

The Lares And The Commemoration of the Dead: Two Stelae from The City Of Lambafundi (Henchir Touchine) In Numidia (2nd- 3rd Centuries AD)

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Abstract:

This article highlights the connections between the symbols found on two stelae from the ancient city of Lambafundi in Numidia, demonstrating how these symbols collaboratively convey the hypothetic commissioner's intended message. These stelae are not only abundant in symbolism but also seem to express a cohesive message that offers significant insights into the cultural beliefs regarding death, the afterlife, and possibly the reverence and association of ancestors in memorial practices. The hypothesis presented in this paper suggests that lares, the protective deities associated with the household and its territory in ancient Roman religions, may have also played a role in the commemoration of the dead.

Keywords: commemoration ; composition ; genius ; lares ; Numidia ; rites.

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- Introduction:

In an examination of funerary and votive stelae from Caesarea, M. Coltelloni-Trannoy explained that the iconography associated with these monuments can be viewed as a blend of lexical and syntactic elements that adhere to their own logical framework. The range of symbols, with their inherent multiple meanings, forms a lexical corpus, where meaning is often dependent on their positioning within the monument. Additionally, the relationships among the symbols produce a visual syntax that communicates the intended message of the commissioner (Coltelloni-Trannoy, 2017, p. 15).

1. Overview of the steles and examination of the depicted scenes

1.1- Presentation of the site and stelae

The ancient settlement of Lambafundi, referred to as Henchir Touchine, is located between the cities of Thamugadi and Lambaesis in Numidia province. A road connected these three cities, as evidenced by a milestone that marks the eighth mile (CIL *VIII*, 10212-3 ; AAA, fe 27, n° 247) (**Figure N° 01**).

Despite the significant attention given to this site by M. Leglay (Leglay, 1966 II, p. 114-124) and the details provided in the Archaeological Atlas of Algeria (AAA, fe 27 (Batna), n° 247), the site remains *largely* unexplored. An inscription dating back to 197 AD indicates the presence of a "saltus La]m[b]afundensium," which, according to M. Leglay, attests to the area's prosperity in terms of settlement and *large* agricultural estates (CIL *VIII*, 2438). Additionally, Inscription 2439 points to the existence of an imperial estate (*saltus* type), managed by a procurator of local origin.

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Figure N° 01: Location of Lambafundi.



(Source: Google Earth Pro. Image 2024)

The town has revealed fifteen votive and funerary stelae, each dedicated to the god Saturn and associated with children or adolescents. Discovered on the M. Fabet estate in 1946, these anepigraphic stelae are generally dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Most of them were oriented eastward, and five were found with a *mensa*. About one meter from the monument, groups of two or three

terracotta vases were located, containing cremated bones, two of which were identified as those of a young child. The remaining bones were identified as faunal remains, including those of sheep, rodents, chickens, pigeons, among other animals.

Unfortunately, the precise location of the sanctuary has not been determined; nonetheless, the features of the stelae have allowed M. Leglay to classify them into three separate categories (A-B-C). The two stelae in our collection are identified as funerary for the second one and the first one, as symbolically identical to the second one. Both belong to type A stelae, characterized by an extensive use of symbols, which raises questions regarding the liturgical practices linked to the worship of the deity (Leglay, 1966 II, p. 114-124). This aspect is one of the primary reasons for our emphasis on this *particular* type (**Figure N° 02 and 03**). For the description, we will rely on M. Leglay's account, as the images, while already somewhat unclear, also possess a rather rough texture, which may lead to potential misinterpretations.

Stela no. 1:

Rectangular, wide-peduncle funerary stela carved in white limestone. H. 1.04; w. 0.43'; d. 0.10.

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Figure N°01 : Stele representing a standing girl.



(Source : Leglay (1966 II), planche N°XXV, figure N°02)

"...in the upper register, Saturn is depicted in bust form rather than seated; in the middle register, it is no longer a teenager who occupies the central position but, standing on a pedestal, a young girl dressed in a clingy dress, tightened at the waist by a belt and with a round neckline, and in a cloak pleated from a headband held by the left arm; she wears on her hair the mark of her initiation: in the axis of

the skull, a braid that ends at the top of the forehead with a small crescent. Directly, without the aid of a *patera*, she places a grain of incense on a flaming cylindrical altar, surrounded by a serpent. Another difference in this register: the victim, completely naked except for his head, which is covered by a long veil, is seated next to the ram, which he holds with his right hand. In the third compartment...the two anguiped *genii*, kneeling as Atlantes, are replaced by two standing telamons, in the same attitude and costume" (Leglay, 1966 II, p. 118).

