

Mount Holyoke College Art Museum
STUDENT OBJECT RESEARCH REPORT
Taylor Anderson, Class of 2015
ARTH310 The Lure of the Past: Collecting Antiquity, Fall 2014

Roman; Imperial

Lar holding a libation bowl and cornucopia

Bronze, 1st-2nd century CE

Overall: 4 1/4 in x 2 3/16 in x 1 1/4 in; 10.8 cm x 5.6 cm x 3.2 cm

Purchase with the Susan and Bernard Schilling (Susan Eisenhart, Class of 1932) Fund
MH 2013.31



Description:

The small bronze *lar* stands as though in motion; one foot is extended forward while the other hovers on tiptoe. Typical of a *lar*, the statuette of a young man wears a short-sleeved, knee-length tunic and high boots. An apparent breeze blows the fabric of the *lar's* tunic, further contributing to the sense of motion. The folds of the tunic incorporate a zigzag pattern running down center of the garment from the *lar's* neck to his knees. The tunic is cinched at his waist by a narrow belt. The *lar's* thick, curly hair frames his face and he is crowned with a wreath of leaves. His eyes are deeply sculpted and his lips are parted in a slight smile. In his left hand, the *lar* holds a cornucopia horn of plenty overflowing with

grapes and also containing three pinecones. His right hand holds a patera (libation bowl), a vessel used in the ritual pouring of liquid, usually wine or olive oil.

Research Summary:

Mode of Construction:

The *lar* was made from a mold, possibly using a method known as lost-wax casting. The shape of the figure was crafted in wax. The wax was then surrounded almost entirely by clay. When the clay was fired, the wax melted and was removed through a small hole in the clay. The melted wax left a void in the shape of the figure. Molten bronze was then poured into the mold. When the bronze cooled, the mold was broken apart and the bronze figure was removed from the mold.

In order to make multiple statues with the same mold, the method of indirect lost-wax casting may have been used. The process differs from lost-wax casting only in that the mold is made in multiple pieces that are secured together for casting, then disassembled (and preserved) when removing the statue. The pieces of the mold can be reassembled to create another copy of the statue.

Though early Roman statues were cast in copper, bronze was ultimately preferred. Bronze has a lower melting point than copper, meaning that it stays in its liquid form for a longer period of time and is easier to mold.

Original Function:

The *lares familiares* were domestic Roman gods. *Lares* typically came in identical pairs and were worshipped in a small household shrine known as a *lararium* (pl. *lararia*). The *lararium* was usually located in the kitchen, but was sometimes found in the atrium, peristyle, or garden. The *lararium* most often took the form of a wall-niche, but could also resemble a miniature temple with columns. *Lararia* were often decorated with fresco wall paintings (sometimes depicting the *lares*), mosaic, and marble inlay. Occasionally, a wall fresco depicting the *lares* substituted for a wall-niche or temple *lararium*.

Lares were protectors of the Roman home and hearth and were worshipped by all members of the Roman household, including the slaves. *Lararia* were populated not only by the *lares*, but also by statuettes of other gods. These included *penates* (inherited domestic gods, protectors of the “pantry” that were specific to individual family members), well-known Roman gods, and small statues and painted likenesses of family ancestors. Roman interest in Egyptian gods is sometimes reflected by the inclusion of gods like Isis, Anubis, and Osiris in *lararia*. The popularity of certain gods in different regions of the empire is reflected in the inhabitants of *lararia*. For example, *lararia* in Pompeii and Herculaneum, wealthy cities known for their frequent celebrations, often included figures of Bacchus, the god of wine and merriment. A typical *lararium* included 4-6 different statuettes. These figurines often varied in material and monetary value; some *lararia* included valuable silver statuettes alongside less expensive terracotta figures. The variety

of statue types and represented figures found in *lararia* indicate that the shrines and their assemblages of various gods were particular to individual families.

