FEMALE RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS IN REPUBLICAN ROME

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the evidence for female religious officials in the city of Rome during the period of the Republic. Official religious service has often been characterized as the exclusive preserve of the male elite. Many historians have argued that Roman women (with the exception of the Vestal Virgins) were categorically excluded from participating in public religion in an official capacity. The ancient evidence, on the other hand, clearly demonstrates that Roman religion required the participation of men and women of various social statuses. In addition to the Vestals, many women held official and often high profile positions in the public religious system. Those specifically attested in the ancient record include the sacerdotes of Ceres, Liber, Bona Dea and Fortuna Muliebris, the flaminica Dialis and the flaminica Martialis, the regina sacrorum, the wives of the thirty curiones, and magistriæ and ministriæ of various other cults. In Rome, numerous women were actively involved in public religion at the highest levels. Indeed, this dissertation argues that official religious service is the one area of public life in which Roman women assumed roles of comparable legitimacy and status with those of men. Although the specific ritual context was often different, female religious officials performed many of the same priestly acts — including animal sacrifice — carried out by their male colleagues. Official religious service allowed men and women to participate in the public life of the community on behalf of the Roman People.

The dissertation is organized by religious office. The first four chapters focus on the Vestal order, the only Roman collegium composed entirely of female members. The fifth and sixth chapters consider joint offices filled by married couples. The most familiar officials of this type are undoubtedly the rex and regina sacrorum and the flamen and flaminica Dialis, though I argue that the remaining flamines maiores and minores also had wives who held the official religious title flaminica. I also discuss evidence for married priests who served the Roman curiae and perhaps the communities of the Seven Hills as well. In the final chapter, I examine religious offices filled by individual women, including the sacerdotes of Ceres, Fortuna Muliebris, Bona Dea, Liber and Bacchus. The chapter concludes with a consideration of evidence for female support personnel and religious specialists.
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Introduction

... usque ego posterum crescam laude recens, dum Capitolium scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex (Hor. Carm. 3.30.7-9).

I will continue to grow fresh with the praise of posterity, as long as the pontifex climbs the Capitol beside the silent virgin.¹

In his entry on “priests (Greek and Roman)” in the revised third edition of The Oxford Classical Dictionary, John North asserts, “In Rome… priests are (with the exception of the Vestal Virgins) males, formed into colleges or brotherhoods.”² Context makes it clear that North is referring only to the category of religious officials commonly known as “public priests,” but even so his statement is problematic.³ In addition to the Vestals, many women held official and often high profile positions in the public religious system during the period of the Republic. Those specifically attested in the ancient record include the sacerdotes of Ceres, Liber, Bona Dea and Fortuna Muliebris, the flaminica Dialis and the flaminica Martianis, the regina sacrorum, the wives of the thirty curiones, and magistriæ and ministriæ of various other cults. In Rome, numerous women were actively involved in public religion at the highest levels.

Female religious officials have often been silent and invisible figures in the modern imagination, but not, ironically enough, because of the ancient sources. Instead, they have been left out of a scholarly paradigm created to explain male religious service. As Celia Schultz has recently noted, “By focusing on the activities of, and requirements applied to, male public priests, namely the pontifices, augurs, and decemvirs, and treating the different female priesthods as isolated exceptions, we have lost sight of how the issue of gender was dealt with by the Romans at the level of public, official religious service.”⁴

This dissertation aims to demonstrate that in Rome, both men and women served as public religious officials. Indeed, I argue that official religious service is the one area of public life in which Roman women assumed roles of equal legitimacy and comparable status

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¹ All translations are adapted from the Loeb Classical Library unless otherwise noted.
² North 2003: 1245.
³ Later in the entry, North (2003: 1246) notes that non-public cults could appoint priestesses.
⁴ Schultz 2006: 79.
to those of men. Although the specific ritual context was often different, female religious officials performed many of the same ritual acts carried out by their male colleagues. I hope that our current tendency to express surprise at the prominent role the Vestal Virgins played in Roman religion and society will be lessened when they are set beside the many other female religious officials who contributed to public religious life in the city of Rome. When the full spectrum of religious actors and activities is taken into account, it becomes clear that serving the gods in an official capacity was a more complex and varied enterprise than is often assumed.

The focus of this study is the period of the Republic through the principate of Augustus. The first princeps left his mark on Roman religion, among other things, and it is important to understand how his efforts reshaped the nature of religious service in the imperial period. I consider all those women who held official titles and performed special functions in the service of a particular public cult, bearing in mind, of course, that any catalog of Roman religious officials will be partial. The emphasis throughout is on the traditional public cults in Rome, that is, those cults that were funded by the Roman state and conducted on behalf of the Roman people (pro populo).

### Background

#### Language and Definitions

Language influences our perception of how women (and men) engaged in ritual activity. Although “priest” is often employed as a general descriptive term for religious officials in the ancient world, there are several disadvantages to its use. Chief among them is the fact that the term imports into a Roman context a host of unwarranted Christian connotations. The English word priest is ultimately derived, via the Latin presbyter, from the Greek πρεσβύτερος, literally “old man,” the term used in the New Testament to refer to leaders of local Christian communities. In English, “priest” suggests a vocation, implying that the bearer of the title is a full time theologian and the pastor of a congregation. It also

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5 All dates given are B.C. unless otherwise noted.
6 Festus (284L) defines as public “those rites that are performed at public expense on behalf of the people and for the hills, rural districts, curiae and shrines” (quae sumpta pro populo fiunt, quaeque pro montibus, pagis, curis, sacellis).
8 See, for example, Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:22; Titus 1: 5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1.
evokes a notion of personal sanctity that often seems out of place in Roman religion. Furthermore, the term “priest” describes a predominately masculine vocation. In the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, for example, women are categorically excluded from serving in this capacity. The second major problem with the use of the term “priest” is that it groups together under a single title a diverse assortment of major and minor officials and representatives of Roman religion. It is reductionist.\(^9\) As we shall see, Roman religious officials do not readily fit into one category.

The Latin title \textit{sacerdos} (*skr\-o\-\-ts, “the one who does the sacred act”) is often suggested as a possible alternative to the more problematic term “priest.” Although \textit{sacerdotes} was often used as an umbrella term in the later Republic, evidence suggests that it originally had a more specific meaning.\(^11\) During the second century B.C., \textit{sacerdos} was used to refer to officials serving the cult of an individual, particularly non-Roman, deity.\(^12\) Officials who celebrated the rites of the ancient Latin communities also held the title \textit{sacerdos}.\(^13\) Since these usages seem very ancient, it has been assumed that the word \textit{sacerdos} originally referred to a non-Roman category of religious official. By the first century B.C., however, \textit{sacerdos} was being applied to the members of the major religious colleges at Rome. Cicero, for instance, describes the Vestals as \textit{sacerdotes}.\(^14\) He uses \textit{sacerdotium} as a general term at the beginning of his discussion of priesthoods in the \textit{De legibus}, but quickly abandons all generalizations in his discussion of individual offices.\(^15\) The Roman preference for a varied sacred vocabulary should give us pause about placing all religious offices in one category, even one that seems to have grown out of Roman terminology.

A variety of alternatives to the word “priest” have recently been proposed by scholars of ancient religions. Jörg Rüpke, for instance, prefers “religious specialist” because it “emphasizes rather the individuals whose expert knowledge and skills make possible an advanced degree of division of religious labour and are able to deploy and modify a whole range of symbolic systems in this area.”\(^16\) Of course one might readily object that “religious”

\(^9\) Beard and North 1990: 3. The Vestal Virgins and the \textit{flamines} are notable exceptions to this generalization.

\(^10\) Henrichs 2008: 7.


\(^12\) See, for example, Plaut. \textit{Bacch.} 307; Plaut. \textit{Rud.} 285; \textit{ILS} 18.10.

\(^13\) See, for example, the \textit{sacerdotes Laurentium Lavinatum} (\textit{ILS} 1147; 1430; 1431).

\(^14\) Cic. \textit{Dom.} 144.


\(^16\) Rüpke 2007b: 216. Rüpke admits, however, that religious specialist is “a clumsy phrase,” and uses “priest” on occasion.
is just as problematic a term in a Roman context as is “priest.”¹⁷ In the end, all modern terms are arbitrary to some extent. In fact, the very attempt to find a blanket term is anachronistic, since it implies that there was a category for which a single term is appropriate.

Albert Henrichs has recently suggested that modern terminology should be abandoned completely in favor of Greek or Latin titles.¹⁸ But in his study of the complicated “terminological genealogy” of crucial terms used in the study of religion, Jan Bremmer concludes that this approach could potentially mask a larger problem.¹⁹ Bremmer argues that even when scholars restrict themselves to ancient terms, they are still engaging in “an interpretive endeavor.” Regardless of the terminology employed, one’s own cultural framework is an inescapable point of reference. In other words, even when we use only ancient titles or employ a seemingly neutral descriptive term, we still make choices about who should or should not be included.

Throughout this dissertation I employ the ancient terminology whenever possible. By foregrounding the multiplicity of Latin titles given to the women under consideration here, I hope to highlight the complexity and variety of religious service at Rome. At the same time, however, it is useful and necessary to make use of a more general descriptive term on occasion. I have chosen “religious official” because it captures the legitimate institutional position of the women under consideration in this study. These women served public cult at Rome in an official capacity. I employ the term “religious specialist,” on the other hand, to describe those women who possessed divinatory skills or other specialized religious knowledge, but whose activities were not officially recognized by the state.

Theories of Priesthood

As noted in the previous section, the study of religious service in Roman society is hampered in part by the lack of a readily defined group of officials who share a common Latin title. We are left to ask, whom can we call a religious official at Rome? One option is to cast the net very widely and include all persons who performed cultic acts on behalf of a

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¹⁷ Compare Rüpke’s (2007b: 179) comments on the equally problematic term “religion”: “It is no improvement to substitute the plural ‘religions’ for the singular ‘religion.’ This use of ‘religions,’ which is fashionable at the moment, goes even further in suggesting the existence of a plurality of self-contained and neatly separated religious traditions or systems, on the model of early modern Christian denominations.”

¹⁸ Henrichs 2008.

specific community (e.g., the entire populus Romanus or the members of a family). But such a
definition would necessarily include the majority of magistrates and every paterfamilias in the
city. This broad dispersal of ritual competence has complicated efforts to define religious
service at Rome. If the magistrates undertook many important ritual actions that appear
virtually identical to those taken by religious officials, how can we differentiate the two types
of offices?

Some scholars have argued that the difference is one of degree: religious officials
performed the same type of ritual “much more exactly and lavishly” than “non-priests,” a
point to which we shall return.20 Another way to resolve the issue is to admit that sacrifice
cannot be regarded as the defining characteristic of a Roman religious official. Although
magistrates offered sacrifices in the course of their public duties, they were not considered
religious officials by virtue of this function.21 Similarly, though sacrifice was an important
sacerdotal activity, it should not be used as the sole criterion for defining a religious official.
Instead, as John Scheid argues, all religious activity must be tied to a precise social context.22
The key difference between the ritual activities of religious officials and those of magistrates
is the fact that each public figure performed only those rites required by his or her particular
office.23 According to this approach, the religious official is defined more by his institutional
position than by the nature of his activity, a point to which we shall return.

As noted above, many scholars assign to religious officials a high degree of “religious
expertise.”24 Others have rejected this view and preferred to see them as religious
amateurs.25 These scholars rightly draw a distinction between the distribution of religious
authority in Roman society and the priestly caste system of other ancient religions. Roman
religious officials did not constitute a distinct class set apart from the rest of society. The
most prominent figures were drawn from the same group of elites who competed for

20 See, for example, Rüpke 1996: 248.
21 For this argument, see Scheid 2003: 129.
22 Scheid 1993: 55.
23 Scheid (1993: 61-4) also discusses the different methods of recruitment, which provide further differentiation
at the institutional level.
24 Joachim Marquardt (1885: 219-20) was one of the first to argue that priests were religious specialists. He
focused on their role as advisors to the senate and magistrates.
25 See, for example, Scullard 1981: 28.
magistracies and filled the senate. They were not paid and the majority of offices required only part-time service.\textsuperscript{26}

Nevertheless, some ancient evidence suggests that the Romans did view their religious officials as specialists.\textsuperscript{27} Although no specific training was required to enter a religious office, once a man became a \textit{pontifex} or an \textit{augur} his status was that of a religious expert. In other words, he was regarded as a specialist because of his institutional position, not his training or time spent serving. The \textit{pontifices}, for example, were responsible for the administration and development of sacred law, a special kind of knowledge that was inaccessible to outsiders and distinct from public law (\textit{ius publicum}).\textsuperscript{28} They also interpreted sacred law and, although their recommendations had no executive force (\textit{ius}), they advised the senate and magistrates who were responsible for rendering decisions. When understood in this sense, specialization does not suggest vocation or full time activity, but rather knowledge and competence to perform a specific set of rites and to advise non-specialists about religious matters.\textsuperscript{29}

The function of ‘mediation’ between gods and men has been taken by many scholars of religion to be the defining characteristic of priesthood in general.\textsuperscript{30} Georg Wissowa argued long ago that this was not the case at Rome.\textsuperscript{31} Roman religious officials were representatives of the \textit{populus Romanus} or a subset of that whole, not the representatives of the divine or mediators between men and the gods. More recently, however, Mary Beard has attempted to assign a mediating function to the senate with less than satisfactory results.\textsuperscript{32} Beard emphasizes that while religious officials provided advice on religious matters, the final decision always rested with the Roman senate. The senate, for example, decided which prodigies should be recognized as legitimate signs from the gods and either

\textsuperscript{26} Significant exceptions are the \textit{flamines} and the Vestal Virgins. Nearly all religious offices, in contrast to magistracies, were held for life.
\textsuperscript{27} Beard 1990; Scheid 1993; Rüpke 1996. Clifford Ando (2008) has recently argued that all Roman religious behavior should be understood in terms of “knowledge,” which he constructs as an alternative to “belief.”
\textsuperscript{28} See especially Scheid 1993: 61.
\textsuperscript{29} For this distinction, see Rüpke 1996: 255.
\textsuperscript{30} For an overview, see Rüpke 1996.
\textsuperscript{31} Wissowa 1912: 479-80. Mediation, it has been argued, is an essentially Christian concept that was developed by Protestant scholars to explain the opposition between the Reformation belief in “the priesthood of all believers” (see, for example, 1 Pet. 2:9) and the Catholic sacerdotal system (McSweeney 1974; Rüpke 1996: 245-6). The priest, as “mediator,” stands between the lay congregation and God in order to monopolize and interrupt the line of communication. Another crucial difference is the concept of ordination to the priesthood as a sacrament (in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions).
\textsuperscript{32} Beard 1990: 30-4.
ordered immediate expiation or referred the matter to the appropriate religious officials. Thus the senate, Beard argues, mediated between the gods and men by controlling the communication of gods to men and directing human responses to such communications. Her definition of “mediation,” which is closely related to religious authority, seeks to explain the fragmentary nature of Roman religious activity by locating authority in the centralized body of the senate. Ultimately, however, Beard’s effort to redefine mediation for a Roman context still involves the imposition of a modern category on the ancient evidence. While the senate had the power to make decisions, they did not have their own religious competence and therefore relied on religious officials for advice and seem to have disregarded their opinion only very rarely.

