

The *Penates* that the ancient Romans worshipped in their huts were different from those we think at if we compare them with the image mainly reflected by the literary tradition: the gods of Aeneas, the symbol of a People, the beginners of a History, the etiological basis of a foundation myth.

The first ones, certainly more intimate and less known, stem from and develop within the family; they find their why in everybody's urge to survive, they care for human livelihood. Actually, the *prisci Penates* were the gods who look after the pantry as well as food contained therein, to be consumed within a year.

How these *Penates* have become "the Aeneas' ones", with their whole range of meanings, is really simple and clear to explain: at the beginning tutelary deities of a vital element, food, and consequently of mankind and its preservation, little by little they become patrons of the whole *domus* but while changing – actually during the socio-economic, cultural and even urban growth occurred during the transition from the last phase of the Republic to the Principality and later Empire – they lose their original nature, that is to say that they lose their archaic meaning even if such a meaning is almost involuntarily held in adjectives, epithets or verbal forms used to hint at them.

When the distinction between private sanctity and public sacredness is not emphasized by the place where the ritual takes place (private or public), but by the believers' praying for their own personal benefit, for their family or even for the whole community, the line between tutelary deities protecting private *domus* or state *domus* appears to be very thin.

So, if in the *paterfamilias'* *domus* the *Penates* are invoked, together with the *Lar*, to preserve its members being a legacy from father to son as guarantors of the welfare of coming generations, it is quite natural that in the reconstruction of the City's etiology, with Troy unsafe and ruined, they are associated with the hero, the greek *Lar*, more than any other deity, more easily and with greater sympathy, in order to preserve the race and the Country, safeguarding its survival in a different place.

For above reasons, this research of the original nature of the *Penates* is carried out through a complex path where religious contexts constantly – and almost always unconsciously – have to face with two natures: the visible (the *Penates* of Aeneas) and the invisible (the *prisci Penates*) in a *mare magnum* of literary and epigraphic attestations, from different authors and locations and with very different contents: from the invocation at the dedication, from simple quotation to philosophical speculation.

The outcomes of this research are grouped in two volumes, completing each other; so, we could say that even the frame and the title reflect the persistent dualism accompanying the gods, coming to define the original nature, functions, scope of worship and perception the chief Latin authors had of them.