It is often difficult to distinguish between *lares* and *penates* physically. It is thought that the main distinction between the two groups is that *lares* were tied to a location while *penates* were associated with individuals and families. If a family moved to a new house, they would not bring the *lares* with them, but they would retain their *penates*. A new home would be accompanied by a new pair of *lares*.

Worship led by the *pater familia* (male head of household) occurred at the *lararium* promptly every morning. Daily prayers at the *lararium* typically included burning incense and sacrifices of food and liquid, typically olive oil and wine. *Lares* were also offered sacrifices during meals; they were brought to the table and were presented with the best pieces of meat and fruit. The food given to the *lares* was later burned. One also invoked the blessings of the *lares* when crossing over the threshold of the home and before leaving for extended travel. Worship at the *lararium* occurred when returning from a long trip; soldiers returning from war often sacrificed some of their spoils to the *lares*.

Prayer to the *lares* was also standard on special occasions such as weddings and funerals; on these occasions, worship may even have included a blood sacrifice. When a young woman was married, she dedicated her childhood clothing and dolls to the *lares* of her parents' home. Following the wedding ceremony, the bride traveled to her new husband's home and worshipped at his *lararium*. Typically, she offered a coin to her new home's *lares*. Similarly, when a young boy came of age, he removed his "childhood locket" and left it in the *lararium*. The ancient author Plautus even suggested that if homage was not properly paid to the *lares*, they could become troublesome or even threatening.

Culture/Historical Significance:

Lar holding a libation bowl and cornucopia serves as an example of Roman domestic religion. Other objects in the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum collection, including coins depicting public temples and well-known gods, and the *Statuette of a youth, probably Apollo* (MH 1926.1.B.OI), exemplify public religious practices from ancient Rome. The inclusion of the *lar* makes the collection more comprehensive and contributes to a better understanding of Roman religious practice in general.

Provenance:


The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum purchased **Lar holding a libation bowl and cornucopia** in 2013 from The Royal Athena Galleries in New York City. A European Museum was also interested in the acquisition of the *lar*, but eventually revoked their interest, allowing the MHC Art Museum to make the purchase.




Prior to coming onto the market, the *lar* was in the private collection of Armand G. Erpf, a partner at Loeb, Rhoades, & Company, a high-profile Wall Street brokerage firm. Erpf lived with his family in Arkville, NY until his death in 1971. The *lar* stayed in the Erpf collection until the death of Armand's wife, Sue Erpf van de Bovenkamp in 2011. The manner in which Erpf acquired the *lar* is unknown.



A line drawing of a lar very similar to **Lar holding a libation bowl and cornucopia** appears in the article “The Nature of the Lares and Their Representation in Roman Art” by Margaret C. Waites, a Mount Holyoke College Professor of Latin (published in the *American Journal of Archaeology* Vol. XXIV (1920), No. 3). This drawing was originally published in the *Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines de Daremberg et Saglio*. According to Daremberg Saglio, the drawing was made after a lar in the collection of the Albertinum Museum in Dresden, Germany. The Albertinum Museum was bombed in 1945 during WWII. A new museum was built and opened in 1953. While the museum was under construction many works of art were taken to the Soviet Union. They were all returned to Dresden by 1958. Most of the Albertinum collection survived the bombing. However, some of the ancient art has not been on display since the museum reopened. It is expected to go on display within the next few years. Whether the Albertinum lar is a twin of the MHCAM lar or the Albertinum lar was lost, deaccessioned, or somehow entered the collection of Armand Erpf is unclear.