All of the approaches discussed thus far attempt to interpret Roman priests within the framework of the Republican political system. The authors of a review of Pagan Priests, an influential study of priesthood in the ancient Mediterranean edited by Mary Beard and John North, have pointed out that although this is helpful to a certain extent, it can only provide a partial picture of Roman priesthood. They argue that the methodological principle that religion and politics are co-extensive limits discussion to the male, public collegia (the pontifices, augures, baruspices, and decemviri), while excluding many religious officials whose duties do not exhibit obvious signs of interaction with the senate or the magistrates. This is not to suggest that religion and politics were entirely separate spheres. Rather, the observation that religion was an embedded practice has had the effect of privileging those instances when religious and political concerns were most closely aligned.

The flamines, for example, who had no advisory function in the political sphere, are barely mentioned in Beard’s discussion of Republican priesthoods. Nonetheless, they were members of the extended pontifical college and performed a variety of rites on behalf of the Roman people. In fact, the flamen Dialis is described as “celebrating every day” (cotidie feriatus, Gell. N.A. 10.15.16). He wore the symbols of his priesthood on a daily basis and was

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33 Beard (1990: 30) defines “mediation” as follows: “In this chapter I have taken mediation to be primarily an institutional function and one which defines, delimits and controls human approaches to the divine and the communication of gods to men… Religious ‘mediation’ in this sense overlaps in part with the wider notion of religious ‘authority,’ but is rather more narrowly defined: whereas religious authority can be understood in a passive sense (as, for example, when it is embedded in a book or set of sacred texts), mediation is an active force, involving direct contact with the sphere of the gods.”
34 For this criticism, see Brennan 2002.
36 Scheid (1993) does discuss the flamines, but only in a separate section that is not well connected to the rest of the essay.
required to observe certain regulations to guarantee his ritual purity at all times.\textsuperscript{37} Furthermore, the wife of the flamen, the flaminica Dialis, shared the office with her husband and even sacrifice on behalf of the Roman people. Thus the flamonium Dialis seems very different from the model that has been developed of a part-time, knowledge-oriented religious office and, for this very reason, little has been done to integrate it into more general theories of religious service at Rome.

Not surprisingly, the political framework also tends to exclude religious offices held by women.\textsuperscript{38} Those who do enter into the picture are described as intruders who have left the typical “female” realms of religious activity and must be explained away. As Scheid argues, “[t]he cult and the priestly powers were, above all, men’s business, on both the public and the private levels. The priestly act, celebrated in the name of a community, could not be entrusted to a woman, considered incapable of representing anyone but herself.”\textsuperscript{39} This position requires a fair amount of qualification. According to Scheid, whenever a woman did take on a religious role she was either subordinate to a man, as in the case of the flaminriciae, whom he describes as “adjuncts of their husbands,” or she was no longer truly considered to be a woman.\textsuperscript{40} In the latter category Scheid includes the Vestals, who, according to a very influential position first articulated by Mary Beard, exhibited masculine qualities.\textsuperscript{41} Finally, Scheid argues that the priestesses of Bacchus, Ceres, and Isis were merely retained when the cults were naturalized and did not represent “an evolution in Roman religious convictions.”\textsuperscript{42}

Scheid’s determination to exclude women from official religious roles at Rome stems largely from his conviction that women were prohibited from offering blood sacrifices.\textsuperscript{43} As Rebecca Flemming and Celia Schultz have recently demonstrated, however, his case for

\textsuperscript{37} Gell. N.A. 10.15; Plut. Q.R. 40.
\textsuperscript{39} Scheid 1993: 56. See also, Scheid 1992.
\textsuperscript{40} Scheid 1993: 57.
\textsuperscript{41} Beard 1980.
\textsuperscript{42} Scheid 1993: 57.
\textsuperscript{43} Scheid 1992. Scheid draws on similar arguments made by de Cazanove (1974) and Detienne (1989). His position on female sacrificial incapacity has become widely accepted, though it is not always expressed in quite such strong terms. In their authoritative \textit{Religions of Rome}, for example, Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price (1998: 297) emphasize the passive role of Roman women and claim, “much more fundamentally (though the evidence is not entirely clear), they may have been banned – in theory, at any rate – from carrying out animal sacrifice; and so prohibited from any officiating role in the central defining ritual of civic ritual activity.”
female sacrificial incapacity is deeply flawed.\textsuperscript{44} None of the passages cited by Scheid in support of his hypothesis require the interpretation he offers.\textsuperscript{45} Moreover, the ancient evidence amply supports women’s ability to sacrifice. As we shall see, the Vestals, the \textit{sacerdos Ceres}, the \textit{flaminica Dialis} and the \textit{regina sacrorum} all presided over sacrifices on behalf of the Roman people (\textit{pro populo}). This does not mean that elite Roman women actually slit the throats of sacrificial victims or butchered their carcasses, but neither did elite men. At a Roman sacrifice, the sacrificant poured the libation, spoke the appropriate prayer, sprinkled the victim with \textit{mola salsa}, and ran the ritual knife along the back of the victim. The actual slaughtering and butchering was the job of the \textit{victimarii} (ritual slaughters) who were, generally speaking, \textit{servi publici} (public slaves).\textsuperscript{46} To be clear, there is no reason to exclude women from the study of Roman priesthood on the basis of sacrificial capacity. Despite Scheid’s claims to the contrary, women were considered capable of representing their fellow citizens to the gods.

Furthermore, as Scheid himself has demonstrated, sacrificial competence was widely diffused at Rome and cannot be used to define the “priest” in opposition to the average citizen. The ability to sacrifice was tied to a particular ritual context. For instance, the \textit{regina sacrorum} alone was competent to offer a sow or ewe to Juno in the \textit{regia} on the \textit{kalendae}.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{44} Schultz 2006: 131-7; Flemming 2007: 87-108. Of course, as Flemming cautions, we cannot replace one flawed model dominated by a notion of female sacrificial incapacity and religious exclusion with another that suggests religious equality at Rome. Certain priesthoods and religious activities were off limits to women simply because of their gender.

\textsuperscript{45} Scheid (1992: 379) points first to Festus 72L: \textit{exesto}, \textit{extra esto}. \textit{sic enim lictor in quibusdam sacrís clamitabat: hostis, vinctus, mulier, virgo exesto; scilicet interesse prohibebatur} (Be away! Thus the lictor used to shout out in certain religious rituals – “Away with the foreigner, prisoner, woman, girl!” – obviously prohibiting them from being present, translation by Flemming 2007: 89). In fact, however, rather than supporting the notion that women were prohibited from participating in sacrificial rites, this passage clearly suggests the opposite. The “\textit{quibusdam}” indicates that women were excluded only from certain rituals. In general, women were present; the shout of “\textit{exesto}” is an exception. Next, Scheid employs Plutarch’s assertion that in early Rome, “wives were not allowed to grind or cook” (\textit{tac γυναῖκας οὔτ᾽ ἀλείν εἴων οὔτ᾽ ὀψοποιεῖν}, Q.R. 85) to suggest that these restrictions would have prevented women from sacrificing. But in this passage appears to have no basis in reality. Grinding and cooking were tasks performed by women in the domestic and religious spheres throughout the historical period. Finally, Scheid quotes a number of stories about wine being forbidden to women in early Rome in order to demonstrate that women must have been excluded from pouring libations and thus from sacrificing (this point is central to De Cazanove’s (1974) argument as well). Here the evidence is stronger (see especially Gell. \textit{N.A.} 10.23). Still, it is not certain that there was ever a law against women drinking wine. Rather, it seems clear that excessive drinking, particularly without the knowledge of the husband, was heavily censured. Women’s troubled relationship with wine should be understood within a moralizing context that sought to establish expectations for ideal matronly behavior. The ancient evidence does not, however, prove that women were prohibited from drinking wine and thus participating in sacrificial rites.

\textsuperscript{46} As we shall see in chapter 7, there were female \textit{victimarii}.

\textsuperscript{47} Macr. \textit{Sat.} 1.15.19.
Individual religious offices were associated with specific ritual obligations that could only be fulfilled by their occupants. Thus the search for a single “priestly” act is ultimately misguided. In addition to animal sacrifice, Roman religious officials performed a wide variety of religious rituals. Prayer, for example, was central to the practice of Roman religion. Many rites involved non-animal sacrifices of grain or wine. The Vestals were expected to tend the flame on the hearth of Vesta, while the salii danced through the city in celebratory processions in the month of March. Official religious service was tied to an office, not a particular ritual act. For this reason, the religious system was able to accommodate a number of different types of officials, including those who were primarily concerned with the cult of an individual deity, such as the Vestals and the flamines and flaminicae, and those like the augures and pontifices, whose responsibilities included advising the senate and magistrates on religious matters. Though their duties differed significantly, all were considered public religious officials.

Roman religious offices can also be organized according to the gender of their occupants. Celia Schultz has recently suggested that all religious offices at Rome should be divided into three categories: those filled by male officials, those filled by female officials, and those requiring the service of a married couple. As Schultz writes, “in the schema proposed here, the requirements of male public priests are no longer held as definitive for all public religious officials, but rather serve to define only one group of priesthoods against others.” Her approach offers a much more productive way of understanding the variety of religious officials at Rome, though I would add that even within these broad categories, variation existed. Schultz’s work, however, has a broader and different scope. She is primarily interested in developing a picture of all women’s religious activity that moves beyond the “confines” of fertility and chastity cults and exclusively female rituals. In this dissertation, I build on her suggestions by focusing instead on the evidence for female religious officials.

48 Indeed, Rüpke (2007b: 100) describes the votive gift (i.e. sacrifice) as a “classic, perhaps even over-rated, element of ritual action” (emphasis mine).
49 See, for example, Hickson Hahn 2007; Rüpke 2007b: 103-4.
50 Schultz 2006: 3.
Women in Roman Religion

Part of the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the nature of official religious service at Rome. Another closely related purpose, however, is to engage with current scholarship on the religious activities of Roman women. In the past, studies of women’s religious activities have focused almost exclusively on their participation in rites of a private, domestic nature, or on their celebration of all female fertility festivals. In fact, women’s secluded ritual activity has often been seen as a corollary to their exclusion from politics. Ritual is imagined as a space where women could release pent-up tension that resulted from their exclusion from male-dominated public life. While traditionally female cults and rites were of central importance to Roman women, they also devoted themselves to the cults of deities concerned with broader civic concerns, which have generally been regarded as exclusively masculine in nature. Women’s religious activities were not restricted to the domestic sphere, the traditional domain of women, but often included official public rites. As Schultz argues in her recent study of the subject, “Roman religion was far more gender-inclusive than is usually presented.”

Sources

Literary Sources

Literary sources provide the majority of our evidence for female religious officials. Unfortunately, however, interpretation of this evidence is complicated by a number of factors. The material itself is scattered across a variety of works written in a number of different genres, each with their own artistic and didactic aims. Antiquarians and poets, for instance, sought to impose their own view of Roman religion on contemporary ritual practice through their work. As Christopher Smith has noted, “the evidence we have for Roman religion is often ancient interpretation – indeed Roman religion sometimes seems as if it is interpretation, not a transcendent reality which we struggle to grasp or recreate, but a

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51 Tzanetou 2007 contains a very helpful history of the study of women in ancient religion.
52 It has even been assumed that evidence for female participation necessarily indicates that a cult was concerned with fertility, even when that assumption is completely unfounded. Schultz (2006: 33-7) considers the case of the cult of Juno Regina, for example. Men also dedicated votive offerings to fertility goddesses, which demonstrates that it is dangerous to interpret ritual activity according to prevailing stereotypes. As Schultz (2006: 116-20) rightly points out, men were also concerned with the production and safety of their children.
53 See especially Schultz 2006.
54 Schultz 2006: 5.
series of ancient readings of [the] reality of the world.” Literature engages with ritual and offers myriad interpretations of it, but no ancient text accurately represents the reality of religious practice.

Roman religion, like all cultural practices, changed over time. Most of our sources, however, were written during the second half of the first century B.C., or, even later, during the principate. Did these authors actually know what religion was like in earlier centuries? It is wise to be cautious, but we should also allow for the possibility that later writers relied on older sources that are no longer available to us. Systematic reflection on the history of Roman religion and its ritual practices began as early as the second century B.C. and culminated in the Antiquitates rerum divinarum of M. Terentius Varro, completed in 47, which sought to uncover the historical underpinnings of contemporary practice. Nonetheless, even when earlier sources were available, later authors may not have faithfully represented the work of their predecessors. Ancient accounts of Roman religion may often have been based in fact, but they were influenced by a variety of factors and must be considered critically.

In the case of women’s religious activity, there are further complications, particularly since their experiences are mediated through the voice of male authors. Men were in general less interested in the ritual tasks undertaken by women, which means that we often hear less about their religious activities. Moreover, male-authored accounts of all female festivals frequently downplay and distort women’s religious agency by “fictionalizing” the rites and inventing negative images of the participants that conform to prevailing gender stereotypes. We should be careful not to replicate the bias present in the ancient sources by ignoring or devaluing female participation in Roman religion. Although the history of female religious officials may always be less full than the one written for their male

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56 The earliest surviving literary sources for Roman religion were written during the second century B.C. Polybius, a Greek hostage at Rome, wrote a history of Rome that contains a variety of information about Roman religion. Cato the Elder, who authored a treatise on estate management around the same time, describes certain ritual activities that should be performed by the landowner or his surrogate. After these two authors we have nothing extant until the middle of the first century B.C. For a discussion of the sources for Roman religion, see Rüpke 2007b: 39.
58 Schultz (2006: 6-7) discusses the difficulties inherent in our interpretation of highly selective, male-authored sources, including the modern analogy with which John Scheid begins his 1992 article “The Religious Roles of Roman Women.”
59 See especially Lyons 2007. Consider, for example, Juvenal’s account of the women only festival of Bona Dea (Sat. 6.314-41). See also Kraemer 1992: 52.
counterparts, an effort should be made to recover what can be known about the official role of women in Roman religion.

_Epigraphic and Archaeological Sources_

In order to expand our understanding of female religious officials at Rome, we must supplement our literary sources with epigraphic and archaeological evidence. Material sources often present a very different picture from the one found in literary texts, particularly in the case of the religious activities of women and nonelite Romans. For instance, the epigraphic record indicates that women held far more official or quasi-official religious positions than the literary sources suggest. Furthermore, the epitaphs of these _magistrae_ (magistrates) and _ministrae_ (ministers) reveal that they were often of libertine or servile status. Epigraphic and archaeological evidence are also the only materials left to us by Roman women themselves. Funerary inscriptions and portrait statues reveal how female religious officials, or members of their families, wished to represent themselves. Unfortunately, all of the Republican inscriptions related to female religious officials come from outside of Rome. While my focus is public cult in the city, these inscriptions suggest how gaps in the Roman material might reasonably be filled in.

