the tomb and leaves the altars where it fed. More eagerly, [Aeneas] renews his father's interrupted rites, unsure whether to think [the serpent] was the **genius loci** or **the servant of his father**. (V. A. 5.84-96)

Vergil's serpent coils around the altar for Anchises, with *gyros*, *volumina*, *amplexus*, and *lapsus* all conveying the same sense as Statius' use of the verb *circumdare* and participle *labens*. The serpent slithers through the altars and peacefully tastes the offerings placed upon them. While these descriptions may seem like programmatic language for describing serpents and serpentine movement, the comparison of these two works becomes more interesting once we note that Vergil describes the serpent's scales as gleamed with gold (*auro* | *squamam incendebat fulgor*, 5.87-8), further marking the shining, golden color of the serpent and its association with the *genius loci*. Vergil seems to set up a dichotomy in the final lines of this passage. The double “-*ne*” in line 95 appears at first to indicate that only one of the two statements is true: either the snake is the *genius loci* or it is the servant of Anchises. Flower compellingly argues, however, that Aeneas' conclusions “are not necessarily mutually exclusive in Roman thought,” and further states that “Vergil's readers would themselves have had no doubt that the snake was indeed the



*genius loci* and, therefore, a propitious sign of welcome and greeting.”<sup>178</sup> Thus, in this religious context, the serpent is both the *genius loci* and acting in the service of Aeneas’ ancestor. Vergil’s description of the serpent thus situates it as the nexus between the natural and ancestral spheres of the Roman world. The serpents characterized by the *lararia* wall-paintings are typically propitious symbols in this context, as we see in Cicero’s account of Sulla’s campaign in Nola.

In Book 1 of the *de Divinatione* in his discussion on divination, Cicero mentions a time when the general, Sulla, was met with a propitious serpent upon making offerings at a make-shift altar in Campania. Here, Cicero writes in the voice of his brother Quintus:

...ut in Sullae scriptum historia videmus, quod te inspectante factum est, ut, cum ille in agro Nolano immolaret ante praetorium, ab infima ara subito anguis emergeret, cum quidem C. Postumius haruspex oraret illum, ut in expeditionem exercitum educeret; id cum Sulla fecisset, tum ante oppidum Nola florentissima Samnitium castra cepit.

...in Sulla’s *History* we see written an event that you witnessed: while he was sacrificing in a field in Nola before his tent, a serpent suddenly emerged from the bottom of the altar, and Gaius Postumius the *haruspex* beseeched him to lead out the army on an expedition. After Sulla had done this, he then captured the strongly fortified Samnite camp at the town of Nola. (Cic. *de Div.* 1.72)

Cicero’s description of how the “serpent suddenly emerged from the foot of the altar” (*ab infima ara subito anguis emergeret*) immediately evokes both the movement of the Nemean serpent around the shrine (*nunc ille dei circumdare templa | orbe vago labens*, 5.513) and that of the serpents depicted in *lararia* paintings like figure 2. The Etruscan *haruspex*, Gaius Postumius, claims that the appearance of this serpent is propitious and that Sulla should immediately lead out his army against the Samnite camp.<sup>179</sup> According to Cicero’s account, Sulla was successful and the appearance of the serpent was indeed propitious (*Sulla fecisset, tum ante oppidum Nola florentissima Samnitium castra cepit*). Cicero’s mention of the serpent and its striking

<sup>178</sup> Flower 2017: 68-9; see also Feeney 1999: 14-21.

<sup>179</sup> Cic. *de Div.* 1.72. For commentary on these lines, see Wardle 2006: 280-5.

resemblance to those depicted on *lararia* is especially interesting given Nola's proximity to the Bay of Naples, where these serpents seem to hold especial religious significance. Thus, a pattern begins to emerge: the propitious, golden, red-crested serpents which rise up from the foot of altars are in fact the protective spirits of place, especially in Campania, Statius' native region.