Stela no. 2:

Rectangular funerary stela with roughly squared peduncle, carved in white limestone. H. 1.21; w. 0.47; d. 0.11.

Figure N°02 : Stele representing a man bearing the *bulla*.



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(Source : Leglay, (1966 II), XXV, figure N°01)

"In the niche is a group of three figures. In the centre, Saturn is seated, his feet resting on the rosette, a celestial symbol, which decorates the architrave; his torso is bare, but the lower part of his body is wrapped in a mantle and his head is covered by a long veil, which hides his left arm; his right hand holds the harp close to his chest. This is the attitude of the god of majesty. He is flanked by two small, winged, naked *genii* who, mounted on two dolphins, ride towards him... In one hand, they guide their mount, in the other, they hold indefinable objects... These dolphin cherubins most likely represent the soul crossing the celestial ocean... an ocean that souls had to cross to reach the astral zone, where, according to the astrological doctrines widespread in Hellenistic times, the Sun and Moon became the abode of their eternal rest. It is this astral world, over which Saturn and Caelestis reign and towards which the souls of the dead sail, that the upper register of our stele evokes. It thus appears to be a funerary rather than a votive monument. It therefore appears to be a funerary rather than a votive monument. This conclusion is confirmed by the figurations in the middle register. In the centre, an adolescent in a toga, with a bulla hanging from his neck, occupies the main position; in his left hand, he holds a *pyxis*, while with his right hand, he places an offering on an altar with the aid of a *patera*. The altar is quadrangular, with a tablet surmounted by horns reminiscent of certain Punic altars, and is surrounded by a snake with a triangular head, cheeks puffed out, tongue out; the complex poly-symbolism of the snake probably represents the Chthonian *genius* of fertility, who comes to be regenerated by contact with the sacrifice and, as it were, takes possession of the offering. To the left of the altar

stands a vase with a handle, the ewer ready for a libation. Four Figures take part in this central scene: on the right, the victim, with a club (or axe?) on his shoulder, brings a ram to the altar; on the left, a double flute player blows into his instrument. This is a precious piece of information for our knowledge of the liturgy of sacrificial ceremonies. Above these two inferior ministers of the cult, either for lack of space on the sides, or rather to give an impression of perspective, we have depicted two small standing *genies*, legs crossed, leaning on overturned torches, head slightly tilted and eyes closed... These two sleeping *dadophoric genii* play the same role as the Eros depicted on other African steles; they are the image of the eternal sleep of death, and their presence confirms the funerary purpose of the monument. In these conditions, the adolescent depicted offering a sacrifice cannot be the dedicator usually found in the central register of votive stelae, but the deceased himself, whose soul crosses the celestial ocean to join Saturn. And the stele commemorates the sacrifice he once offered in person, or that was offered on his behalf, as a sign of his "gift" to the divinity or, if you like, of his initiation, the pledge of his eternal salvation. Finally, below, in the lower compartment, separated from the middle by a narrow band adorned with a few floral motifs, two anguiped *genii*, abundantly hairy and bearded, girded with a simple loincloth, kneel to support the façade of the sanctuary with their raised arms" (Leglay, 1966 II, p. 116-118).

1.2 Scene analysis

In conjunction with M. Leglay's observations, it is noteworthy that the organization of the two stelae is illustrated through the segmentation of space into registers, the axial positioning of the sacrificer alongside the god Saturn, and the symmetry achieved by the dolphins on either side of the upper register. The middle register contains the *dadophoric genii*, the *tibicen*, and the *victimarius*, while the lower register showcases the anguiped *genii*. Additionally, the

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elements of the ram, the piper, the *victimarius*, the altar, and the serpent(s) collectively imply a thoughtful approach to composition.

In this regard, we notice on the girl's stela that the victim is represented with a veil, marking a significant deviation from the traditional iconographic standards associated with this character, the veil being Generally worn by either the priest or the sacrificer in the context of a Roman rite, which means with the head covered (*velato capite*) (On this subject, see the investigation conducted by V. Huet 2012, p. 47-62).