It is occasionally possible to recover a sense of the physical space inhabited by female religious officials. The remains of the _aedes_ and _atrium Vestae_, for example, help to provide a concrete physical context for the Vestal Virgins. The eternal flame on the hearth in the _aedes Vestae_ was the central focus of Vesta’s cult, though literary and physical evidence from inside the _atrium Vestae_, the House of the Vestals, suggests that the women carried out other ritual duties (e.g., the preparation of _mola salsa_) in this space. The _atrium Vestae_, where the six Vestals lived throughout their period of service, also sheds light on aspects of their lives unrelated to their ritual responsibilities. While no comparable physical context can be provided for the other offices under consideration, it is often possible to speak in general terms about the relationship of their religious activities to less fully excavated sacred spaces within the city.

There is little visual evidence for religious officials, male or female, from the Republican period.\(^60\) The Vestal Claudia, who served in the mid second century B.C., appears on a coin minted by C. Clodius Vestalis in 41 (Fig. 50). She is depicted seated on an

\(^{60}\) For art with religious topics, see Ryberg 1955; Fless 1995; Siebert 1999; Moede 2007.
elaborate chair holding a sacrificial vessel, her hair bound by the characteristic *insulae* and *vittae*. Clodius’ coin, however, is the sole witness to the appearance of the Vestals during the Republican period. The number of representations of religious scenes notably increases at the beginning of the principate.61 The Vestals in particular begin to appear with more regularity. They are featured as a group on the altar frieze of the Ara Pacis (Fig. 7) and figure prominently in several other small-scale monuments from the Augustan period. Finally, a series of well-preserved Vestal statues and portrait heads dating to the second through the fourth centuries A.D. have been discovered in the *atrium Vestae*. These visual representations of the Vestals help to illuminate our literary sources and provide information about habits of representation during the imperial period. In the past, this material has not been fully exploited. In this study, however, I seek to integrate to fully integrate the literary, visual and archaeological sources for the Vestal order.

**Overview**

The dissertation is organized according to type of religious office. Chapters 1 – 4 focus on the Vestal order, the only Roman *collegium* composed entirely of female members. The Vestals are by far the best-attested group of female religious officials and their presence in this dissertation is naturally quite substantial. I argue that the Vestals, who are best known for their virginity and service at the hearth of Vesta, had a more significant and varied role in Roman public religion than is often assumed. While many of their most important sacred obligations were tied to the physical space of the *aedes Vestae*, they also participated in at least ten annual public rites arranged throughout the festival calendar. These rites took them out of the precinct of Vesta and into the wider religious landscape of the city. As Horace’s poem suggests, these women were fundamentally connected with the continuity and well-being of the city of Rome.62 Furthermore, evidence for the political activities of the Vestals demonstrates that these women were adept social actors who understood how to use the privileges of their office for their own advantage.

Chapters 5 and 6 consider joint offices filled by married couples. The most familiar officials of this type are undoubtedly the *rex* and *regina sacrorum* and the *flamen* and *flaminica Dialis*, though I argue that the remaining *flamines maiores* and *minores* also had wives who held

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61 For the multiplication of historical reliefs under the principate, see Moede 2007: 164.
62 Hor. *Carm.* 3.30, quoted above.
the official religious title “flaminica.” I also discuss evidence for married priests who served the Roman curiae and perhaps the communities of the Seven Hills as well. This material has important implications for the study of gender roles and gender relations in ancient Rome. I argue that joint offices filled by married couples mirrored and reinforced the structure of religious service in Roman household cult, which required the participation of the head of the household, his wife and their children.

In the final chapter, I examine religious offices filled by individual women, including the sacerdotes of Ceres, Fortuna Muliebris, Bona Dea and Liber. This material demonstrates that more women served in an official capacity than the few who were chosen as Vestals and flaminicae. The so-called Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus from 186, in which the senate reaffirms the position of female sacerdotes in the cult of Bacchus, is also discussed. The chapter concludes with a consideration of evidence for female support personnel and religious specialists who are typically excluded from studies of the Roman “priest,” but were nevertheless integral to the practice of Roman religion.

In conclusion, this dissertation seeks to provide a more complete picture of official religious service at Rome, one that emphasizes its complex and gender inclusive nature. From the elite Vestal Virgins to the slave woman who led a sacrificial victim to the altar, women at Rome served the gods in an official capacity. Public religion was not the exclusive preserve of the male elite, but rather required the participation of men and women of various social statuses. Roman religion was a cooperative endeavor. Religious officials of different types – pontifices and Vestals, men and women, husbands and wives, free born citizens and slaves – worked together to maintain the ritual system. Some of these officials were essentially full-time professionals, while others acted in an official capacity only once or twice a year. They belonged to collegia, joint offices filled by married couples, and minor offices associated with the cult of an individual deity. Religious officials fulfilled a variety of religious obligations, both ritual and administrative, on behalf of the Roman people. Indeed, there is no single category that can adequately contain the variety of religious officials who served at Rome. The emphasis on an individual “priest” or single “priestly” act is manifestly misguided. The single unifying characteristic of religious service at Rome is the fact that it allowed individuals to participate in the public life of the community on behalf of the Roman people.
Chapter One
The Vestal Virgins

The six Vestal Virgins were members of one of Rome’s most ancient and prestigious religious orders. Indeed, their visibility and importance eclipsed that of many male religious officials. Chosen for their role between the ages of six and ten, they were committed to serve for a minimum of thirty years. Most remained Vestals for life. They lived together in the *atrium Vestae* (House of the Vestals), near the *aedes Vestae* (Temple of Vesta) in the Roman *forum*. They were expected to remain virgins throughout their period of service and faced severe punishment in the form of burial alive if they failed to maintain this condition. The requirements, responsibilities and honors associated with their office set the Vestals apart from the social structure and created a unique arrangement within Roman religion.

The Vestals’ most important ritual responsibility was to keep the fire burning on the public hearth in the *aedes Vestae*. This flame guaranteed the well being of the Roman people and the continuity of the empire, and its extinction was said to portend the destruction of the city.¹ The Vestals prepared the *mola salsa* (salted grain) that was sprinkled on the head of sacrificial victims and thus were symbolically present at every public sacrifice in the city of Rome. They also participated directly in at least ten public religious festivals that took them out of the *aedes Vestae* and into public view at various times of the year. These rites involved them in the agricultural life of the city and emphasized their association with purity and purificatory substances. Their role in Roman religion was absolutely central. The Vestals were synonymous with the continued safety of Rome and inseparable from the Romans’ view of themselves. Rome, the poet Horace emphasizes, would stand “as long as the pontifex climbs the Capitol beside the silent virgin” (*dum Capitoliwm / scandet cwm tacita virgine pontifex*, *Carm. 3.30.7-9*). In this chapter and the three that follow, I aim to describe and explain the Vestals, their role in Roman society and their relationship to other female religious officials.

¹ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.67.5.
Vestal Virginity

A Vestal was expected to be and do many things, but above all else, she was required to be a *virgo* (virgin). A Vestal who failed to preserve her absolute physical virginity was stripped of the insignia of her office and buried alive outside the Colline Gate. More than any other condition of service, this unusually stringent requirement has captivated the attention of authors both ancient and modern, and it is appropriate to begin our study of the Vestals with a consideration of this topic. Though periods of purity were necessary in certain ritual contexts, religious officials were not typically expected to remain perpetually chaste. Moreover, purity before marriage and chastity thereafter were valued in Roman society, but lifelong virginity generally was not. Young women were expected to marry and contribute citizens to the state. While the Vestals did not conform to this traditional expectation, they nonetheless fulfilled a central role in Roman society, one in which their virginity had important ritual and symbolic functions.

Ancient and modern scholars have advanced various theories concerning the significance of the Vestals’ virginity. Each likely contains an element of truth since, as Holt Parker has noted, “the rituals and persons of the cult of Vesta, as in others, are overdetermined and multivalent.” Though we may never establish why the Vestals were virgins on the basis of ancient exegesis alone, these theories allow us to better understand how contemporary observers perceived the Vestals and their role in Roman society and religion. Ovid attributes the Vestals’ virginity to the character of the virgin goddess Vesta:

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quid mirum, virgo si virgine laeta ministra
admittit castas ad sua sacra manus?
nec tu aliud Vestam quam vivam intellege flammam;
nataque de flamma corpora nulla vides.
iure igitur virgo est, quae semina nulla remittit
nee capite, et comites virginitatis amat (Fast. 6.289-94).
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What wonder if a virgin delights in a virgin minister and allows only chaste hands to touch her sacred things? Conceive of Vesta as naught but the living flame, and you see that no bodies are born of flame. Rightly, therefore, is she a virgin who neither gives nor takes seeds, and she loves companions in her virginity.

Ovid’s explanation rests primarily on the principle of sympathy; pure and virginal goddesses require pure and virginal religious officials. In practical terms, Ovid suggests that Vestal

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2 The *sacerdos Ceres* is a possible exception. Her status is considered in chapter 8.
virginity was related to their unique ritual responsibilities. “Only chaste hands,” the poet writes, could tend the hearth of Vesta. Sexual activity led to temporary ritual impurity, and so a period of abstinence was often necessary before certain ritual tasks could be undertaken.\(^5\) Since the Vestals were required to tend the hearth of Vesta on a daily basis, they had to be free from sexual impurity at all times. As a consequence of their perpetual ritual purity, Livy suggests that the Vestals were regarded as “sacred” (sanctae) and “venerable” (venerabiles).\(^6\) Virginity set them apart from the rest of Roman society and clarified their position as religious officials dedicated to the cult of Vesta.

Several modern scholars have also subscribed to the notion that the Vestals were required to abstain from sexual intercourse because they were in constant contact with the virgin goddess Vesta.\(^7\) Others emphasize the socially isolated position of a Vestal, who was removed from her natal family upon entrance to the order and prevented, for obvious reasons, from joining a new family through marriage.\(^8\) Thus the Vestals stood outside the traditional Roman family structure. Their primary loyalty was supposed to be to the state, rather than to an individual family. Furthermore, as career virgins, the Vestals would have been free to focus on their ritual tasks unencumbered by the myriad responsibilities associated with marriage and motherhood.

Recent scholarship on the order has focused a great deal of attention on the function of Vestal virginity as a signifier of the wellbeing of the Roman state.\(^9\) As long as the Vestals maintained their absolute virginity, the city remained secure. If, however, a Vestal violated her vow of chastity, the pax deorum was ruptured and the entire community was exposed to the consequences. This conceptual link between Vestal unchastity and public misfortune allowed the women to serve as a mechanism for restoring stability in times of crisis, which explains why accusations of unchastity and subsequent interments typically arose during periods of great political or social unrest.\(^10\)

\(^5\) The flaminica Dialis, for example, was required to abstain from sexual activity during the period from 7 June to the 15 June (Ov. Fast. 6.226-32). For a discussion of ritual abstinence in the Greek world, see Parker 1996: 74-103; Sebesta 2005.

\(^6\) Livy 1.20: virginitate alisque caerimoniiis venerabiles ac sanctas fecit ([Numa] made [the Vestals] sacred and venerable by virginity and other ceremonies).

\(^7\) See, for example, Rose 1926: 442-3; Guizzi 1968: 102-8; Mustakallio 1992: 62.


Finally, Mary Beard’s very influential interpretation of what she called the Vestals’ “sexuality” requires consideration here as well. Her 1980 article “The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins” was an attempt to move Vestal scholarship beyond the confines of the “wives or daughters” debate.11 Beard refused to choose between the two alternatives, arguing that neither the virginal nor the matronal aspects of the Vestals’ identity could be ignored. She also suggested that because certain privileges associated with the Vestals were otherwise exclusively granted to men, they were regarded as playing a male role and were, at least in part, classified as masculine. They were interstitial figures whose sexual status crossed all boundaries and included virginal, matronal, and even masculine dimensions. Drawing on the work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas, Beard maintained that the Vestals’ “sexual ambiguity” was actually what made them sacred figures. According to this interpretation, Vestal virginity was far less important than Vestal ambiguity.

Beard’s description of the Vestals has been extremely influential.12 But as she has acknowledged in her 1995 article “Re-reading (Vestal) Virginity,” gender categories are not pre-existing cultural givens. By applying unproblematized gender labels to various aspects of the Vestals’ identity, Beard 1980 misses the fact that the Vestals contributed as much to the construction of gender categories as gender categories contributed to the construction of the Vestals. Religion is a privileged space for defining what it is to be male or female, what constitutes virginity or marriage, and what it means to be a religious official. The “ambiguity model,” as Beard has written, “‘misses the point’ of Roman culture, and misdirects our attempts to reconstruct and analyse it.”13 I argue that the Vestals should not be understood as anomalous, interstitial figures whose status within the sphere of public religion is inherently problematic. Vestal virginity defined the women who served in the order and shaped their experience of religious service. When the Vestals are considered alongside all of their colleagues in official religious service, however, it becomes clear that their office was just one within a complex and varied system that could accommodate and might need the cooperation of men, maidens, *matronae*, and even married couples serving together.

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11 See below.
12 For an assessment of Beard 1980’s impact on later scholarship, see Beard 1995; Staples 1998; Parker 2004: 563-4. Although recent scholarship has largely discarded Beard’s claim that the Vestals’ sexual identity had a masculine component, it has become standard to assert that the Vestals were “interstitial figures.”
Becoming a Vestal Virgin

Principles of Selection

New Vestals were carefully chosen for their role. The *pontifex maximus* scrutinized the age, sexual status and physical attributes of the young candidate as well as the legal and social status of her parents. Absolute virginity was certainly the most important qualification. Aulus Gellius, however, describes a variety of other conditions that had to be fulfilled in order for a girl to gain entrance to the Vestal order.\(^{14}\) When considered as a group, the provisions reveal a deep interest in physical, social and ritual purity:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{qui de virgine capienda scripserunt, quorum diligentissime scripsit Labeo Antistius, minorem quam annos sex, maiorem quam annos decem natam negaverunt capi fas esse;} \\
\text{item quae non sit patrima et matrima; item quae lingua debili sensuve aurium deminuta aliave qua corporis labe insignita sit; item quae ipsa aut cuius pater emancipatus sit, etiamsi vivo patre in avi potestate sit; item cuius parentes alter ambove servitutem servierunt aut in negotiis sordidis versantur (N.A. 1.12.1-5).}
\end{align*}
\]

Those who have written about the taking of a Virgin, of whom Labeo Antistius wrote most carefully, deny that it is permitted to take a girl who is less than six years in age or greater than ten; or to take one whose father or mother is not living; or one who has been shown to be lacking in speech or hearing or has some other bodily fault. Nor is it permitted to take one whose father has been emancipated or one who has been emancipated herself, even if her father is living and she is in the *potestas* of her grandfather, nor one whose parents, either one, have been slaves or engaged in a low occupation.

