

## The influence of Roman culture on Celtic religious practices

In first-century Rome, the family, household and fields were placed under the protection of 'Lares', deities that were worshiped in small shrines built in homes or outdoors, on crossroads or at property borders. They were depicted in many forms, such as the young man holding a horn of plenty, or a drinking horn with a peg for serving wine.

In Gaul, prior to the Roman conquest, tributes were given to deceased chiefs, who were often made into heroes. This tradition predisposed local populations to view the cult related to Lares favourably. Private oratories, often built underground, in reference to ancient Celtic practices, also housed other deities, such as Mercury, who was particularly popular in Saône-et-Loire. Offering protection from danger, he was the equivalent of the Celtic god Cernunnos. Jupiter was also present, holding a sceptre and a lightning bolt, but he was sometimes accompanied by Celtic symbols, such as the wheel or spiral. Few stone reliefs of Lares have been found in Gaul and the one

from Sennecé-lès-Mâcon is exceptional. In rich families, lararia contained bronze statuettes, often associated with Roman gods. More modest altars were decorated with terracotta statuettes, where mother goddesses, which played an important role in Gaulish culture, as well as Venus Anadyomene, were commonly depicted. The presence of animals, such as the boar and the horse, evoked local guardian deities. While they were related to protection of the family, small figurines often accompanied individuals until the end of their life and were used as offerings on the funeral pyre.

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