The author points out that the anguiped *genii* located in the lower register suggest the existence of a crypt beneath the sanctuary. Nevertheless, when considering the depth of the shadow behind what is described as a veil, the posture of the *victimarius* (with bent knees), and the position of the ram, which appears to be ascending a slight slope, it is more likely that the veil indicates an open passage. This passage allows the *victimarius* and the ram, both clearly in motion, to proceed towards the sacrificer, possibly emerging from the subterranean crypt referenced by the author. This detail may have been intended to highlight the preliminary stage of the rite (*praefatio*), especially the *praefatio-pompa* sequence, as the *victimarius* and the ram are moving towards the altar. Furthermore, the dedicator's hand is directed towards the altar for a libation, reinforcing the notion of this initial phase. The same reasoning applies to the stela of the young boy.

It should be recalled that the presence of the ram, the *tibicen* and the *victimarius* points directly to a sacrificial act of a bloody character, i.e., an act of piety intended, first and foremost, to commune with the divine through the offering. The purpose of the sacrificer clearly varies according to the expectations or honours to be paid to the gods. Thus, sacrifices may be expiatory (*hostiae piaculares*) to atone for a fault; propitiatory to protect against some misfortune; honorific (*hostiae honorariae*) to honor a god, claim protection or fulfill a vow; or divinatory (*hostiae consultatariae*) by examining the entrails and thus the details likely to reveal the future or the will of the gods

(DAGR, *Sacrificium*, p. 973 ; Prescendi Moresi 2004, p. 24). As for the sacrificer, he or she is "the subject who receives...the benefits of the sacrifice or suffers its effects » (Mauss, 1899, p. 11). In the case of the deceased, the message conveyed by the scene depicted on the memorial or votive monument remains open to further questioning.

In instances involving deceased children, particularly within the sanctuaries dedicated to the god Saturn, the focus often lies on seeking the god's protective favor for the child and, for those who are initiates, the attainment of eternal salvation. However, the profound symbolism associated with the two monuments in question, coupled with the sorrow stemming from the loss of a child, indicates that we should not overlook the parents' feelings of frustration and unfulfilled hopes. These emotions may also be conveyed through the depiction of a notable aspect of the child's character or life. Consequently, the symbols represented would serve as an expression of grief, appealing for divine intervention to provide solace to the parents, as well as the possibility of peaceful continuity for the departed children.

The arrangement of the middle register on the two steles may indicate a possible connection between two distinct cults represented on the same monument. This proposition brings forth two critical questions: Is there a conceivable relationship among the *tibicen*, the *victimarius*, the altar, the snake, and the rite of passage to adulthood conducted at the *lar familiaris* altar? Furthermore, is there a correlation between the cult of the *lares* and the worship of the god Saturn? Current scholarly discourse remains uncertain regarding the precise function of the *lares*. Nevertheless, there is a consensus among researchers that these deities served a domestic and protective purpose. G. Wissowa notably posits that the *lares* are primarily deities associated with specific locations, overseeing land, particularly that which is outdoors (**Figure N° 03**). Over time, they evolved into household deities, coinciding with the emergence of a non-free clientele within the residences of patrons (Wissowa, 1912, p. 167-168).

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2- The lares and the world of the dead

2.1- What the sources reveal

The potential funerary function of the *Lares* is indeed addressed in the sources, particularly through the figure of their mother, *Lara*, also referred to as *Mania*. As early as the 1st century AD, *Mania*, along with her offspring, was linked to the realm of the deceased, and possibly even prior to that time. By the end of the Republic, Cicero indicate that a family in mourning would conclude their period of grief with a ram sacrifice dedicated to the *Lares*. He places this ritual alongside the ancient Roman practice of *os resectum*, which involved in the case of cremation the removal of a bone from the deceased and its burial (Cicéron, *Traité des lois*, II, XXII, 57).

According to Festus (2nd c. AD), the *Lares* were human souls ranked as gods, to whom woollen figures were dedicated at crossroads during the *compitalia* festival (Festus, *De significatione verborum*, XI):

Varron, although hesitating, affirms that these (the *Lares*) are the Manes and that their mother *Lara* is called *Mania*, or that they are aerial gods who are referred to as heroes, or else, following the opinion of the ancients... the *Lares* are called *larvae*, as if they were genies and souls of the departed (Varron, *De Lingua latina*, IX, 61).

Despite Varron's hesitation, the *Lares* are consistently associated with the dead, including the peaceful spirits (manes), those who wander and could be dangerous to the living (*larvae*), and the distinguished individuals who have achieved the status of apotheosis (heroes).

A quote from Arnobius (3rd-4th century AD), referring to Varron (1st century BC), expresses this relationship as follows: « According to Macrobius, *Mania* was the mother of the *Lares*, but the author also refers to an ancient custom dating back to royal times, when children were sacrificed to her. The custom was abolished by consul Iunius Brutus, founder of the Republic in 509 BC, after the expulsion of the Tarquins » (Macrobe, *Saturnalia*, I, 7).