With the exception of virginity, the age of a potential candidate seems to have been the most important selection criterion. Gellius mentions that only girls between the ages of six and ten could be chosen as Vestals. The lower age limit may reflect a belief that a child under age six was too young to be removed from her birth family or properly fulfill a Vestal’s cultic responsibilities.\(^{15}\) At age six, however, a prospective Vestal had nearly reached her seventh year, the age at which children normally began to participate in public and private religious rituals.\(^{16}\) A girl who reached age six had also survived the most dangerous years of her childhood. Nearly fifty percent of Roman girls died before their sixth birthday, while those who reached this milestone were more likely to survive to adulthood.\(^ {17}\) The Romans were

\(^{14}\) Though Gellius compiled his *Noctes Atticae* in the second century A.D., he based his work on the research of earlier commentators on the pontifical law. The jurists M. Antistius Labeo and C. Capito Ateius, whom Gellius cites later in his discussion of the Vestals, were active during the Augustan period. Both wrote commentaries on the pontifical law, and it is likely that Gellius found his material in these commentaries. For Gellius’ relationship to his antiquarian sources, see Stevenson 2004; Holford-Strevens 2005: 65-80, 298-9.

\(^{15}\) Wildfang 2006: 44.


\(^{17}\) Saller 1994: 22-25, with Table 2.1.
certainly aware of the prevalence of child mortality and may have factored this into the selection process. A girl who had lived through the precarious years of early childhood could reasonably be expected to reach adulthood and therefore would be more likely to fulfill the expected thirty-year period of service.

Robin Lorsch Wildfang has suggested that the lower age limit was also designed to ensure that no previously unrecognized physical imperfection would manifest itself in a newly selected Vestal.\(^\text{18}\) This observation may be particularly relevant to the prohibition against choosing a girl with a speech impediment (\textit{lingua debili}). Pliny the Elder believed that most speech disorders are resolved by age six, when children learn to speak clearly.\(^\text{19}\) Roman legal texts regularly refer to children under the age of seven as \textit{infans}, literally “not speaking.”\(^\text{20}\) Once a girl had reached age six, however, it could be determined with some degree of certainty whether she had overcome childish speech patterns or had a disqualifying speech impediment.

In fact, Gellius specifies that a girl could not be selected as a Vestal if she had a hearing problem or a speech impediment.\(^\text{21}\) This condition has a straightforward practical explanation. The Romans believed that the prayers recited at a sacrifice had to precisely replicate traditional formulae in order to be effective.\(^\text{22}\) Any omission or mispronunciation automatically forced a repetition of the entire rite.\(^\text{23}\) A girl who could not hear or speak properly would not be able to pray effectively, and therefore could not be entrusted with the responsibilities of the office.\(^\text{24}\)

The requirement that candidates for initiation had to be free from physical defects also reflects a broader demand for physical perfection in the religious sphere. Blemishes of any kind disqualified an animal for use as a sacrificial victim.\(^\text{25}\) Even internal imperfections discovered during the inspection of a victim’s entrails could invalidate the offering and

\(^{18}\) Wildfang 2006: 44.
\(^{21}\) Fronto (\textit{Epist.} 149N) mentions the same condition: \textit{neque balbam virginem, quae Vestalis sit capi fas est neque sirhenam} (It is not lawful to take as a Vestal a virgin who stutters or speaks confusedly).
\(^{22}\) For a discussion of prayers and praying, see Hickson Hahn 2007.
\(^{23}\) See, for example, Livy 41.16.1.
\(^{24}\) Wildfang 2006: 43-4. Pliny the Elder (\textit{H.N.} 11.174) seems reluctant to believe that the pontifex Metellus was troubled by a stutter, which could indicate that he knew of a rule that pontiffs should be free of speech impediments as well.
\(^{25}\) According to Pliny the Elder (\textit{H.N.} 8.183), for example, the sacrifice of a lame animal would be ineffectual: \textit{hoc quoque notatum … nec claudicante nec aliena hostia deos placari} (It has also been noted … that the gods are not propitiated if the victim is lame or is not of the appropriate sort).
necessitate a repetition of the sacrifice. New Vestals, who presided over religious rites on a daily basis, were also required to exhibit physical purity and perfection. Cassius Dio, however, reveals that in 14, the virgo maxima was blind. If Dio is correct, it seems that Vestals who lost their sight, and perhaps those who developed other impairments as well, were permitted to continue serving as Vestals, presumably since their training and years of experience made them valued members of the order.

The upper age limit of ten years ensured that a new Vestal was chosen well before she reached puberty. This precaution may have been designed to alleviate concerns over whether a candidate’s virginity was still intact. A Vestal's absolute virginity was central to her identity as a religious official of Vesta and vital to the continued safety of the Roman people. The harsh punishment that awaited a Vestal who lost her virginity was presumably a strong, though not entirely foolproof, deterrent to those in office, while the upper age limit minimized the risk that a Vestal candidate had engaged in illicit sexual activity before entering the order. Furthermore, the very young age at which a new Vestal was chosen may have ensured that she was not simply unmarried, but also not betrothed or spoken for in any way. Betrothals could take place at any age, though the majority seem to have occurred not long before the marriage. Since Roman girls tended to marry in their mid to late teens, few would have been betrothed before age ten.

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26 See, for example, Cic. Div. 2.37.
27 Whether or not the same expectation applied to all Roman religious officials is less clear. Candidates for the thirty curial religious offices also had to be free from physical defects (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.21.3). This condition, however, is not explicitly stated with reference to any other religious official. Wissowa (1912: 491) believed that all religious officials had to be free from physical defects, and many scholars have adopted this position (see, for example, Szemler 1972: 31). Morgan (1974), however, argues that there was no general rule regarding physical defects in religious officials. Although Morgan is right to point out that the sources are ambiguous, there is enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that the Romans were at the very least uneasy about physical defects in their religious representatives (see, for example, Plut. Q. R. 73; Pliny H.N. 7.105; Sen. Controv. 4.2). Greek religious officials were expected to be free from physical imperfections (see, for example, Garland 1984: 85).
29 On the average age of menarche for Roman girls, see Harlow and Laurence 2002: 13-5; 56.
30 Wildfang 2006: 42.
31 Vestals convicted of losing their virginity while in office were buried alive outside the Colline Gate (Plut. Num. 10.4).
32 For betrothal procedures, see Gardner 1986: 45-7; Treggiari 1991: 138-60.
33 Age at first marriage is a notoriously difficult question. Ancient literary and legal sources suggest that the median age at first marriage was nineteen for men and fourteen for women (Hopkins 1965: 309-18; Lelis, Percy and Verstraete 2003: 15-20, 29-72, 91-101, 103-24). Using funerary inscriptions giving both the age at death and the length of marriage, Keith Hopkins (1965: 318-27) showed that for men and women commemorated in this way, the median age of marriage was twenty three and fifteen, respectively, a conclusion which seems to confirm the literary and legal evidence. Richard Saller (1987; 1994) and Brent Shaw (1987) have reached a
The Vestals’ young age at initiation undoubtedly set them apart from other religious officials at Rome. While *camilli* (male attendants) and *camillae* (female attendants) began their period of service at age seven, their positions were not lifelong commitments, but rather offices that were relinquished when adulthood was reached. Former *camilli* may have sought positions in the major colleges at Rome or been selected as *flamines*, while former *camillae* were permitted to participate in rituals reserved for *matronae*. Their role in public cult, in other words, was transformed by their new status in society. The Vestal order was the only religious office that took no notice of the physical development of its occupants. Vestals entered puberty and passed the age at which their peers were considered marriageable without making the transition to married life. Although they were free to leave the order after thirty years, most chose to remain Vestals for their entire lives, and must often have been the longest serving religious officials in their generation. The level of nearly lifelong and intense full time commitment required of Vestal Virgins is unique within Roman religion and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they were essentially professionals.

Other principles of selection addressed a prospective Vestal’s family situation, which was evidently critical to her success as a candidate. Indeed, Gellius prefaces the passage under discussion by stating that he will describe “at what age a Vestal Virgin is taken and from what sort of family” (*virgo Vestae quid aetatis et ex quali familia … capiatur*, N.A. 1.12.1). The first family-oriented requirement states that a girl chosen as a Vestal had to be *patrima et matrima* at the time of her initiation. According to an entry in the lexicon of Festus, *patrimes et matrimes* were children whose parents were both living (*matrimes ac patrimes dicuntur, quibus matres et patres adhuc vivunt*, Festus 113L). This definition is corroborated by Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Dio, who translate *patrimi et matrimi* with the Greek word ἀμφιθαλεῖς.

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36 The Vestal Occia, for example, served for fifty-seven years (*Tac. Ann. 2.86*).
37 The adjective *patrimus* was used to designate a person whose father was still living in non-religious contexts as well (*Festus 266-7L*).
(“children whose parents are still alive”). Although Servius claims that \textit{patrimi et matrimi} were children born to a couple married by \textit{confarreatio}, his testimony seems inaccurate and confused and is generally discounted by modern scholars.\textsuperscript{38}

The \textit{salii} and the \textit{camilli} and \textit{camillae}, who served as assistants to certain religious officials, were also required to be \textit{patrimi et matrimi}.\textsuperscript{39} When considered as a group, it is evident that the religious officials subject to this requirement were all relatively young when they took up their positions. The upper age limit of ten years for the Vestals has already been noted. The \textit{salii} were also young men while \textit{camilli} generally served from age seven until they put on the \textit{toga virilis} at age sixteen, and \textit{camillae} until they married.\textsuperscript{40} Some scholars have suggested that the regulation was actually designed to ensure that candidates would be fairly young when selected, since the high mortality rate at Rome meant that relatively few children could expect to reach adulthood with both parents living.\textsuperscript{41} But age at death is not an exact science, and the stipulation that a candidate be \textit{patrimus et matrimus} would not have been a foolproof method of regulating age. Moreover, when applied to the Vestals, this explanation amounts to no more than a reworking of the upper age limit discussed above. It seems more likely that these two requirements for selection as a Vestal served different purposes.

It may be helpful to examine the meaning of \textit{ἀμφιθαλεῖς}, the word used by Dionysius and Dio to translate \textit{patrimi et matrimi}. Like \textit{patrimi et matrimi}, children who were

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\item \textsuperscript{37} Dion. Hal. \textit{Ant. Rom.} 2.21.1, 71.4; Cass. Dio 59.7.1. The literal meaning is “blooming on both sides” (LSJ, s.v. \textit{ἀμφιθαλεύς}). According to the second century A.D. grammarian Julius Pollux (\textit{Onom.} 3.25), a child who was \textit{ἀμφιθαλῆς} had both parents living.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Serv. \textit{Georg.} 1.31: \textit{Tribus enim modis apud veteres nuptiae fiebant: … farre, cum per pontifex maxunum et Dialem flaminem per frages et molam salam coniungebantur, unde confarreatio appellabatur, ex quibus nuptiis patrimi et matrimi nascebantur} (For among the ancients, marriages were concluded in three ways … by far, when the \textit{pontifex maximus} and the \textit{flamen Dialis} joined the couple by means of grain and \textit{mola salsa}, whence the ceremony was called “\textit{confarreatio}.” \textit{Patrimi et matrimi} are born from these marriages). Jean-Claude Richard (1978: 241-4) discusses the passage in detail and concludes that Servius is mistaken. Wissowa (1912: 491, n. 9), however, does not entirely discount Servius’ testimony. More recently, Jerzy Linderski (2005: 233, n. 20) has revived the notion that the passage is derived from an authoritative source, the \textit{De pontificio iure} of Ateius Capito, and is therefore credible. He suggests that the original meaning of \textit{patrimi et matrimi} was “children born of confarreate parents,” and that the meaning “children whose parents are still alive” was a later development. Linderski’s suggestion has the virtue of synthesizing all of the ancient evidence, though it is very difficult to imagine how and why \textit{patrimi et matrimi} would have undergone such a radical transformation in meaning.
\item \textsuperscript{39} For the \textit{salii}, see Dion. Hal. \textit{Ant. Rom.} 2.71.4. For \textit{camilli} and \textit{camillae}, see Dion. Hal. \textit{Ant. Rom.} 2.22.1; Festus 38, 821L; Macr. \textit{Sat.} 1.6.14. The requirement also seems to have applied to children who participated in \textit{supplicationes} (Livy 37.3.6).
\item \textsuperscript{40} For the \textit{salii}, see Dion. Hal. \textit{Ant. Rom.} 2.70.1, 71.2. For the \textit{camilli} and \textit{camillae}, see Dion. Hal. \textit{Ant. Rom.} 2.22.1. Although an exact age requirement is not specified in the ancient sources, partially preserved \textit{fasti} from the end of the second century A.D. indicate that newly inducted \textit{salii} were about twenty years old (Dietz 1976: 410-2).
\item \textsuperscript{41} Rappaport s.v. \textit{Salii} in \textit{RE} 1A.2.1882; Wildfang 2006: 44.
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ἀμφιθαλεῖς performed a variety of ritual tasks, including cutting branches from the sacred olive trees with which wreaths were fashioned for Olympic victors. Genera
tly speaking, children were considered ideal ritual agents because they symbolized sexual purity. The emphasis on the well being of their parents, however, suggests that the religious prominence of ἀμφιθαλεῖς might also be explained by the fact that they had not been polluted by contact with the dead. The fear of death-pollution was strong in the ancient world. The Romans believed that family members, including children, were particularly susceptible to pollution even if they had been abroad and had no physical contact with the corpse. A person in mourning (funesta) was prohibited from sacrificing, since the pollution of death was offensive to the gods. Religious officials were often subject to stringent restrictions in order to ensure that they would be able to carry out their ritual duties without interruption.

Under normal circumstances, however, death-pollution was purified at the novemdial sacrificium on the ninth day after the funeral. This may suggest that ritual impurity was not the primary concern addressed by the requirement that a child be patrimus et matrimus. In addition to its physical implications, death was a bad omen that could attach itself to close relations. Apuleius, for example, claims that a widow is “a woman of evil omen and unlucky” (illa morte amisit maritum, ut scavi ominis mulier et infausti, Apol. 92). The death of a parent at a young age may likewise have indicated that a child was particularly unlucky or out of favor with the gods and was therefore an unsuitable ritual agent. It would have been especially dangerous to choose a girl, especially one so young, with an inauspicious past as a Vestal, a position inextricably linked to the safety of the Roman state.