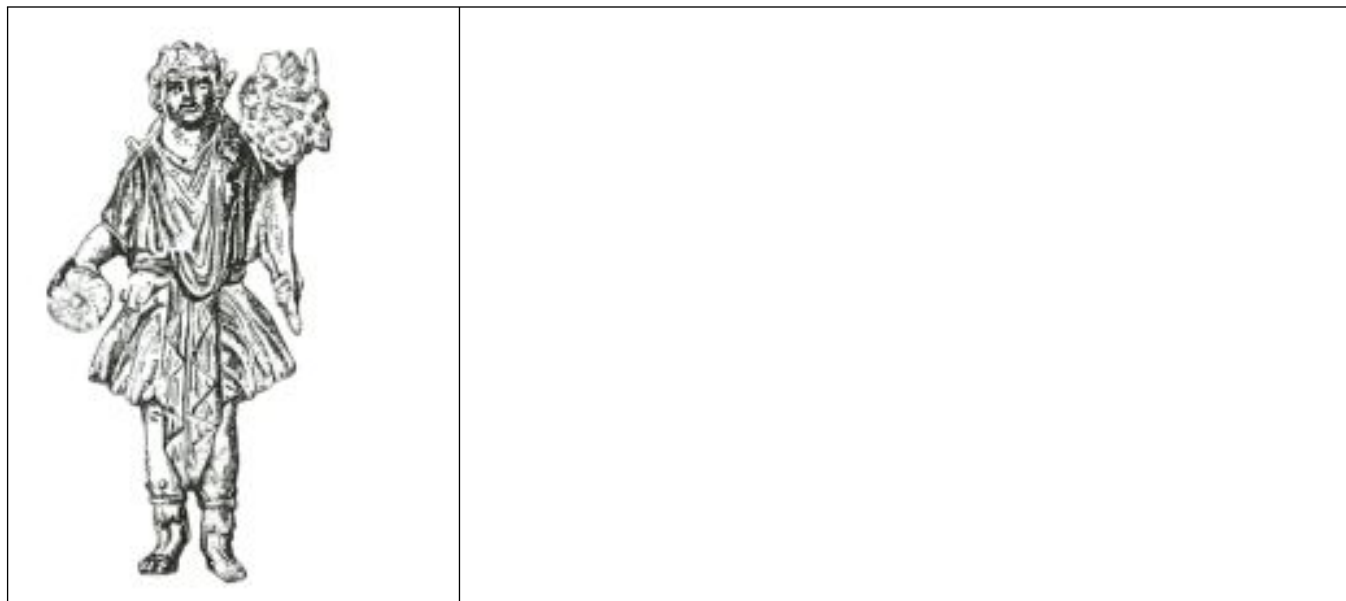
Ancient bronze sculpture is rare, as many bronze statues were melted down or lost. The high level of preservation of this lar leads me to believe that it was at one point underground. It is plausible that this lar was found in an area buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

Comparanda:

	<p>Statuette of a Guardian God with an Offering Bowl Unknown Roman; Imperial 1 -100 CE Bronze H: 5 in. The Getty Museum Accession Number: 71.AB.174</p>
	<p>Bronze statuette of a lar holding a cornucopia Roman; Imperial 1st century CE, from Lora del Rio (Spain) National Archaeological Museum of Spain, Madrid</p>

		
		<p>Bronze statuette of a Lar (holding a rhyton and libation bowl) Roman; Imperial 1st-2nd century CE Bronze Overall: 9 3/4 x 4 9/16 x 2 1/8 in. (24.8 x 11.6 x 5.4 cm) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Accession Number: 19.192.3</p>
		<p>Bronze statuette of a lar (holding a libation bowl and cornucopia) Roman; Imperial 100-200 CE Ancientpoint.com</p>
	<p>Lar Roman; Early imperial 1-25 CE Overall - h:5 11/16 inches, h:14.50 cm Bronze with copper inlay The Cleveland Museum of Art</p>	

