**LARES**

The Latin name for the good spirits of the departed, who even after death continue to be active in bringing blessing on their posterity. The origin of the worship of the *Lares* is traced to the fact that the Romans buried their dead in their own houses, until it was forbidden by the laws of the Twelve Tables. Every house had individually a *lar familiaris*, who was the "lord" tutelary spirit of the family; his chief care was to prevent its dying out. His image, habited in a *toga*, stood between the two *Penates*, in the *lararium* or shrine of the *Lares*, beside the household hearth, which in early days was in the *atrium*; the group as a whole was also commonly called either the *Lares* or the *Penates*. The ancient Roman and his children saluted it daily with a morning prayer and an offering from the table; for, after the chief meal was over, a portion of it was laid on the fire on the hearth. When the hearth and the *Lares* were not in the eating-room, the offering was placed on a special table before the shrine. Regular sacrifices were offered on the calends, nones, and ides of every month and at all important family festivities, such as the birthday of the father of the family, the assumption by a son of the *toga virilis*, the marriage of a child, or at the reception of a bride, or the return of any member of the family after a long absence. On such occasions the *Lares* were covered with garlands and cakes and honey; wine and incense, and animals, especially swine, were offered up. Out of doors the *Lares* were also honoured as tutelary divinities, and in the chapels at the cross-ways (*compita*) there were always two *lares compitales* or *vicorum* (one for each of the intersecting roads) which were honoured by a popular festival (*Compitalia*) held four times a year (cp. cut). Augustus added to the *Lares* the *Genius Augusti*, and commanded two regular feasts to be held in honour of these divinities, in the months of May and August. Further, there were *Lares* belonging to the whole city (*lares proestites*). They were invoked with the mother of the *Lares*, also called *Lara*, *Larunda*, or *Mania* (q.v.), and had an ancient altar and temple to themselves in Rome. The *Lares* were invoked as protectors on a journey, in the country, in war, and, on the sea. In contrast to these good spirits we have the *Larvae* (q.v.).

http://www.classics.upenn.edu/myth/php/tools/dictionary.php?method=did&regexp=809&setcard=0&link=0&media=0
LARVAE  
In Roman belief the Larvae, in contrast to the Lares (the good spirits of the departed), were the souls of dead people who could find no rest, either owing to their own guilt, or from having met with some indignity, such as a violent death. They were supposed to wander abroad in the form of dreadful spectres, skeletons, etc., and especially to strike the living with madness. Similar spectres of the night are the Lemures. To expel them from the house, peculiar expiatory rites were held on three days of the year, the 9th, 11th, and 13th of May, the Lemuria, when all the temples were closed, and marriages avoided.


---

Object Details

- **Title**: Miniature Skeleton
- **Artist/Maker(s)**: Unknown
- **Culture**: Roman
- **Place(s)**: Asia Minor (Place created)
- **Date**: 1st century
- **Medium**: Bronze
- **Dimensions**: 6.6 cm (2 5/8 in.)

In Petronius' satirical novel, the Satyricon, written in the 60s A.D., Trimalchio, the crass, nouveau riche host of a dinner party, has a small silver skeleton brought out between courses. The skeleton in the novel had flexible joints and after posing it on the table in various ways, Trimalchio recited a poem to the effect that life was short and should be enjoyed before becoming a skeleton like the one he displayed.

This bronze skeleton, called a larva convivalis by the Romans, may have been used in just such a setting. Although now missing several limbs, it too is joined in a way that allows it to be posed or to be shaken so that it jumps and dances. In the first century B.C and the first century A.D., the Romans frequently linked images of the banquet and death in both literature and the visual arts. This blending of imagery probably derived from the resurgence during this period in the popularity of Epicurean philosophy with its emphasis on the need to grasp the pleasures of life while one is still able.

carpe diem
An ancient Roman larva convivialis, a memento mori.

‘Memento mori’ translates from Latin as “Remember you must die”.

This is a special type of memento mori called a larva convivialis, given to revelers at a banquet or feast.

Even when the Romans were enjoying themselves, they still were reminded of their own mortality.

This is an extremely rare example. [ca. 199 BCE-500 CE]

The bronze skeleton is just over 110 mm high.

For an unknown reason the right leg of the articulated skeleton has been substituted for a left arm.

via the Science Museum, London / Wellcome Images via Nezka Pfeifer
I. Epicurus of Samos (341-270 B. C.) founded his school, the Garden, in Athens--instructed his followers in the art of rational living.

   A. Main belief: pleasure is the end (telos) of life: by pleasure he meant the lack of pain.

      1. Pleasure is the freedom of the body from pain and the soul from confusion--not a positive condition.

      2. Taught a moderate asceticism, self-control, and independence. One should not undertake heavy responsibilities and serious involvement.

      3. Pleasures which endure throughout a life-time are sought, not momentary pleasures. Epicurus praised a life that escapes other people’s notice.
B. *Pleasure is the absence of pain or the avoidance of pain*, rather than a positive satisfaction. More important, pleasure is the lack of a troubled soul.

1. Examples: intellectual pleasure, serenity of soul, health of body.
2. Even though every pain is evil and pleasure good, Epicurean hedonism is meant to result in a calm and tranquil life, not libertinism and excess.
   a. Avoid pleasures which are extreme: they have painful concomitants.
   b. Lasting pleasure is not a bodily sensation.
   c. "Though he is being tortured on the rack, the wise [person] is still happy."

C. Epicurus distinguished between higher and lower pleasures (an influence on J.S. Mill).

higher pleasures: pleasures of the mind--intellectual and aesthetic.

lower pleasures: pleasures of the body--food, drink, and sex.

II. Epicurus sought **virtue**--a condition of **tranquility of soul**. Although it is based on the individual’s pleasure (rather than duty).

A. Epicurus put great stress on **friendship** because one’s own pleasure is dependent on others also.

B. Peace of mind and mental well-being is achieved through philosophy--death is recognized to be merely the limit of experience and therefore having nothing to do with the quality of experience. It is not to be feared since it is nothingness.

III. Reason: the art of calculating our conduct of life.

A. **Reason** is the ability to balance one thing with another in order to calculate future happiness.

1. Great stress on practical reason (*phronesis*): something more to be prized than philosophy itself.
2. **Prudence**: a person who knows how to conduct himself in the search for pleasure.
3. **Natural Science**: All things in the world are atoms linked temporarily in constant motion. Understanding science (i.e., how nature "works") can overcome superstition and irrational fear.
B. The resulting outlook is something like the opportunity cost in economics: recognition of the necessary losses in life. The choices we make are important since each choice obviates all other choices at that moment.

IV. Historically, Stoicism was absorbed into Epicureanism. Epicureanism is not a philosophy of heroes like Stoicism is.

V. Objections to Epicureanism:

A. Epicurus seems to recommend "the absence of pain" as a pleasure more sought than pleasure itself. The state of no pain is not a pleasure—cf., the fallacy of false dichotomy.

B. Where many persons regard the most significant pleasures in life as achieving a difficult goal and overcoming adversity, Epicurus counsels for us to seek tranquility. He seems to advise, in this instance, a philosophy of life-avoidance.

C. Epicureanism is an incomplete ethics and requires supplementation. How should we regard community virtues such as justice, societal good, and pleasure for others?

http://philosophy.lander.edu/ethics/epicurus.html