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42 Garland 1990: 145.
43 Garland 1990: 145. For the significance of sexual purity in Greek ritual, see Parker 1996: 74-103.
45 Serv. Aen. 11.2.
46 The flamen Dialis, for example, was prohibited from touching a corpse or setting foot on a grave (Gell. N.A. 10.15.25; Serv. Aen. 11.76, with Lindsay 2000: 154-7). He was allowed to participate in a funeral, although this may have been difficult since he was not permitted to hear the sound of funerary flutes (Cic. Tusc. 1.16; Gell. N.A. 10.15.25; Festus 82, 212L). Greek religion treated death-pollution with similar caution. In Messene, a religious official who lost a child was required to resign from office (Paus. 4.12.6; Parker 1996: 52), while a passage in Plato’s Laws may indicate that religious officials were generally excluded from participating in funerals (947b-d).
47 Lindsay 2000: 166-7.
48 It seems that Seneca the Elder’s sacerdos prostituata, who had been kidnapped by pirates, sold into a brothel, and managed (she claimed) to preserve her virginity throughout, is imagined to have sought the Vestal order, in which case certain of the arguments used in the controversia may reflect actual attitudes towards the Vestals. In addition to the dispute over her purity, the undeniable infelicitas of the candidate surfaces as an impediment to her selection. One of the declaimers argues, “The law is insistent: it admits to the sacerdotium only a woman of inviolate purity and good fortune” (Ambitiosa lex est: ad sacerdotium non ullass nisi integrae non sanctitatis tantum sed
We know of no explicit stipulation that the parents of a prospective Vestal had still to be married at the time their daughter was selected. Tacitus, however, reports that in A.D. 19, the daughter of Domitius Pollio was preferred to the daughter of Fonteius Agrippa, “because her mother had remained in the same marriage: for Agrippa had diminished his house by divorce” (quod mater eius in eodem coniugio manebat; nam Agrippa discidio domum imminuerat, Ann. 2.86). Unfortunately, however, it is difficult to determine whether this episode is unique or reflects the conventional approach to selecting a Vestal. Divorce, especially of a virtuous wife or one who had borne legitimate children, was regarded with disapproval at Rome. Nevertheless, the decision about the suitability of a candidate was ultimately left to the pontifex maximus, and the daughter of a divorced couple may not always have faced the same displeasure shown by Tiberius.

In addition to the above conditions, which ensured that a new Vestal came from a complete and “ideal” family, Gellius records the existence of provisions regarding the legal status of a Vestal candidate. Neither a prospective Vestal nor her father could ever have been emancipated from the potestas of their paterfamilias. It is important to remember that in this context, “ideal” refers to the legally constructed Roman familia, rather than the lived reality of family life at Rome. Patria potestas was an artificial construct that articulated the precise legal relationship between the paterfamilias and the members of his household. Under normal circumstances, patria potestas was a lifelong power, and even an adult man and his property technically remained in the control of his father as long as he was living. Emancipation, however, legally severed the bond of potestas, making the emancipatus legally independent (sui iuris).

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49 Treggiari 1991: 471-3. Although actual statistics are irrecoverable, Treggiari (1991: 473-82) argues that divorce was not nearly as prevalent in the late Republic as scholars once believed.

50 On the mechanics of the selection process, see below.


52 Members of the family who were in the potestas of the paterfamilias included his wife (if she had married cum manu), their children, their children’s children, their daughters-in-law (if they had married cum manu), and all household slaves. On patria potestas see, for example, Crook 1967; Lacey 1986; Saller 1994: 102-32.

Several scholars have argued that emancipation, and the associated loss of inheritance rights, was actually a way for *patresfamilias* to punish wayward sons by casting them out of the family.\(^{54}\) If this were the original intent of the practice, it would bring into sharper focus the prohibition against *emancipati* presenting their daughters as Vestal candidates. Jane Gardner, however, has argued that emancipation was not a punishment but rather a means to improve the economic well being of the emancipated son and perhaps even his *paterfamilias*.\(^{55}\) Regardless of intent, *emancipatio* diminished the ideal structure of the family by removing one of its members, and undermined the proper succession of *potestas*. Such meddling was considered serious enough to disqualify a family from presenting their daughter as a candidate for the Vestal order.\(^{56}\)

The ban on emancipation reveals two further details about a prospective Vestal’s family situation. Firstly, only Roman citizens had *potestas* relationships, which indicates that only citizen families could contribute their daughters to the Vestal order. This condition was likely regarded as self-evident and did not require explicit mention in Gellius’ list of criteria.\(^{57}\) Secondly, a Roman man had *potestas* only over children born to him by his *matrona*, the woman with whom he had *conubium* (right to marriage).\(^{58}\) Children born by a woman other than his *matrona* were not under his *potestas* but instead derived their legal status from their mother.\(^{59}\) A Vestal candidate, in other words, had to be the product of a *iustum matrimonium*, a marriage entered into by a Roman citizen for the sake of producing legitimate children.\(^{60}\) Once again, provisions surrounding the selection of a new Vestal reveal a preference for girls who came from “ideal” Roman families.

Gellius also notes that the daughter of a man or woman who had been a slave or had been engaged in a base or degrading occupation (*sordidum negotium*) was prohibited from

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\(^{54}\) Girard 1911: 190; Nicholas 1962: 80; Thomas 1982: 554-5; Borkowski 1994: 107. It seems that emancipation did not require the consent of the son (Gardner 1998: 7, 178), which could strengthen the argument that it was designed as a punishment.

\(^{55}\) Gardner 1998: 6-10, 67-8, 104-10, 112. Gardner argues, for example, that emancipation was frequently granted in order to fulfill the conditions of an inheritance left to a child. She suggests elsewhere (1986: 22) that emancipation was prohibited in the case of a Vestal candidate because, technically speaking, it would have made her an orphan, thereby contravening the requirement that she be *patrima et matrima*.

\(^{56}\) Wildfang (2006: 41-2) suggests that the ban on emancipation ensured “that the lines of *potestas* relating to a candidate and thus that candidate’s familial cult status were pure and that all question of her possible pollution through an incorrect transfer from one domestic sphere to another was avoided.”

\(^{57}\) It seems that all Roman religious officials, including the Greek born *sacerdos Cereris*, had to be citizens (Cic. *Bals.* 55).

\(^{58}\) Treggiari 1991: 43.

\(^{59}\) Treggiari 1991: 49-54.

\(^{60}\) Treggiari 1991: 11-2.
joining the Vestal order. Although more straightforward than some of the other criteria discussed thus far, this restriction also warrants a brief investigation. Elite Romans generally held a very dim view of craftsmen and wage-laborers.\textsuperscript{61} Certain trades and professions were officially considered base (\textit{sordidi}), and disqualified a citizen from political activity and membership in the equestrian or senatorial orders.\textsuperscript{62} Cicero’s well-known catalogue of occupations in the \textit{De officiis} provides some indication of how the Romans categorized work, and may also shed light on the occupational profile of a prospective Vestal’s family.\textsuperscript{63} Not surprisingly, Cicero extols agriculture as the only truly honorable (\textit{liberalis}) pursuit for a freeborn man. For those whose station prevents them from pursuing agriculture, professions like medicine, architecture and teaching are acknowledged to be honorable (\textit{honestae}). All other professions are base (\textit{sordidi}) for one reason or another. Moneylenders (\textit{faeneratores}), for example, are objectionable because they incur the hostility of others. Those who work for wages (\textit{mercennarii}) are base because they sell their labor and therefore reduce themselves to a nearly servile status. The least respectable of all, however, are those professions which cater to pleasure and self indulgence, among which fishmongers, poulterers, butchers, cooks, perfumers, dancers and stage artists are singled out for particular censure.\textsuperscript{64}

Cicero’s list of \textit{sordida negotia} is far more expansive than the one provided by the late Republican \textit{Tabula Heracleensis}, which reveals that public criers and undertakers were banned from the municipal magistracies and senates, and gladiators, prostitutes, and those who trained gladiators or ran brothels were excluded from the senates.\textsuperscript{65} It is impossible to know exactly which professions disqualified a family from offering their daughter as a candidate for the Vestal order, or even whether there was any consistency over time.\textsuperscript{66} The final decision must always have rested with the \textit{pontifex maximus}.

\textsuperscript{64} Cic. \textit{Off.} 1.150: \textit{minimeque artes eas probandae, quae ministrae sunt voluptatum: cetarii, lanii, coqui, fartores, piscatores, ut ait Terentius; adde lac, si placet, unguentarios, saltatores, totumque ludum talarium} (Least respectable of all are those trades which cater for sensual pleasures: “Fishmongers, butchers, cooks, and poulterers, and fishermen,” as Terence says. Add to these, if you please, the perfumers, dancers, and all the stage artists).
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{FIRA} 1.13.94-6, 105-7, 111-2, 123, 126-40.
\textsuperscript{66} Prostitution is the only profession mentioned in connection with the Vestal order (Sen. \textit{Controv.} 1.2).
The general picture is one in which certain members of Roman society were prohibited from participating in public religion in an official capacity because they or their parents had engaged in a stigmatized occupation. While some of the professions classified as *sordidi* were simply regarded as unworthy of freeborn citizens, others were held as literally unclean and physically polluting. Undertakers (*libitinarii*), for example, were believed to be ill-omened and ritually polluted due to their constant contact with the dead.67 The children of men and women who engaged in such occupations could also be regarded as polluted and were therefore unsuitable ritual agents.68 The exclusion from the Vestal order of any girl whose father or mother had performed a *sordidum negotium* may reasonably be ascribed to this religious rationale, and goes hand in hand with the requirement that she be physically unblemished.69

The prohibition also had consequences for the social profile of the office by limiting access to families of a certain social status, and it is conceivable that the restrictions were formulated with this in mind. The exclusion from the Vestal order of the daughters of freedmen and freedwomen can likewise be attributed to a desire to maintain social distinctions. In all periods, the Roman elite exhibited a hearty disdain for former slaves and their children, particularly those whose wealth and success threatened to efface time-honored social distinctions. Former slaves were prohibited from holding magistracies or positions in the major and minor colleges.70 Although it was legally permitted for their freeborn sons to do so, the stigma of libertine descent was often an impediment to advancement.71 In light of this evidence, it is understandable that access to one of Rome’s most ancient and prestigious religious offices was restricted to the daughters of freeborn

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67 Bodel 2000: 135-44; Lindsay 2000: 157-60. A late first century B.C. or early first century A.D. inscription from Puteoli (*AE* 1971 88) stipulates that *libitinarii* live near the grove of Libitina and prohibits them from entering the town except to collect or dispose of a corpse or to inflict a punishment.

68 Q. Fufius Calenus, for example, sought to discredit Cicero by calling his father a fuller, an accusation that degraded the orator, since fuller’s collected and used human urine for their washing (Cass. Dio 46.4.2-5.3, 7.4). Calenus emphasizes the physically polluting nature of fulling, saying that Cicero’s father “defiled himself day and night with the foulest filth” (καὶ καθ ἑκάστην ἡμέραν καὶ νύκτα τῶν αἰσχίστων ἀναπιμπλάμενος, 46.4.3).

69 See, for example, Wildfang 2006: 43.

70 This is not to say that freedmen were excluded from participating in public religion on every occasion. They were eligible for certain religious offices, including those of the *vici* and the cult of the Magna Mater. Slaves and freedmen also performed a variety of supporting roles in Roman ritual, such as playing music at sacrifices and slaughtering the victims (Beard, North and Price 1998: 260-1). For the role of female slaves in Roman religion, see also chapter 8.

71 See, for example, Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.
citizens. Dio, however, reports that in A.D. 5, a shortage of candidates for the Vestal order led to the enactment of an extraordinary measure:

ἐπειδή τε οὐ ῥᾳδίως οἱ πάνυ εὐγενεῖς τὰς θυγατέρας ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἑστίας ἱερατείας ἐπεδίδοσαν, ἐνομοθετήθη καὶ εἰς ἀπελευθέρων γεγεννημένας ἱερᾶσθαι. καὶ ὁ μὲν κλήρος αὐτῶν, ἐπεὶ πλεῖοι ἡμεροβίτης, ἐντῷ συνεδρίῳ παρόντων τῶν πατέρων σφῶν, ὅσοι γε ὑπευνόν, ἐγένετο, οὐ μέντοι καὶ τοιαύτη τις ἀπεδείχθη (55.22.5).

Since the highborn were reluctant to contribute their daughters for the order of Vesta, it was enacted that the daughters of freedmen also be Vestals. The casting of lots in their case [the daughters of freedmen], seeing that there were still other candidates [the daughters of freeborn fathers], took place in the Senate with the fathers in attendance – at least insofar as these were equites; however, it was not a freedman’s daughter who was elected.\footnote{I have adopted Swan’s (2004: 157) translation of this text. Only the fathers who were of equestrian rank were allowed to be present for the sortition. Since freedmen were generally excluded from the equestrian order (Demougin 1988: 650 lists just six freedmen who became equites from the time of Augustus to Nero), the fathers in question must have been freeborn equites who had also submitted their daughters to the lot. Mekacher and Van Haeperen (2003: 74), however, argue that there were equites among the freedmen who vied for the honor of presenting their daughter as a candidate.}

An anecdote related by Suetonius reveals that Augustus had faced similar opposition several years earlier.\footnote{Suet. Aug. 31.3: cumque in demortuae locum aliam capi oporteret ambirentque multi ne filias in sortem darent, adiuravit, si cuiusquam neptium suarum competeret aetas, oblaturum se fuisse (Moreover, when there was occasion to choose another Vestal in place of one who had died, and many used all their influence to avoid submitting their daughters to the hazard of the lot, he solemnly swore that if anyone of his granddaughters were of eligible age, he would have proposed her name). Although Suetonius does not provide a date, this episode must have occurred between July 4, 13, when Julia was old enough to be chosen as a Vestal and Augustus had returned to Rome from Gaul, and late March 12, when her father Agrippa died (Scheid 1999: 15; Mekacher and Van Haeperen 2003: 72-4).} On this occasion, the princeps attempted to shame the recalcitrant nobles into offering their daughters by swearing that if one of his own granddaughters were eligible, he would have proposed her name. When faced with renewed intransigence in A.D. 5, Augustus adopted an astonishing solution.\footnote{It is worth noting that despite the evident importance of the Vestal order to Rome’s continued existence, fathers could not be forced to relinquish their daughters to the order, otherwise Augustus could simply have chosen a new Vestal without resorting to such a radical measure.} Marie-Thérèse Raepsaet-Charlier has suggested that the law was actually more cunning than it appears at first glance.\footnote{Raepsaet-Charlier 1984: 257-60.} The measure allowed Augustus to flatter the libertine population by extending to them a considerable honor while simultaneously guaranteeing that the fear of a freedman’s daughter in the order would motivate the elite to participate in the sortition. Whatever the reason freeborn fathers had initially been reluctant to see their daughters become Vestals, the specter of a Vestal with libertine blood seems to have reignited their interest. The daughters of ingeni were
submitted to the lot and a freedman’s daughter, Dio reports, was not selected as a Vestal in A.D. 5.