The various interpretations regarding the precise role of the *Lares* cannot overshadow their connection to the Chthonic realm as indicated in historical sources. It is also important to acknowledge that, regardless of the accuracy of the information provided, it may hold elements of truth or represent a facet of the motivations behind collective consciousness.

Epigraphy can also provide some insight, particularly through the inscription of the Arvales brothers' college. Fragments of the inscription have made it possible to reconstruct an important ritual sequence performed by the college. This sequence involves the presentation of vessels filled with *puls*, with the jars subsequently cast into a well as an offering to the "mother of the *lares*" (*cena matri larum*) (Ross Taylor, 1925, p. 299). L.R. Taylor has attributed to her the role of an earth goddess, concluding that her offspring, the *Lares*, are likely to be the spirits of the deceased (Taylor, 1925, p. 300-302).

2.2- The identity and function of the lares among scholars

Current scholarly discourse remains uncertain regarding the precise function of the *lares*. Nevertheless, there is a consensus among researchers that these deities served a domestic and protective purpose. G. Wissowa notably posits that the *lares* are primarily deities associated with specific locations, overseeing land, particularly that which is outdoors (**Figure N° 03**). Over time, they evolved into household deities, coinciding with the emergence of a non-free clientele within the residences of patrons (Wissowa, 1912, p. 167-168).

M.C. Waites characterizes these entities primarily as benevolent spirits, emphasizing their close connection to both the family and the surrounding territory of the family residence. The author also highlights a relationship with the ancestor, who is identified as the *lar*, overseeing the well-being and prosperity of his descendants. Additionally, the author introduces a new perspective regarding the twin *lares* that accompany the family *genius*, which, according to G. Wissowa, can be traced back to the reign of Emperor Augustus (Waites, 1920, p. 242; Wissowa 1912, p. 168). Furthermore, the author discusses the procreative role of the *lar*, symbolized by fire,

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which, when associated with the hearth, sometimes establishes a connection between the *lar* and the ancestor (Waites, 1920, p. 246).

G. Laing describes these entities as ancient and somewhat abstract deities whose influence can be both beneficial and unpredictable. The diversity among the various types of *lares* gods reflects their different functions; for example, the *compitales* are linked to crossroads, the *praestites* serve the community, the *familiaris* relates to the family, the *permarini* are associated with those embarking on voyages, and the *militares* cater to individuals preparing for battle. Their connections to deities like Janus, Mars, Belonna, and Quirinus further highlight their ancient roots and the ambiguity surrounding their roles, particularly as these associations also include the spirits of the manes (Laing, 1921, p. 136-137).

F. Prescendi Moresi, referencing Arnobius, explores the various interpretations of the concept of the god *lar* and recommends a cautious interpretation of the sources. However, she concurs with G. Laing and G. Wissowa in recognizing the presence of territorial deities (Prescendi Moresi, 2004, p. 7).

Figure N° 03: *Genius Loci* of Herculaneum shown alone



(Source: Boyce (1942), figure N° 5)

The *genius*, characterized by the toga and the cornucopia—often held by the *lares*—serves as a pivotal figure within a scenographic arrangement, typically accompanied by the twin *lares* (a tradition established during Augustus' reign). These *lares* are depicted holding a *skyphos* or *rython* in one hand and a patella in the other, with the addition of one or two snakes and an altar, which may sometimes be shown in flames. Determining the identity of this *genius* proves to be as challenging as identifying the *lares* themselves. He may represent an ancestral spirit, occasionally accompanied by the *Iuno*, the embodiment of the *matrona familiaris* (Delforges, 2009, p. 17), to whom libations or blood offerings are made. Alternatively, he could be seen as an emanation of the dedicator, serving as a loyal companion with a capricious nature, embodying both fortune and misfortune. In this context, E. Ndiaye and B. Vilain referring particularly to Servius, suggest the existence of two *genii* for each individual—one advocating for good and the other for evil (*Ad Aen*, p.

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6, 743 cited in E. Ndiaye, p. & B.Vilain, 2011, p. 42 and 47). Thus, interpretations are diverse, with some focusing on the ancestral master of the household (**Figure N° 04**).