Now that we have adequately connected Statius' Nemean serpent to the paintings of serpents on the Campanian *lararia* and the notions of the *genius loci*—how does such a reading influence our understanding of the larger themes of the *Thebaid*? In reading the Nemean serpent as a literary manifestation of the *genius loci* from domestic religion, we can easily see how Statius brings the Greek war and setting of the *Thebaid* ever-closer to home for the south Italian and Roman reader.<sup>180</sup> On a narratological level, however, the Nemean serpent foreshadows Capaneus' *aristeia* and the final lamentation scene in Book 12. Statius brings to life the ritualistic serpents painted on *lararia* as the representative of the Nemean grove and a sacred object to Jupiter, only to submit them to the nefarious cruelty of the Seven, namely Capaneus. The hero kills the serpent in his hubris, which will be his end later on in the epic—much like Ovid's Erisychthon. All is not well, however, after the serpent is slain. The non-human inhabitants of the Achaean grove lament the serpent, just as the Seven and Hypsipyle lament Opheltes.<sup>181</sup> Thus we see the bipartite division of the natural and mortal spheres just as in the *lararia* paintings (fig. 1). While Soerink and others see this lamentation as an unexpected twist, I propose that it is only fitting if we understand the serpent as the spiritual embodiment of the grove itself and that it only killed the infant Opheltes because of the human actions building up towards the *nefas* of the civil war.<sup>182</sup> This lamentation in combination with envisioning the serpent as a feature of Roman

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<sup>180</sup> On how Statius localizes a Greek *topos* for Latin epic, see Ash 2015 and Ahl 1986 *passim*.

<sup>181</sup> Stat. *Theb.* 5.579-82.

<sup>182</sup> For a full treatment on these scholars, see Soerink 2014: 159-60.

domestic religion looks ahead not only the impending atrocity and devastation of the civil war, but also the final lamentation scene at the very end of the epic. The serpent's (and Opheltes') death spell the beginning of the end in the *Thebaid*.

The serpent's death reflects the overarching theme of the destruction of nature within the poem. Though the Argives do not desecrate the Nemean grove, they murder the divine representative of that place and thus engage in the *nefas* set forth by Oedipus at the beginning of the epic. Newlands specifically notes that the "destruction of groves expresses the profound disorder at the heart of Statius' universe."<sup>183</sup> Antony Augoustakis has made similar acknowledgements about the destruction of sacred groves in Lucan, who had a significant influence on Statius as a poet.<sup>184</sup> By casting the Nemean serpent as the sacred guardian of the natural setting in Roman household religion, Statius ultimately localizes the Theban cycle for his readers and foreshadows several important events in the latter half of the epic. With the slaying of the serpent, however, he perverts a typically propitious religious symbol and engages the larger discourse about civil war, *nefas*, man and nature within the poem.

#### FLAVIAN FAMILIES AND THEIR ENVIRONS

As we have seen, domestic religion is a useful tool for Valerius and Statius in engaging contemporary discourses of the Flavian period. Indeed, they use the gods of domestic religion to discuss the pressing issues of their time such as the imperial cult, elite families, and man's relationship with the environment. Valerius uses features of Roman domestic religion to Romanize the Greek setting of the *Argonautica* tradition, but in doing so, draws his readers'

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<sup>183</sup> Newlands 2002: 27; cf. 2012: 53-5.

<sup>184</sup> Augoustakis 2006: 634-8.

attention to the many examples of familial piety inherent in the poem. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that Valerius' readership would have been comprised of elite, educated members of society. Domestic religion, then, provides a vehicle for Valerius' readers to contemplate familial piety and its place among both elite families and among the imperial family, which we have seen, continued to grow in political importance during the Flavian period. In the *Argonautica*, the *lares* and the *penates*, though ancestral deities in and of themselves for the Romans of Valerius' time, serve as a (distinctly Roman) marker of familial piety and a point for meditation on family relationships and family values in Flavian Rome.