Despite the outcome of the sortition in A.D. 5, scholars have rightly questioned the impact of the law on the order’s subsequent history. Did the principate of Augustus represent a major turning point in the way access to the Vestal order was defined? A survey of known Vestals from the imperial period provides no definitive answers, though it does reveal that many belonged to the senatorial and equestrian orders. Aulus Gellius’ assertion that Vestals had to be the daughters of ingenui is ultimately a more reliable indication that the law of A.D. 5 did not permanently expand access to the order.

Following the criteria discussed thus far, Gellius notes that certain girls were excused from serving in the order:

Sed et eam, cuius soror ad id sacerdotium lecta est, excussionem mereri aiunt; item cuius pater flamen aut augur aut quindecimvirum sacris faciundis aut septemvirum epulonum aut Salius est. Sponsae quoque pontificis et tubicinis saecorum filiae vacatio a sacerdotio isto tribui solet. Praeterea Capito Ateius scriptum reliquit neque eius legemdam filiam, qui domicilium in Italia non haberet, et excusandam eius, qui liberos tres haberet (N.A. 1.12.6-8).

But they also say that she, whose sister has been chosen for this sacerdotium, deserves to be excused, as does a girl whose father is a flamen or an augur or a quindecimvirum sacris faciundis or a septemvirum epulonum or a salius. Also it is customary to give an exemption from the rites of the sacerdotium to the fiancé of a pontifex and the daughter of a tubicinus. Moreover, Capito Ateius has left an account that the daughter of a man who did not have a home in Italy might not be chosen, and that the daughter of one who had three children must also be excused.

Although it is not entirely clear, the wording in the above passage suggests that these girls were not strictly banned from serving as Vestals, but rather could not be forced to do so. Whereas Gellius states that it would not be “fas” (1.12.1) to select a girl who did not fulfill the necessary requirements, in the section under consideration here, he writes that certain girls are said to “deserve to be excused” (excussionem mereri, 1.12.6), while for others “it is customary to grant an exemption from the sacerdotium” (vacatio a sacerdotio isto tribui solet,

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76 Many scholars believe that the measure was exceptional and had no lasting impact on the Vestal order. See, for example, Münzer 1937: 48; Koch 1958: col. 1744; Raepsaet-Charlier 1984: 257; Mekacher and Van Haeperen 2003: 75. Others, however, argue that the law granted the daughters of freedmen permanent access to the order. For this view, see Gianelli 1913: 51; Gardner 1986: 22; Takács 2008: 81.

77 Of thirty-eight Vestals from the imperial period, eight can be identified with certainty as having belonged to senatorial families while another fifteen are probable. One is of equestrian birth and fourteen are of unknown origin. For the list, see Raepsaet-Charlier 1984: 259ff.

78 Mekacher and Van Haeperen 2003: 75.

79 For a discussion of the possible date of these exemptions, see Mekacher and Van Haeperen 2003: 67-8.
1.12.7). The case of the Oculata sisters, two Vestals convicted of being unchaste during the reign of Domitian, provides a concrete example that the exemptions mentioned by Gellius did not categorically exclude a girl from joining the order.\(^\text{80}\)

According to Gellius, exemptions were granted to the sister of a Vestal, the daughter of a \textit{flamen}, an \textit{augur}, a \textit{quindecimvir}, a \textit{septemvir}, a \textit{salius}, and a \textit{sacerdos} of the Tubilustrium, and the fiancé of a \textit{pontifex}.\(^\text{81}\) The list is defined by a potential candidate’s relationship to specific religious officials, which may suggest that the exemptions had a religious basis.\(^\text{82}\) The daughter of a \textit{flamen}, for example, was expected to assist her parents as a \textit{camilla}, and it may be that the daughters of other religious officials also participated in rites celebrated by their fathers. In other words, these girls may already have been serving in an official capacity, and it would have been inappropriate to remove them from this role. Immunity was not granted to the sisters, daughters and fiancés of all religious officials, however, and the absence from the list of several prominent figures is curious. Why, for instance, was the daughter of a \textit{tubicen} excused but not the daughter of a \textit{pontifex} or the \textit{rex sacrorum}?

It may be the case that the decision to excuse certain girls was motivated not only by \textit{religio}, but also by political calculation. The exemption granted to the sister of a Vestal, for example, could very reasonably be explained in this way. With only six Vestals serving at any given time, each fulfilling a term of at least thirty years, vacancies in the order must have been few and far between. The Romans were certainly not insensible to the political utility of the Vestal order, and it undoubtedly would have struck the elite, who generally preferred to distribute power and prestige as widely as possible, as unfair for a single family to monopolize new spots.\(^\text{83}\) Unable to find a reason why it would be nefas for a Vestal’s sister

\(^\text{80}\) Suet. \textit{Dom.} 8.4: \textit{incesta Vestalium virginum, a patre quoque suo et fratre neglecta, varie ac severe coercuit, priora capitali supplicio, posteriora more veteri. nam cum Oculati sororibus, item Varronillae liberum mortis permisisset arbitrium corruptoresque earum relegisset…} (And the unchaste behavior of the Vestal Virgins, condoned even by his father and his brother, he punished severely in various ways, at first by capital punishment, and afterwards in the ancient fashion. For while he allowed the sisters Oculata and also Varronilla free choice of the manner of their death, and banished their paramours…). While Nina Mekacher and Françoise Van Haeperen (2003: 68) believe that this passage proves Gellius has provided a list of exemptions, Danielle Porte (1989: 67) and Carl Koch (1958: col. 1744) both argue that the girls named by the antiquarian were barred from joining the order and assert the impossibility of both sisters having taken up the office.

\(^\text{81}\) The daughter of a \textit{flamen Dialis}, however, would have been technically ineligible, since the \textit{flamen Dialis} was released from the \textit{potestas} of his \textit{paterfamilias} (if he was living) when he took office (Gai. \textit{Inst.} 1.130, 3.114; Ulp. 10.5).

\(^\text{82}\) Wildfang (2006: 45) believes that this is the case, though she does not offer a specific solution.

\(^\text{83}\) With respect to the important male religious offices, there was rule, perhaps even a provision in the \textit{loc Domitia}, that only one member of a family could serve in a particular college at any given time (see North 1990).
to be elected to the order as well, the Romans decided that such a girl should be exempt, a condition that likely exerted social if not religious pressure on a father to withhold his second daughter from consideration. A similar logic may lie behind the exemptions granted to the daughters of the officials named by Gellius. Such an explanation assumes that at the time these exemptions became customary, the office was very desirable.

Having apparently exhausted the information provided by Labeo, Gellius ends with two additional conditions found in the commentary of Capito Ateius. According to Capito, the daughter of a man who did not have a home in Italy was ineligible for the Vestal order. This provision likely dates to the late Republic or early principate, a period when Roman citizens first began to settle in the provinces in large numbers. Roman religion placed a very high premium on place, and it may have made the Romans uncomfortable to select a Vestal whose natal hearth was not in Italy.

Capito also reported that the daughter of a man with three children “must be excused” from joining the order (filiam … et excusandam eius, qui liberos tres haberet, Gell. N.A. 1.12.8). This provision undoubtedly postdates the introduction of the ius trium liberorum in 18, which granted an exemption from tutela to women who had borne three children and allowed fathers of the same number to ascend the cursus honorum more quickly. The wording of this provision is ambiguous, making it difficult to ascertain whether the daughter of a man with three children was prohibited from serving, or simply excused from the expectation that she do so. Perhaps Augustus sought to further increase the tangible rewards of a large family by exempting fathers who had borne three children from submitting one of their daughters to the order at a time when, as we have seen, the elite were generally disinclined to do so.

This condition ensured that power was not concentrated in the hands of one gens and that positions in the major colleges were shared among the most important families.

It is probably not coincidental that the only pair of Vestal sisters known to us served during the Principate, when competition for the office seems to have waned.

Of course this explanation does not account for the exemption granted to the fiancé of a pontifex, since her selection as a Vestal would naturally invalidate the betrothal.

North (1990) makes a similar argument with respect to male religious officials.

Mekacher and Van Haeperen (2003: 79) have suggested that this measure was introduced by Augustus not to limit access to the order, but rather to increase the potential pool of applicants at a time when he was struggling to fill vacancies.


Wildfang 2006: 45.

For the ius liberorum see, for example, Gardner 1986: 20-1, 194-8.

Wildfang (2006 42-3) argues that the daughter of a man with three children was excluded from the order, though it is not entirely clear why this should have been the case.
When considered as a group, these varied requirements and exemptions provide some indication of who and what the Vestals were expected to be. New Vestals were chosen at a very young age, presumably to ensure that they had not yet been betrothed and, even more importantly, to ensure that their sexual purity had not compromised. Potential Vestals were also required to be free from physical blemishes, hearing defects and speech impediments. Many of the selection criteria addressed the legal, social and religious status of a prospective Vestal’s parents. This is not surprising in a society where family and lineage played a major role in the construction of an individual’s identity. Although a new Vestal was removed from her birth family upon initiation, it is clear that this relationship was an important factor in determining a candidate’s eligibility for the office. The daughters of slaves, freedmen or those who engaged in a sordidum negotium were excluded from the order. Potential Vestals were also required to be the product of a instum matrimonium, and it seems likely that the daughters of divorced couples did not generally fare well in the competition. Neither the candidate nor her father could ever have been emancipated from the potestas of their paterfamilias. Finally, a Vestal candidate had to be patrima et matrima, that is, both her parents had to be living when she was initiated into the order. Taken together, these requirements suggest that the Vestals were typically the daughters of “ideal” Roman families.

It is clear that the provisions recorded by Gellius and his antiquarian sources were not developed at one time as part of a coherent program for choosing a new Vestal, but rather reflect concerns that were prevalent at different times in Roman history. Unfortunately, however, it is virtually impossible to recover the precise chronological development of the checklist provided by Gellius in the second century A.D. Several of the provisions, including the requirement that a Vestal be a virgin, are almost certainly contemporaneous with the institution of the office itself. Others, such as the exemption offered to the daughter of a man with three children, must have been instituted in response to the Augustan marriage legislation in 18. Requirements may have become more stringent during periods when competition was particularly intense. In the late first century B.C., at a time when the Roman elite had grown apathetic regarding the office, Augustus considered abandoning the condition that a new Vestal be the daughter of freeborn parents. Although the threat of libertine blood in the Vestal order seems to have reignited interest on this occasion, it is possible that other selection criteria were ignored as Roman society changed.

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92 See below.
over time. In general, however, it seems clear that new Vestals were chosen with great care at all times.

*The Selection Process*

After establishing the various criteria that had to be fulfilled in order for a girl to be approved as a Vestal candidate, Gellius describes the mechanics of the selection process:

De more autem rituque capiundae virginis litterae quidem antiquiores non exstant, nisi, quae capta prima et, a Numa rege esse captam. Sed Papiam legem invenimus, qua cavetur, ut pontificis maximi arbitratu virgines e populo viginti legantur sortitioque in contione ex eo numero fiat et, cuius virginis ducta erit, ut eam pontifex maximus capiat eaque Vestae fiat (N.A. 1.12.10-11).

But concerning the custom and ritual of taking a virgin, there are, in fact, no ancient accounts, except that the first who was taken was taken by Numa. But we have found the *lex Papia*, in which it is stipulated that twenty virgins be selected from the populace by the judgment of the *pontifex maximus*, and that a choice by lot be made from this number in a *contio*, and that the girl whose lot is drawn, her the *pontifex maximus* takes and she becomes Vesta’s.

Although Gellius claims to be ignorant regarding the details of the earliest selection and initiation process, his account suggests that the Romans believed the king directly nominated new Vestals. 93 Scholars have long speculated that during the early Republic, the *pontifex maximus* exercised this prerogative by virtue of his position as president of the pontifical college. 94 Direct nomination allowed the *pontifex maximus* unilateral control over access to the order, and we may speculate that his decision was often determined by personal interest and political affiliation. Later, however, a new Vestal was chosen according to the procedure established by the *lex Papia*, which stipulated that she be selected by lot, in a *contio*, from a group of twenty virgins selected by the *pontifex maximus*. This reform reduced the role of the *pontifex maximus* in the selection of new Vestals and subjected the process to public scrutiny. According to Gellius, the *pontifex maximus* selected candidates “*e populo*,” in other words, from among the entire citizen body. This provision in particular has led scholars to speculate that it was related to a bid for plebeian access to the order, which has in turn incited a lively debate regarding the date of the law, with scholars attempting to place it

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93 See also Cic. *Rep.* 2.26; Livy 1.20.3; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.64, 3.2.67; Plut. *Num.* 10.1. Roman historians claim that Rhea Silvia was also directly nominated by the Alban king Amulius (Livy 1.3.11; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.76; Plut. *Rom.* 3).

within an appropriate sociopolitical context.\textsuperscript{95} As we have seen, however, the Vestal order had likely always been open to plebeians.\textsuperscript{96} Nonetheless, the larger pool of candidates mandated by the \textit{lex Papia} was almost certainly designed to create a more equitable selection process in the eyes of patrician and plebeian elites.

The \textit{lex Papia} created less opportunity for direct popular participation than the selection of a \textit{pontifex maximus} or new members of the four major colleges, who were elected in a special session of the \textit{comitia tributa}, albeit from a list of three nominees prepared in advance by members of the relevant college. Instead, Vestals were chosen by lot, a mode of selection unique to their office.\textsuperscript{97} How should we account for this difference? Election, which was the method chosen when reforms were made in the way other religious offices were filled, may have seemed inappropriate when the candidate was a young girl. The religious import of the lot is also a potential factor.\textsuperscript{98} Many Greek religious officials were chosen by lot because this method left the decision in the hands of the gods.\textsuperscript{99} The Romans also viewed the lot as an expression of divine will, but it was also used to make contentious political decisions without any explicit religious overtones.\textsuperscript{100} However we interpret the law’s intent, the \textit{lex Papia} suggests that the Vestal order was a highly coveted office and that a new selection process was necessary to accommodate the larger number of candidates.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{95} The date of the \textit{lex Papia} has been the subject of much debate and will probably never be known with certainty. Gellius, who is the only ancient source to mention the \textit{lex Papia}, does not indicate when the law was enacted. Some scholars, including most recently Jörg Rüpke (1996b: 277-9, with further bibliography), have proposed that it should be dated to 65, a year in which one of the tribunes was named C. Papius. Others have argued for a much earlier date. Guizzi (1968: 73-77), for example, proposed the years between the \textit{lex Ogulnia} of 300, which first opened the major colleges to plebeians, and 254, when the first plebeian \textit{pontifex maximus} was selected, while Niccolini (1934: 382-3) places the law just after 253. Elizabeth Rawson (1974: 210-1) has proposed the end of the second century B.C., an era likewise marked by conflict between patricians and plebeians over control of Roman religion. More recently, Nina Mekacher and Françoise Van Haepenen (Van Haepenen 2002: 96-102; Mekacher and Van Haepenen 2003: 70-2) have placed the \textit{lex Papia} in the years between 292 and 219, a period when changes were made to the mode of selection of the \textit{rex sacrorum}, the \textit{flamines maiores} and the \textit{pontifex maximus}. José Carlos Saquete (2000: 128-31) dates the law to A.D. 5, arguing that the \textit{lex Papia} and the law granting access to the daughters of freedmen mentioned by Dio are one and the same.

