1. Horace, Satires, 2, 7, 8 ss

Priscus, who was often marked (*notatus*) by wearing three rings, but once in a while by wearing none, was so fickle in his life, that he would change his stripe (*clavus*) every hour. Passing from a stately mansion (*aedibus ex magnis*), he would bury himself in a den, from which a decent freedman could scarcely emerge without shame. Now he would choose to live in Rome as an adulterer (*moechus*), now as a sage (*doctus*) in Athens—a man born when all the possible Vertumni were hostile (*Vertumnis quotquot sunt natus iniquis*).

2. Arnobius, Adversus Nationes, 4, 13, 3 ss.

We have been traditionally taught by our teachers that there is no plural in the declension of the names of gods, because the gods are singular (*singuli*), and because it is impossible that ownership of a proper name can be distributed among multiple subjects (*per plurimos*). You, however, have forgotten this and have abandoned the memory of your elementary education.

3. Phocas, *De nomine*, 55 (GLK 5, 410 – 439, 7) : cfr. *Catholica Probi*, *De nomine*, 14 (GLK 4, 3, 2-33, 7) ; etc.:

Deorum propria nomina, elementorum, heroum, fluminum, montium, singulariter dumtaxat declinantur

4. Alongside the Lar there were also the (plural) Lares; alongside Silvanus there were also the Silvani; alongside Faunus there were also Fauni; alongside Carmentis there were also the Carmentes; and so on. Paul Veyne has noted: "It was not clearly understood whether there was only one Pan, Faunus or Silenus, or many Pans, Fauni, and Sileni . . . the experience of the divine encounters a *force*, not an individuality".

5. The plural *Castores* can be used to indicate both Castor and Pollux; *Cereres* to indicate both Ceres and Proserpina; *Quirini* to indicate both Romulus and Remus

6. Catullus, *Carmina*. 3, 1

Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque

13, 11 s.:

nam unguentum dabo, quod meae puellae
donarunt Veneres Cupidinesque

86, 5 sg:

Lesbia formosa est, quae cum pulcerrima tota est,
    tum omnibus una omnis surripuit Veneres

Plautus, *Stichus*, 278 s.

amoenitates omnium Venerum et Venustatum adfero

7. Catulllus, *Carmina* , 36, 3 s.:

sanctae Veneri Cupidinique
vovit

Plautus, *Asinaria* 803 ss.:

tum si coronas, serta, unguenta iusserit
ancillam ferre Veneri aut Cupidini

8. Plautus and Catullus pluralized Venus for the same reason Horace pluralized Vertumnus and the Romans in general could pluralize Juno, the Lar, or Silvanus, or create Castores or Quirini: because the name of Roman gods in certain cases *exceeds the boundaries of grammatical number*.

9. CIL VI, 17366; IX, 891; I-2, 761:

Euodiae dis manibus; dis manibus nepotis sui; dis manibus sacrum L. Caecili Rufi, etc.

Seneca *Troades* 644 sg.:

        Testor immites deos
deosque veros coniugis manes mei

10. Vergil, *Aeneis*, 6, 743

quisque suos patimur manis.

11. Servius, Commentarius ad Vergili Aeneidem, 2, 351:

in Capitolio fuit clipeus consecratus, cui inscriptum erat "genio urbis Romae, sive mas sive femina"

12. It was possible to use the masculine substantive *deus* to designate also a female goddess. If Minerva is the *deus* who invented the oil, it is again a feminine *deus*, Venus, who guides Aeneas out of the burning Troia

13. There are other cases in which Latin uses a masculine noun to indicate both a male and a female subject indifferently. And this occurs in contexts, and with specific semantic purposes, which closely recall the use of the simple *deus* to designate divinities of both genders. For example, we know how *puer* could also designate a *puella*, *socrus* could be used for both father-in-law and mother-in-law, *heres* for both male and female heir. More interestingly *parens* – properly "mother" "woman who gives birth, parit" could be used for both mother and father.

When the Romans speak of the gods, the grammatical gender is neutralized in favor of the characteristic of being "divine" in general: regardless of whether this quality is exercised by a male or female divinity

14. *Numen*

As the Italian linguist Romano Lazzeroni effectively summarized, the neutral is "characterized by a variable participation in a set of traits ranging from non-individuality to non-countability.

Such a variable participation in the traits of non-individuality and non-countability explains the collective value of the Indo-European neutral"

15. The suffix –*men*. Latin has in fact many other terms in -*men*: *agmen, fragmen, germen, gramen, sagmen, semen, stamen, stramen, tegimen / tegmen, (sub)temen, vimen*, and so on. It is a class of neutral nouns, derived from verbs, and often of a collective nature, as they designate mostly a set of 'parts': *agmen* is a set of soldiers (or ants) on the march, *gramen* a set of grass (primarily intended for animal pasture), *semen* a set of seeds, *stramen* a set of straw for the straw mat, *tegmen* a set of materials with which a cover is made, *germen* everything 'germinating' from a plant, *vimen* means fibers of rush or willow used as a tie, and so on.

It is also possible to use these substantives in the plural - *agmina, gramina, semina, stramina, vimina* - with the same meaning

16. A simple look at the uses of *numen*, allows us to see how it can be used both in the singular and in the plural - *numen* or *numina* - with the same meaning, as the other terms in -*men*. In addition, *numen* in the singular can be used in reference to a *plurality* of gods, *numina* in the plural can be used in reference to a single deity. By defining the characters of divinity through a noun such as *numen*, the traits of countability and of individuality become irrelevant. The *numen* is a whole, a bundle of divine characteristics, not better specified and above all not better identified.

The term *numen* defines the divine regardless of both its masculine / feminine characteristic, because it is a neutral noun; and regardless of its singular / plural nature, since it falls within a class of nouns in which the countability feature is irrelevant.

17. Jean-Pierre Vernant : "An ancient god expresses the aspects and the modes of action of a power, not of a personal form of existence". Ancient gods are not "persons (*personnes*)" but "powers (*puissances*)".

Paul Veyne: "the experience of the divine encounters a *force*, not an individuality".

This particular grammatical treatment of divinity represents an attempt to convey the *exceptional* nature of divinity – its being radically different from humanity, its *not* sharing the fundamental characteristics of a human person (being either one or many, male or female)

18. Cicero, , *De natura deorum*, 1, 77: *Auxerunt autem haec eadem poetae, pictores, opifices; erat enim non facile agentis aliquid et molientes deos in aliarum formarum imitatione servare*

If poets, painters and artists have attributed human form to divinity, this has happened because "it was not easy to represent in another form the gods who acted and worked (*agentes et molientes*)"