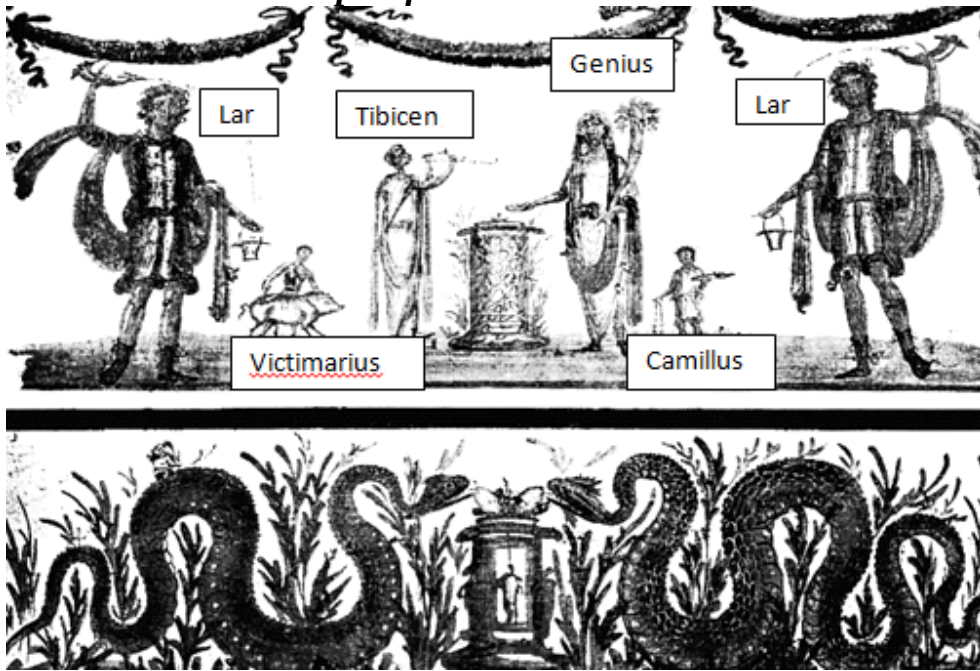
In the context of a bloody sacrificial ritual, the *genius* and the *lares* are accompanied in the depiction by additional figures, typically including the *victimarius*, the *tibicen*, and the *camillus* (*puer*) (**Figure N° 05**).

Figure N° 04: *Lararium* from the house of the Vettii, featuring the twin *lares* carrying a *rython* and flanking the *genius*.



(Source: Laforge (2009), figure N° 43)

Figure N° 05: *Lararium* from the city of Pompeii. Scene depicting the *praefatio* of a blood sacrifice.



(Source: Laforge (2009), figure N° 42)

3- Analysis of the potentially conveyed message

There are compelling arguments that suggest a more direct connection between *lares* and children. These deities were called upon during significant life events, such as childbirth, marriage, and the transition to adulthood. For the latter, a ceremony was conducted in the morning, during which, as noted by Tertullian, a sacrifice—though unspecified in nature—was made to the *lares*.

In the case of boys, the ritual included placing the pretext toga and bulla on the altar, followed by the wearing of the virile toga. Subsequently, the bulla was transferred from the boy's neck to that of the *Lar familiaris* (Wissowa, 1912, p. 167-169) (**Figure N° 06**), as illustrated in a passage from Petronius' *Satyricon*: "Meanwhile, three slaves dressed in white tunics made their entrance, two of whom placed gold-bulbed *lares* on the table, while the third, holding a cup of wine, proclaimed, 'May the gods be propitious to us.' They introduced

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themselves, one as Cerdon, another as Félicion, and the third as Lucérion." (Pétrone, *Le Satyricon*, XL , 171).

Figure N° 06: Domestic *Lar* holding the patella and adorned with a bulla around the neck.



(Source: DAGR (1877), figure N° 4345, p.943)

In the context of pubescent girls, the rite of passage was primarily associated with the transition to marriage, during which girls would present their dolls, clothing, and other childhood belongings to the *Lar familiaris* (Wissowa, Ibid). Consequently, the *lararium* played a significant role in this rite of passage by affirming a pivotal milestone that marked a change in social status.

In Roman law, the minimum legal age for marriage for girls was set at 12 years. As S. de Larminat points out, the depiction of the

deceased on our stela features a representation of a breast, which may symbolically suggest her age of puberty. A similar example from the same city displays this characteristic (De Larminat, 2011, p. 83) (**Figure N° 07**). Aside from this implication, it is uncertain whether the representation refers to the deceased or a dedicatee, such as her mother. As for the young boy, the presence of a bulla indicates that he is still a child.