\textsuperscript{96} Mommsen 1887: 3.567, n. 2; Klose 1910: 33. The Vestal Minucia, who was accused of \textit{incestum} and executed in 337, several decades prior to the \textit{lex Ogulnia}, was from a plebeian family (Livy 8.15.7-8; \textit{POx.} 12.3.33-6; Klose 1910: 35-6, no. 4; Rüpke 2008: 802-3, no. 2463).

\textsuperscript{97} The lot was involved in the appointment of a \textit{pontifex maximus} and, following the \textit{lex Domitia} of 104, any member of one of the four major \textit{collegia}, but only because the people could not legally bestow a religious office. In order to circumvent this problem, sortition was used to create a \textit{minor pars populi} by selecting seventeen of the thirty-five tribes who then voted to elect a candidate (Rosenstein 1995: 50, n. 26).

\textsuperscript{98} See, for example, Wildfang 2006: 47.

\textsuperscript{99} Headlam 1933: 5-6; Rosenstein 1995: 50.

\textsuperscript{100} Rosenstein 1995.

\textsuperscript{101} Guizzi 1968: 69-70.
Sortition likely reduced tension among the aristocracy by preventing favoritism, but whether it was intended to or actually made the order more accessible to families outside of the elite is more difficult to tell.

According to Gellius, the procedure outlined by the *lex Papia* was rarely used in his day. Instead, the senate typically granted an exception to the *lex Papia* if a man of respectable birth offered his daughter to the *pontifex maximus*, provided that she met all of the requirements for admission to the order. Although it is clear that the *lex Papia* had not been formally repealed, it had evidently outlived its utility. As we have seen, the selection process was already in a state of flux during the early principate. Raepsaet-Charlier suggests that the incident related by Suetonius, which has been dated to 13 or 12, precipitated the transformation. But the details of the selection process in A.D. 5, when a shortage of candidates prompted Augustus to open the order to the daughters of freedmen, suggest otherwise. The radical nature of the solution surely indicates that Augustus was trying to fill the requisite slate of twenty candidates in accordance with the *lex Papia*, not just find one or two fathers willing to offer their daughters. Nevertheless, the unusual circumstances surrounding the sortition in that year, which was held in the senate rather than in *contione*, do seem to suggest that the *lex Papia* was not strictly observed in this case.

The first securely attested instance of the new procedure occurred in A.D. 19, when a replacement was sought for Occia, who had served Vesta for fifty-seven years. According to Tacitus, Fonteius Agrippa and Domitius Pollio offered their daughters to the *pontifex maximus* Tiberius, who chose the daughter of Pollio:

> post quae retulit Caesar capiendam virginem in locum Occiae, quae septem et quinquaginta per annos summa sanctimonia Vestalibus sacris praesederat; egitque grates Fonteio Agrippae et Domitio Pollioni quod offerendo filias de officio in rem publicam certarent. praelata est Pollionis filia, non ob aliud quam quod mater eius in eodem coniugio manebat; nam Agrippa discidio domum imminuerat. et Caesar quamvis posthabitam decies sestertii dote solatus est (*Ann. 2.86*).

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102 Gell. *N. A.* 1.12.12: *Sed ea sortitio ex legi Papia non necessaria nunc videri solet. Nam si quis honesto loco natus adeat pontificem maximum atque offerat ad sacerdotium filiam suam, cuius dumtaxat salvis religionum observationibus ratio haberi possit, gratia Papiae legis per senatum fit* (This selection by lot according to the *lex Papia*, however, is usually not considered necessary today. For if someone of respectable birth approaches the *pontifex maximus* and offers his daughter to the order, provided that consideration may be given to her candidacy without violating the religious requirements, the senate grants an exemption from the *lex Papia*).

103 Raepsaet-Charlier 1984: 256.

104 Guizzi even speculates that the sortition was held in the senate, rather than *in contione*, to ensure that the daughter of a freedman was not chosen (1968).
The emperor then moved for the appointment of a Virgin to replace Occia, who for fifty-seven years had presided over the rites of Vesta with unblemished purity. Fonteius Agrippa and Domitius Pollio he thanked for the public-spirited rivalry that had led them to proffer their own daughters. Pollio’s child was preferred, for no reason save that her mother was still living with the same husband, while Agrippa’s divorce had impaired the credit of his house. As a consolation to the rejected candidate, the Caesar presented her with a dowry of a million sesterces.

The fact that only two senators offered their daughters, coupled with Tiberius’ praise of their initiative and his provision of a dowry for the runner-up, may suggest that there was once again a shortage of families willing to offer their daughters to the order. The new method of selection overcame this problem not by altering who was eligible for the office, but by dispensing with the necessity of finding twenty girls for the lot. The transition also placed control of the selection of new Vestals more securely in the hands of the emperor, by virtue of his position as pontifex maximus, and the senate, who sanctioned his decision by granting an exemption from the lex Papia. Thus under the principate, the procedure for selecting a new Vestal closely resembled the method practiced during the regal and early Republican periods. The process outlined by the lex Papia was the product of a characteristically Republican struggle for religious authority and access to public religious offices. As social and political circumstances changed once again under Augustus and his successors, the practice of selecting a new Vestal was renegotiated in order to account for the princeps and his new position within the Roman religious system.

Initiation: The Rite of Captio

Once a candidate had been selected, she was formally “taken” by the pontifex maximus and initiated into the Vestal order. Once again, Gellius provides the most detailed account of this ritual:

“Capi” autem virgo propterea dici videtur, quia pontificis maximi manu prensa ab eo parente, in cuius potestate est, veluti bello capta abducitur. In libro primo Fabii Pictoris, quae verba pontificem maximum dicere oporteat, cum virginem capiat, scriptum est. Ea verba haec sunt: “Sacerdotem Vestalem, quae sacra faciat, quae ius sit sacerdotem Vestalem facere pro populo Romano Quiritibus, uti quae optima lege fuit, ita te, Amata, capio” (N.A. 1.12.13-4).

105 Mekacher and Van Haepenen (2003: 76, 79) argue that the selection of a new Vestal was actually made by the senate, not the pontifex maximus, but neither Tacitus (Ann. 2.86) nor Gellius (N.A. 1.12.12) support this assertion. If the senate had taken over the traditional power of the pontifex maximus to select a Vestal, either through direct nomination or the compilation of a slate of candidates for the lot, Gellius certainly would have mentioned the change.
The virgin is said to be “taken,” it seems, because she is seized by the hand of the pontifex maximus and lead away from the parent in whose potestas she is, as if she had been taken in war. In the first book of Fabius Pictor, the formula is recorded which the pontifex maximus must use when he takes a virgin. It is this: “I take you thus, Amata, as a Vestal sacerdos, as one who will perform the sacra which it is right for a Vestal sacerdos to perform on behalf of the Roman people, the Quirites, on the same terms as her who was a Vestal on the best terms.”

The details of this passage have been the subject of intense debate, particularly with respect to the nature of the relationship between the Vestals and the pontifex maximus. Some scholars have identified what they consider to be striking similarities between the captio and the traditional Roman marriage ceremony. In the course of the rite, the young girl was taken from her paterfamilias and led away by the pontifex maximus “as if she had been taken in war” (veluti bello capta, Gell. N.A. 1.12.13), a process similar to the abduction of the bride during a Roman wedding. The soon-to-be Vestal was addressed by the pontifex maximus as “Amata,” which, when translated as “Beloved,” could likewise suggest a connection with the marriage rite. Finally, scholars have noted that the Vestals’ hairstyle, the seni crines (sometimes called the sex crines), was otherwise associated exclusively with brides. All of these details suggest to some that the rite of captio should be regarded a symbolic wedding between the new Vestal and the pontifex maximus.

The stance taken by scholars on this issue is, generally speaking, directly related to their position on another contentious issue in Vestal scholarship. Because it was generally assumed that the cult of Vesta grew out of the hearth cult of the ancient Roman kings, early work on the Vestals was often framed in terms of their relationship to the women in the royal household. Some suggest that the Vestals represented the wife of the early Roman king, others his virginal daughters. Ultimately, scholarly preoccupation with the cult’s origins and the assumption that those origins can be located in the household of the early Roman

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106 The Fabius Pictor cited by Aulus Gellius is not the annalist but rather Ser. Fabius Pictor, who was a pontifex and the author of a commentary on pontifical law, De iure pontifico, around 150 (Rüpke 2008: 677, no. 1600). For a discussion of the formula, including the interpretation and translation of “amata” and “uti quae optima lege fuit,” see Guizzi 1968: 130-7; Wildfang 2006: 40-1.

107 Santinelli 1904.

108 Festus 354L: Rapi simulatur virgo ex gremio matris, aut, si ea non est, ex proxima necessitudine (The bride appears to be seized from the lap of her mother, or, if she is not living, from the closest female relative).

109 It has been argued that amata was the perfect passive participle of “amari” (to love), and therefore should be translated as “beloved” (See, for example, Guizzi 1968: 130-1).

110 See, for example, Jordan 1886: 43-56; Guizzi 1968: 110-2; Beard 1980: 16; La Follette and Wallace 1993; La Follette 1994.

111 Angelo Brelich (1949: 9), who argued that the cult of Vesta was public from its foundation, is an exception.
king is misguided. Nonetheless, as Mary Beard has noted, the terms of the debate have important implications for the study of the Vestals. There was a relationship between the role of the Vestals in Roman society and the roles traditionally assigned to Roman women. In order to fully understand the Vestals, we must explore the nature of this relationship.

Many who see the rite of captio as a symbolic wedding ceremony also believe that the Vestals originated as and later represented the wife of the early Roman king. The centerpiece of this hypothesis is the costume of the Vestal, which included vittae (woolen head bands) and, it has been argued, the stola (dress) of a Roman matrona. It has also been noted that many of the ritual tasks performed by the Vestals, tending the hearth, for example, and cleaning out the aedes Vestae, resemble those of a Roman matrona. Their participation in fertility and agricultural rites has also been adduced in support of their matronal role. Finally, the right of the pontifex maximus to punish errant Vestals has been compared to the disciplinary powers of a Roman husband over his wife. In order to overcome the glaring difficulty presented by the Vestals’ virginity, these scholars argue that the chastity modeled by the women did not necessarily signify total abstinence from sexual intercourse, but rather the pudicitia of a Roman matrona, a quality exemplified by her fidelity to one husband and by her modest conduct and dress.

Supporters of the opposing hypothesis, which suggests that the Vestals were originally the daughters of the early kings, argue that their number and virginal status precludes relating the women to the wife of the early king. Moreover, the “domestic” tasks assigned to the Vestals could just as easily have been performed by the daughters of the house as by the materfamilias. In fact, some tasks may have been reserved exclusively for young children. According to the Roman agricultural writer Columella, bee-keeping and the preparation of food could only be performed by children, the abstinent, or those who had purified themselves from the effects of intercourse. Furthermore, fertility cults in the ancient world were often associated with virginal religious officials.

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112 For a discussion of the futility of focusing on origins, see Parker 2004: 565.
116 Columella Rust. 9.14.3, 12.4.3. According to Palladius (1.6.14), the planting and harvesting of olives was also restricted to these groups. For a discussion of the sexual contamination of food, see Parker 1996: 99.
117 Beard 1980: 15.
It has also been noted, and rightly so, that the Vestals’ costume was not identical to that of the matron or the bride, but rather was unique, marking out their special sacred status. In particular, the evidence that Vestals wore the *stola* is not as secure as has often been assumed.\(^{118}\) Furthermore, it is by no means certain that the Vestals adopted the *seni crines* from the bride, or that this coiffure indicated that they were symbolic brides. It has been argued that the *seni crines* represented the bride’s liminal status, and therefore by extension that of the Vestals.\(^{119}\) Although this hypothesis may be true in a general sense, the bride’s transitional status was symbolized by the *tunica recta*, a special garment otherwise worn only by young men about to make the transition from childhood to manhood.\(^{120}\) An alternative explanation for the significance of the *seni crines* is highlighted by Festus, who provides the only literary reference to the hairstyle:

> senis crinibus nubentes ornantur, quod [h]is ornatus vetustissimus fuit. quidam quod eo Vestales virgines ornentur, quorum castitatem viris suis †sponoe *** a ceteris… (454L). 

Brides are adorned with the *seni crines*, because this was the most ancient style for them. Moreover [brides wear the *seni crines*] because the Vestal Virgins are adorned with it, whose chastity for their own husbands †brides *** from others…

Although the passage is corrupt, it suggests that brides wore the distinctive *seni crines* in order to evoke the *castitas* of the Vestal Virgins, just as they wore the *flammeum* of the *flaminica Dialis* in order to evoke her unwavering fidelity to her husband.\(^{121}\) Together, the *seni crines* and the *flammeum* symbolized the ideal virtues of the status the bride was leaving behind and the one she was about to take up.\(^{122}\) The *seni crines*, the emblem of the Vestal order, announced the sexual purity modeled by these women, who wore the hairstyle on a daily basis. According to the interpretation offered here, the hairstyle did not symbolize the liminal status of the bride or the Vestal initiate, but rather her absolute physical virginity.

There are also compelling differences between the rite described by Gellius and a Roman wedding ceremony. The new Vestal was taken from her *paterfamilias* and not, as a

\(^{118}\) See chapter 2.

\(^{119}\) See, for example, Beard 1980; Wildfang 2006: 13.


\(^{121}\) Festus 79L: *flammeo amicitur nubens ominis boni causa, quod eo assidue utebatur flaminica, id est flaminis uxor, cui non licebat facere divortium* (Brides are veiled with the *flammeum* as a good omen, since it was worn on continuously by the *flaminica*, the wife of the *flamen*, for whom divorce is not permitted).

\(^{122}\) The bridal coiffure and veil are just two ways among many in which the ideal appearance of Roman women incorporated elements from Roman religion. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see, for example, Staples 1998: 146-7; Olson 2008: 22-4.
The bride was, from the lap of her mother or closest female relative, and was delivered not to the pontifex maximus, but rather was led by him to the pontifical college, who awaited her arrival in the atrium Vestae. Furthermore, it is far from certain that “Amata” should be translated as “Beloved.” The relationship between the pontifex maximus and the Vestals is also less straightforward than that of symbolic husband and wife. Finally, the role of the pontifex maximus in the punishment of a Vestal accused of incest is very different from that of a Roman husband over his wife. It is clear that the rex and regina of early Rome cannot be equated with the pontifex maximus and Vestal of the Republican city.