	<p>Accession number: 1987.3</p>
	<p>Lar (holding a rhyton and libation bowl) Roman; Imperial 1st century CE Bronze; solid cast 3 15/16 x 2 1/16 x 1 1/16in., 10 x 5.3 x 2.7cm, Base+object: 4 15/16in., 12.5cm Yale University Art Gallery</p>
	<p>Drawing: Statuette of a lar, Pre-Augustan type Appears in "The Nature of the Lares and Their Representation in Roman Art" by Margaret C. Waites (Mount Holyoke College Professor of Latin 1914-1923) in the American Journal of Archaeology Vol. XXIV (1920), No. 3</p> <p>Originally in <i>Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines de Daremberg et Saglio.</i></p>



Explanations of Revisions:

The museum should consider altering the name of this object. It might be called **Lar holding a patera and cornucopia**. "Patera" and "phiale" are both other names for a libation bowl. The term "patera" is more closely associated with Roman religion while the term "phiale" is associated with Greek religion.

Annotated Bibliography:

John Bodel, "Household and Family Religion in Antiquity - Cicero's Minerva, Penates, and the Mother of the Lares: An Outline of Roman Domestic Religion," in *Family Religion in Antiquity*, edited by John Bodel and Saul Olyan, 248-275. Blackwell, 2008.

This article gives an overview of Roman domestic religion. Specifically, it discusses the history of the lares, their purpose, and their place in the household shrine (lararium). Bodel considers the function of the lares as household protectors and the various ways in which different members of the household worshiped the lares. Additionally, he asserts that Roman domestic religion was fluid and personal, varying between households.

Gordon Liang, "The Origin of the Cult of the Lares," *Classical Philology* 16 (1921) 124-40.

Liang challenges Margaret Waites' assertion that the lares had a specific role as the protector of the hearth and were tied to one specific family and homestead. He cites many ancient authors, pointing out that their references to the role of the lares is usually vague. For this reason, Liang asserts that ancient Romans did not believe in one specific function of the lares; he claims that Romans believed that the lares existed, that the lares were protectors, that the lares operated in many ways, and that the lares should be respected.

John North. "Rome." in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, edited by Sarah Iles Johnston. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press) 2004.

John North offers a general overview of the role of the lares in ancient Roman religion. He gives details about the practices, including sacrifice, that occurred at the lararium. Specifically, he provides a distinction between the roles of the lares and the penates.

Robert E. A Palmer, *Roman Religion and Roman Empire: Five Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) 1974.

Palmer discusses the general role of the lares in Roman domestic religion. His account includes a history of the lares, indicating that their earliest known representation comes from ancient Greece. Palmer also includes information about ceremonies that incorporated the worship of lares, specifically a coming-of-age ceremony in which a Roman boy presented his "childhood locket" to the lares, at which time he became a man.

"The Technique of Bronze Statuary in Ancient Greece." Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, Metropolitan Museum of Art. October 18, 2014.

This source details the processes of lost-wax casting and indirect lost-wax casting, the techniques used for the creation of bronze lares. It also explains the benefits of casting in bronze as opposed to other materials.

Robert Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome: Religion in Everyday Life from Archaic to Imperial times*. North American ed. (New York: Routledge) 2001.

Turcan details the daily worship that occurred at the lararium and the role of the lares in protecting the Roman house. Specific information about sacrifice to the lares is included. Turcan also writes about special occasions, including weddings, that would have involved the lares.

Margaret C. Waites, "The Nature of the Lares and Their Representation in Roman Art," *American Journal of Archaeology* 24 (1920) 241-261.

Margaret C. Waites, a Latin professor at Mount Holyoke College from 1914-1920, writes about the variation in the number of Lares and their representation in Roman art. She identifies two classes of lares (one class holds a cornucopia and libation bowl, the other holds a rhyton and patera or some other receptacle). Waites includes a line drawing of a lar that is remarkably similar to that in the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum collection.

Wendy Watson. "Safeguarding the Roman Household: Museum Acquires Statuette of Domestic Deity." *Mount Holyoke College Art Museum Newsletter* (2014) 6-7.

Watson's article in the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum Newsletter gives an overview of the function of the lar, its journey to the MHC Art Museum, and its contribution to the museum collection.