An additional significant aspect is the depiction of a ewer or jug on the boy's stela. Typically, it is the responsibility of the *camillus* (referred to as *puer* when he is the son of the officiant) to bear such items along with a dish or garlands. However, in this instance, the ewer likely substituted the *camillus*, possibly due to spatial constraints (**Figure N° 08**).

Figure N° 07: Stela dedicated to Saturn. Lambafundi.



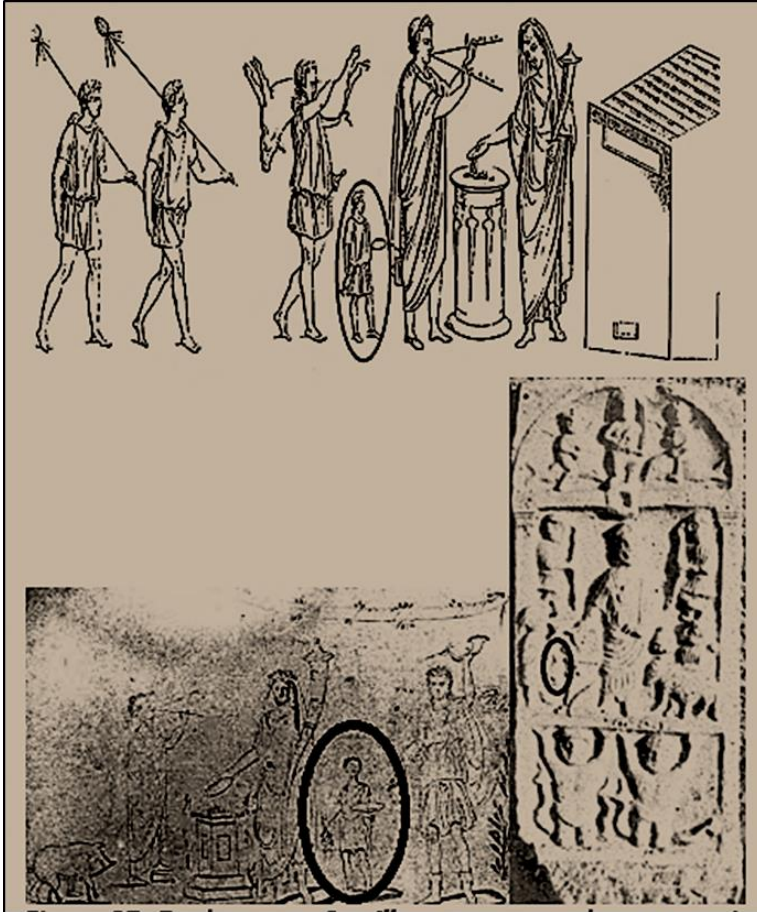
(Source: Leglay (1966 a), XXV, figure N° 8)

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In public sacrificial rites, the action is performed by the highest magistrate or head priest; in private (domestic) cults, however, this role belongs to the pater familias or his representative; we may therefore question the motive behind the presence, on our two stelae, of children who perform the action in such a solemn scene, representing the attendants found on sacrificial scenes dedicated to the *lares*, and in particular the flute player. M. Leglay states that stelae dedicated to Saturn, whether votive or funerary, most often depict children, sometimes adolescents, but never adults (Leglay, 1961 II, p. 381). This means that children are indeed involved on our stelae.

If we bear in mind that, during the rite of passage, it's the child who stands before the altar of the *lares*, and if the dedicators on the two stelae are indeed children, their gestures (hands outstretched on the altar) make them the performers of the rite, and if the rite of passage requires the presence of attendants such as the *tibicen* and the *victimarius*, it's conceivable that the aim was to illustrate this crucial stage, which might have been interrupted by a premature death.

Figure N° 08: Above, a *Camillus* carrying a dish and a ewer (or jug). Below (left), *Camillus* carrying a dish and one of the plants. On the right, the ewer between the *tibicen* and the altar



(Source: Laforge, (2009), figure N° 51 - VII, iv, 20 Taberna.
Fröhlich (1991), figure N° 6, L 83. Laforge (2009), Figure N° 50.
Leglay (1966a), XXV, figure N° 1)

The serpent is represented on both monuments. M. Leglay describes it as "the chthonic *genius* of fecundity, regenerating itself through contact with the sacrifice and, in some way, taking possession of the offering".

An obviously reasonable hypothesis, particularly as the author emphasizes the chthonic nature of the reptile, which, on the boy's monument, moves progressively from the lower register, supported by the anguipedal *genii*, to the second register featuring the flaming altar.