In both the *Silvae* and the *Thebaid*, we have seen that Statius deploys the language of domestic religion to engage in the discourses surrounding the imperial cult and man's relationship with the environment. His portrayal of Domitian in the *Silvae* is consistently marked by allusions to domestic religion and its role in the origins of imperial cult that I discuss in the first chapter. He further deploys the *penates* to characterize the villas of elite families in terms of their owners' virtue and proper relationship with the environment. While Statius only conveys positive examples in the *Silvae*, he provides a wholly negative example in Nemean serpent episode in book 5 of the *Thebaid*. In portraying the Nemean serpent as a *genius loci* from domestic religion, Statius comments upon the utter destruction wrought on the environment by civil war. Valerius and Statius thus engage the language and visual aspects of domestic religion in their discussions on contemporary issues—nuanced discussions that are easily overlooked without a critical eye to these seemingly minor gods of the Roman household.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the history of scholarship on Latin literature, the gods of domestic Roman religion have too often been deemed synonyms for house and home. By oversimplifying the multiplex uses of domestic religion and not engaging in a critical analysis of their place in Roman society, scholars have missed the ways in which Latin authors deploy these gods for participating in cultural and social discourses. While each author that I have discussed uses domestic religion to different ends, they all employ the language of domestic religion as a vehicle for understanding and affecting the discourses in which they write.

As we have seen, Seneca employs the gods of domestic religion in his goal to facilitate philosophical education, even though these deities are not compatible with Stoicism. Thus, Seneca only mentions the *lares* and *penates* in his tragedies, which enable his audience to more easily connect with latent Stoic premises embedded in the plays. For Lucan, domestic religion provides a means for discussing Roman cultural identity. With the language of domestic religion, Lucan is able to nuance his characterizations of Caesar and Pompey with regard to these patently Roman religious figures.

Valerius Flaccus, in his *Argonautica*, exemplifies how domestic religion functions in the larger discourses of family (both domestic and imperial) and civil war which became so prominent during the Flavian period. He employs the gods of domestic religion to navigate these discourses on family values and how they changed during the years of civil war that characterize Flavian poetry. Similarly, Statius uses the language of domestic religion to participate in the discourses of family and civil war, though he is also concerned with the relationship between man and the natural world. In both the *Silvae* and the *Thebaid*, Statius discusses the ethics of man's relationship with nature and the environment. In this collection of villa poems, Statius

uses the *lares* and *penates* to frame his understanding of how man interacts with the natural world and to discuss the virtue of cultivating a proper relationship with the environment. These two discourses, however, find a nexus in Statius' depiction of the Nemean serpent in book 5 of the *Thebaid* as a *genius loci*.

We have seen domestic religion used consistently to comment upon elite families, virtue, the imperial cult, and man's relationship with the natural world. Domestic religion permeates the discourses on these topics and speaks to the importance of this cultural sphere in Roman society and thought. The language of domestic religion served as a vehicle for Romans to contemplate such topics and discuss these aspects of their culture. I hope to have elucidated how and why certain authors employ the language of domestic religion in their respective contexts and what we, as modern readers, can glean about their relevant discourses. I hope that this analysis will prove fruitful for augmenting our understanding of domestic religion in Latin literature after the age of Augustus. We must revise our understanding of this unique framework that these authors employed to navigate important discourses of their respective time periods.

## FIGURES

## FIGURE 1

Painting of serpents from a larger wall-painting of the *lares* and *genius*, from The House of Cippus Phamphilus Felix, Pompeii VII.6.38. 128 x 183 cm. MANN Naples inv. 8905 (After Flower 2017: cover).

## FIGURE 2

18th Century Rendition of a Painting from Herculaneum, depicting Harpocrates and a serpent as the *genius loci*. Painting: MANN Naples inv. 8848, 40 x 50 cm. Inscription (no longer extant): *CIL* 8.14588 (After Flower 2017: 68).

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