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However, we suggest that the animal is linked, on the one hand, to the cult of the *Lares* and, on the other, to the concept of victory and rebirth. Furthermore, considering that our monument is symbolically charged, perhaps even overcharged, at the same time as the space is reduced, it seems difficult to see it as an element isolated from the composition as a whole.

Three episodes in the sources provide a basis for the hypotheses put forward. First, a passage from Virgil's *Aeneid* relates an event that took place around the tomb of Aeneas' father (Anchises): "He had just uttered these words, when from the foot of the altar, an enormous slippery serpent, dragging seven coils, in seven folds, peacefully circling the tumulus and gliding between the altars...Aeneas is shocked by this spectacle. Finally, sliding its long body between the polished bowls and cups, the serpent tasted the feast and again, quite harmless, slithered under the tomb, leaving the altars where it had fed. He (Aeneas) therefore renews his father's interrupted rites with even greater zeal, not knowing whether to believe that the serpent was the *genius* of the place or in the service of his parent » (Flower, 2017, p. 69-70).

Aeneas' confusion confirms, at least, the hypothesis that the snake on its way to the altar in a funerary context cannot be dissociated from the other elements. Aeneas acts as if it were a stranger to the rite he is performing to honor his father, and performs it again, but nevertheless wonders what role to attribute to it: is it the *genius* of the place or the paternal *genius*, thus pointing us to the world of the dead? In the same vein, the snake in our stela could represent the protective *genius* of the place where the rite of passage of the two deceased was performed; as the rite of passage to adulthood takes place before the altar of the *lar familiaris*, the snake would be anchored both in its space and in its role as *genius* of the ancestor.

Two other events relate a vision of Anchises, twenty years before the birth of his son Aeneas, and a sacrifice performed by L.

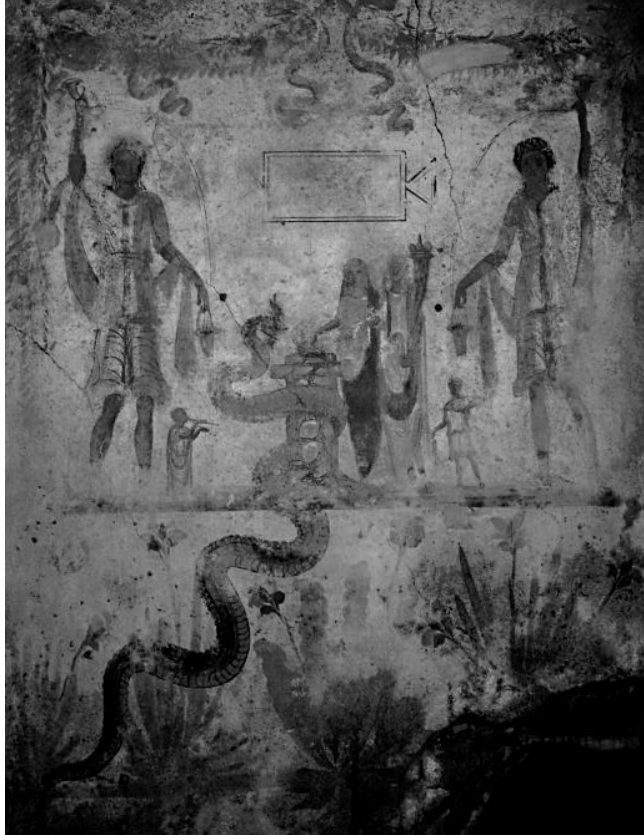
Cornelius Sylla in 89 in his camp at Nola (Campania) during the civil wars. Both events involved the appearance of a snake emerging from the earth to coil itself around the altar, where, in both cases, it was perceived as a symbol of victory (Flower, 2017, p. 68-69).

In our case, if there is a victory, it is linked to death, in the sense that placed under the protection of Saturn and in the case of the young girl, initiated, our deceased are assured of eternal salvation, and thus a victory over fate. The snake could thus be an element linking the two cults, that of the *lares* in his capacity as *genius loci* or *genius* of the pater familias, and that of Saturn for its symbolism linked to victory and rebirth.

If it's difficult to determine the true meaning of the snake's role, it's equally difficult to accept the idea of a chthonian *genius* appearing unexpectedly to feast on the sacrificial gift, without relating it to the solemn scenography that surrounds it and, above all, to the purpose envisioned by the dedicator. As we have seen in the episodes discussed above, the snake was always attached to the altar in a specific context, carrying a message, despite the fact that it had unexpectedly emerged from the ground (**Figure N° 09**).

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Figure N° 09: *Lararium* from the house of Iulius Polybius depicting a snake emerging from the ground to feast on the offering placed on the altar



(Laforge (2009), figure N° 45)

Finally, it's worth reflecting on the importance of the *tibicen*. This is part of a tradition borrowed from Etruria, where the flute-player was necessary in all sacrifices"; in Rome, it is also present in all sacrificial ceremonies depicted on monuments (DAGR 1877, Tibia, p.322). Ovid, who attributes its origins to Greece, informs us that it was held in honor in ancient times, and that the *tibicen* flute sang at temples, games and funerals alike (Ovide, *Fastes*, VI, 30, 651-710). When it came to worship, *tibicines* acted as sound purifiers of a ceremonial atmosphere that had to be filled with a pietas worthy of the

gods, and as such, the *tibicen* was held to have the virtue of appeasing the gods. The *tibicines* are also musical performers who are involved in the first part of the sacrificial rites (the *praefatio*)(Huet, 2012, p. 55), as discussed above, and remain present after the sacrifice. Since the social, political and religious reform of Emperor Augustus, they have been inseparable agents not only of the official cult, but also of the *compitalia* festival, celebrating the *genius augusti* at district crossroads since the reign of the same emperor.

The presence of the *tibicen* on our monument is thus not a coincidence, and reflects a cult in which the dedicator did not neglect to involve this agent who, according to A. Vincent, embodies ceremonial perfection (Vincent, 2016, p. 61-64). It is therefore possible that this imagery reflects a genuine concern for perfection, suggesting that the commissioner deliberately chose the elements to appear on the monument and, with them, the message they were to convey. Unfortunately, the absence of an inscription makes it impossible to determine the origins of the owner.

It should be noted, however, that J. Mabrouk's recent study of cultores deorum in Africa has revealed that the cult of domestic *lares* is scarcely documented in epigraphy, except for an inscription from the house of the Asinii at Acholla. Conversely, the cult of the *genius augusti* or the *lares* of the *domus augusta* were widely observed, and even had their own colleges of cultores. Three inscriptions attest to the existence of *cultores domus Augustae* (Volubilis), *cultores Augusti* (Volubilis) and *cultores Larum et imaginum Augusti* (Tipasa) (Ben Mabrouk, 2020, p. 70-72).

2.2. Saturn and the *lares*

Regarding the association between the god Saturn and the cult of the *lares*, we can suggest the following hypotheses:

-In the Roman calendar, December is punctuated by agrarian festivals. These include the Saturnalia, held from December 17 to 21, and the *larentalia/ compitalia*, celebrated on December 23 (Macrobe, *Saturnales*, I, X). The latter mark the end of the Saturnalia festival, a feast not listed in the calendar due to its changing character, and which, according to G. Wissowa, followed closely the Saturnalia. The

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author states that it was scheduled by the praetor between January 3 and 5 (Wissowa, 1912, p. 168). M. Leglay mentions April 23 and links the *larentalia* to Saturn's calendar (Leglay, 1986, p. 274). In this regard, the *lares* are part of the list of 14 deities introduced to Rome by King Titus Tatius to accompany the god Quirinus, the god of agricultural production. Of these 14 deities, seven relate directly to agriculture and rural life, including Saturn and the *Lares*. Moreover, the etymological meaning of the term *genius* in domestic cults derives from the verb "*gignere*", meaning to beget; the main function of the household gods being to ensure the protection and renewal of food supplies (Leglay, 1983, p. 275).

Conclusion

Imagery is a collection of pictographic codes where the message (the signified) can only be deciphered by combining the symbols of the composition as a coherent whole. While it's not easy to understand the subtleties of a syncretism, it remains potentially fruitful to suggest a hypothetical approach that provides a perspective for reflection. In the present case, we have attempted to explore the possibility that the scene depicted on the two stelae is a figurative story relating an episode, a moment of life or death, an important and unfulfilled moment, perhaps a rite of passage to adulthood before the altar of the *lar familiaris*; a rite not fulfilled because of an untimely death, but redeemed by the integration of the deceased into the world of the god Saturn, with eternal salvation and victory over death at the end. The presence of the *tibicen* should also be highlighted, as it serves to accentuate the cultic importance and ceremonial perfection of the scene depicted on both monuments, pointing to an act of piety performed according to the modalities adopted by the Roman rite. In either case, this symbolic excess points at least to the official character conferred on the god Saturn, but the question still lingers as to the

scarcity of this type of association for such a widespread god in Africa, and thus other hypotheses are called for further analysis.

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