These difficulties indicate that the rite of captio should not be interpreted as a symbolic marriage ceremony between the pontifex maximus and the new Vestal. This does not change the fact, however, that the ceremony was a rite of transition from one status to another. The rite removed the candidate from the private context of her father’s religious community and made her a Vestal, a representative of the Roman state as a whole. The change in her status was immediate and complete. There does not appear to have been a separate inauguration ceremony, which suggests that the rite of captio served to fully integrate a candidate into the order. The young initiate accompanied the pontifex maximus to the atrium Vestae, where she was received by the pontifices and began her new life as a Vestal.

When the rite of captio is understood in this way, it becomes more difficult to interpret the Vestals as interstitial figures who were in a perpetual state of transition. The Vestals did not make the traditional transition from virginal daughter to bride to matrona, but their status did change. The rite of captio transformed a young Vestal candidate forever; she would never return to her former position in the social hierarchy. As a sacerdos of Vesta, her primary obligation was to the populus Romanus, whom she represented at the communal

123 The pontifex maximus could not unilaterally punish a Vestal for violating her vow of chastity, rather, he was required to consult with the other members of the pontifical college (see Johnson 2007).
124 Wildfang 2006: 38-9
125 Gellius (N.A. 7.7), however, says that the right of “exauguration” (exaugurandi) and marriage was first offered to the Vestal Gaia Taracia on account of her generous gift of the Campus Martius to the Roman people. The fact that Gellius speaks of exauguration may suggest that the Vestals were officially inaugurated.
126 Gell. N.A. 1.12.9: virgo autem Vestalis, simul est capta atque in atrium Vestae deducta et pontificibus tradita est, en statim tempore sine emancipatione ac sine capitis minutione e patris potestate excipit et ius testamenti faciundis adipiscitur (Now, as soon as the Vestal Virgin is taken, led to the atrium Vesta and handed over to the pontifices, she immediately at this time passes from the power of her father without the ceremony of emancipation and without the diminution of her rights, and acquires the right to make a will). For a discussion of the legal consequences of initiation, see chapter 3.
127 “Vesta’s priestesses remained in a perpetual “rite of passage” loop, between status (unmarried and married) and a gendered (female and male) sphere” (Takács 2008: 80-6). See also Beard 1980, 1995; Versnel 1993; Wildfang 1999: 227, 2006: 12-3.
hearth in the forum, rather than to her birth family. Though she remained an unmarried virgo, she had exchanged her place in her father’s household for a life marked by official religious service. Following the initiation ceremony, she was a Vestal with all of the responsibilities and privileges of that religious office.
Chapter Two
The Costume of the Vestal Virgins

In a treatise defending his decision to abandon the toga, the Christian apologist Tertullian claims that some Romans sought religious experiences simply because of the clothes:

... cum ob cultum omnia candidatum et ob notam vittae et privilegium galeri Cereri initiantur, cum ob diversam affectionem tenebricai vestis et tetrici super caput velleris in Bellonae montes fugantur, cum latioris purpurae ambitio et Galatici ruboris superficietio Saturnum commendat (Pall. 4.10.2).

For it is for entirely white clothing and for the sign of the vittae and the privilege of the galerus that people are initiated into [the mysteries of] Ceres; it is for the opposite affection of dark dress and a gloomy covering upon the head, that people flee into the mountains of Bellona; and the [opportunity of] wrapping with a broader, purple tunic and of taking on a mantle of Galatian red commends Saturn [to others].

Although Tertullian’s tone is derisive, his satiric comments derive their meaning from an acknowledgement that costume is a powerful visual language. Clothing and other physical adornment constructs and communicates identity and positions the wearer within the larger social group. Social categorization at Rome was reflected in and reinforced by distinct clothing for each class of citizens. The toga praetexta, for example, distinguished curule magistrates from ordinary citizens, while a gold ring indicated that a man belonged to the equites. In addition to serving as a visual marker of social status, clothing also evoked the wearer’s moral standing. The stola and palla, for example, symbolized the pudicitia and moral probity of the Roman matrona. As Tertullian points out, costume could also signify that the wearer held a special position within the religious system. The bright orange-yellow veil of the flaminica Dialis, for example, distinguished her from other Roman matronae and conveyed her status as the sacerdos of Jupiter. The Vestals’ costume was no less rich in its symbolism, and therefore provides a unique opportunity to analyze the ways in which their sacerdotal identity was represented on a daily basis, as well as how they chose to represent themselves.

1 Olson 2008: 1-2. Important studies of Roman clothing include Sebesta and Bonfante 1994; Croom 2002; Cleland, Harlow and Llewellyn-Jones 2005; Edmondson and Keith 2008; Olson 2008.
2 For the costume of the flaminica Dialis, see chapter 5.
in their portraits.

**Hairstyle and Headdress**

*The Seni Crines*

The Vestals’ distinctive hairstyle, the *seni crines*, has featured prominently in nearly every modern attempt to understand the position of these *sacerdotes* in Roman society. The Vestals shared the *seni crines* with the ideal young bride, another figure for whom absolute physical virginity was a requirement. Brides, however, who stood on the threshold between maidenhood and married life, wore the hairstyle only for a day. Since the Vestals dressed their hair in this way throughout their period of service, many scholars have suggested that they were regarded as perpetually liminal figures.³ As I argued in the last chapter, however, the primary symbolic valence of the *seni crines* was not liminality, but rather *castitas* (purity) and virginity. Furthermore, Karen Hersch has recently suggested that the six parts of the *seni crines* hairstyle may have corresponded to the number of women active in the order.⁴ As Hersch writes, “[i]t seems that each individual Vestal bore on her head a symbolic representation of the totality of her group: her religious identity was bound up with her membership in the community of six Vestals.”⁵

The best literary evidence for the *seni crines* is found in the lexicon of Festus, where the author reveals that the hairstyle symbolized the wearer’s *castitas*.⁶ He does not, however, describe how it was achieved. *Seni crines* is generally translated as “six-tressed,” but aside from suggesting that it was divided into six sections, this does not clarify how the hair was arranged.⁷ Visual evidence has likewise failed to reveal what the *seni crines* actually looked like.⁸ In Roman art, brides are typically shown with veiled heads (Figs. 53-5). Visual depictions of the Vestals are equally problematic and fail to provide definitive proof regarding the appearance of the *seni crines*. Nonetheless, they offer important evidence for the representation (and self-representation) of the Vestals and merit further consideration.

The Vestals appear on nine sculpted reliefs dating from the late first century B.C.

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³ See especially Beard 1980.
⁴ Hersch 2010: 75-6.
⁵ Hersch 2010: 76.
⁶ Festus 454L, quoted above.
⁷ La Follette 1994: 57. Giannecehini (1980) has argued that *seni crines* should be translated as “shorn” or “cut hair,” but his arguments are refuted by La Follette and Wallace (1993).
⁸ For the limitations of art as a source for ancient clothing, see Van Deman 1908; Lindner 1996: 98-129; Connelly 2007: 86-7; Olson 2008: 3-4.
through the late second century A.D. These reliefs originated on public monuments in Rome, the Campanian city of Surrentum (modern Sorrento), and Calacete in Sicily. These diverse find spots testify to the order’s visibility throughout Italy during the early principate in particular. On the majority of the reliefs, the Vestals appear in the company of the princeps and other members of the religious and political establishment, a fact that further underscores the prominence of their position at the center of public religion at Rome. In addition to these public reliefs, ten Vestal portrait statues and nine portrait heads dating to the second and early third centuries A.D. have been recovered from the atrium Vestae and the surrounding area.9

Nearly all of the relief sculptures depict the Vestals’ hair parted at the center and waved back beneath the infula and suffibulum, which disguise any further details. This arrangement is clearly visible, for example, on two Vestal heads from the Antonine period (Figs. 1-2),10 the Vestal on a relief fragment now in the British Museum (Fig. 3),11 and the figures on the heavily restored Villa Albani Relief (Fig. 4).12 Though not as readily discernable, the same style can be seen on a relief from the principate of Augustus now in

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9 The fullest discussion of these portraits is Lindner 1996.
10 These two nearly life-size marble heads were discovered in the late nineteenth century on the north slope of the Palatine Hill and are now on display in the Antiquario Palatino (Inv. Nos. 12491/1, 12491/2). Esther Boise Van Deman (1908) mentions a third head, now lost, in the Wellesley College collection. The heads had been deposited with material that likely came from the atrium Vestae, which suggests that the relief on which they originated may have been displayed there as well. The two heads have been dated to the Antonine period based on the care with which the eyes were carved, with irises, pupil, and tear ducts fully delineated (Thompson 2005: 155). The heads likely belonged to a frieze depicting a processional group or even a panel showing a sacrificial ritual, one in which the Vestals may have been participants. Perhaps the scene included the figure of the princeps, either Antoninus Pius or possibly his adopted son and heir Marcus Aurelius, and other members of the pontifical college.
11 This fragmentary large-scale relief has been dated to the Flavian period on the basis of stylistic similarities to the Cancelleria Reliefs (see below). The relief was acquired in the eighteenth century by the antiquarian Charles Townley and purchased by the British Museum in 1805 (Inv. No. 1805,0703.263). The provenance was originally recorded as Agrigento, “from the bottom of the sea” (see Bonanno 1979: 343). However, after a close analysis of the marble surface, Anthony Bonanno (1979: 347) concluded that the abrasion was due to weathering, rather than to marine erosion. He argues that Rome is a more likely provenance for the monument, though it could have been carved in Sicily by sculptors with knowledge of the style and techniques current in Rome during the Flavian period. Bonanno (1979: 348-51) was also the first to identify the figures as a flamen and a Vestal. Both figures face right, with the head of the flamen, who is readily distinguished by his characteristic head covering, the galerus, overlapping that of the Vestal in the background. This arrangement suggests that the pair may originally have been part of a monument in which members of the collegium pontificum appeared as a processional group alongside the emperor as pontifex maximus. For a recent discussion of this relief, with further bibliography, see Thompson 2005: 139-43.
12 The relief was reportedly discovered in Rome. It was restored in the eighteenth century and incorporated into the marble revetment of the villa’s galleria nobile (Inv. No. 1010). For a discussion of the restoration and iconography of the Villa Albani Relief, see Thompson 2005: 99-102. See also below.
Palermo (Fig. 5), as well as the so-called Banqueting Vestals Relief, which dates to the Claudian period (Fig. 6). Unfortunately, the heads of the Vestals on the altar frieze of the Ara Pacis Augustae (Figs. 7-8) and the roughly contemporaneous Sorrento Base (Figs. 9-10) are too badly damaged to assess how the hair of these figures was depicted.

The only fully intact Vestal on the so-called Cancellaria Reliefs, on the other hand, is depicted wearing a closely cropped coiffure beneath her infula (Figs. 11-2). Short locks of hair appear combed across her forehead and behind her ear, with no evidence of longer hair coiled at the top or back of her head. Two Vestal portraits from the atrium Vestae, one from the late Flavian or early Trajanic period (Fig. 13) and the other from the late Trajanic period.

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13 This relief was found in Sicily at Marina di Caronia, the site of ancient Caleacte, and is now in the Museo Archeologico Regionale in Palermo (Inv. No. 1539). It has been dated to the Augustan period on the basis of style and subject matter. As both princeps and pontifex maximus, Augustus was keenly interested in the cult of Vesta and cultivated a close relationship between his household and the Vestal order (see, for example, Bömer 1987; Price 1996: 826; Grandazzi 1997: 167). Indeed, on 28 April, 12, he dedicated a shrine to Vesta in his house on the Palatine (for the long-standing debate concerning the evidence for a Palatine cult of Vesta, see Degrassi 1955; Guarducci 1964; Degrassi 1966-7: 98-115; Kolbe 1966-7: 101-3; Guarducci 1971; Fraschetti 1988: 949-65; Capelli 1990; Fishwick 1993; Cecamore 1994-5; Thompson 2005: 73-113). Although no archaeological evidence has been found to support the existence of a Palatine cult of Vesta, three reliefs depicting Vesta and the Vestals in front of an architectural backdrop likely represent the new foundation. These are the Palermo Relief, the so-called Sorrento Base (see below) and the heavily restored Villa Albani Relief (see above). For a discussion of the Palermo Relief, see Rizzo 1932; Degrassi 1955: 152-4; Ryberg 1955: 51-3; Guarducci 1964; Degrassi 196607: 111-5; Guarducci 1971: 95-6; Cappelli 1990; Thompson 2005: 89-95.

14 The fragment, which is now in the Museo dell’Ara Pacis Augustae (Inv. No. 2391), was discovered in the excavations of the Campus Martius near the Via del Corso in the 1930s. Together with the Della Valle-Medici reliefs, the fragment was originally assigned to a monument identified as the Ara Pietatis Augustae (Van Buren 1934). In the 1980s, however, Gerhard Koeppel (1982, 1983) demonstrated that this altar never existed. For the suggestion that the whole group of fragments be assigned to an Ara Reditus Claudii, which was decreed in A.D. 43 upon the return of the princeps from his expedition in Britannia, see La Rocca 1992, 1994. The relief depicts the six priestesses seated behind a low table, perhaps at a banquet honoring the inauguration of Claudius as flamen Augustalis (for this suggestion, see Ryberg 1955: 72-3). For a recent discussion of the Banqueting Vestals Relief, see Thompson 2005: 174-8, with further bibliography.

15 The was constructed in the northern Campus Martius between 13 and 9 in honor of Augustus’ return from Spain and Gaul. The bibliography on the Ara Pacis is enormous. For a discussion of the altar frieze in particular, see Simon 1968: 10-1; Thompson 2005: 42-52.

16 The Sorrento Base, unearthed in the early nineteenth century in the Roman ruins of Sorrento (ancient Surrentum) on the Bay of Naples, is now in the Museo Correale di Terranova in Sorrento (Inv. No. 3657). The scene is very similar to the one on the Palermo Base (see above), and likely depicts the Vestals, Augustus and Livia at the dedication of the new shrine to Vesta on the Palatine. For a discussion of the Sorrento Base, see, for example, Rizzo 1932; Ryberg 1955: 49-53, 74; Guarducci 1964; Kolbe 1966-7; Guarducci 1971; Cappelli 1990; Cecamore 1994-5; Thompson 2005: 74-99.

17 The Cancellaria Reliefs were excavated from beneath the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome in the late 1930s. All of the relief slabs except for one were found in a dump near the tomb of Aulus Hirtius (cos. 43). They are now in the Museo Gregoriano Profano in the Vatican (Frieze A: Inv. Nos. 13389-91; Frieze B: Inv. Nos. 13392-5). It seems likely that all six Vestals appeared as a processional group on Frieze B, though only one has been fully preserved. The scene in which they appear may depict Domitian’s victorious return (adventus) from Sarmatia in A.D. 93 (see Ghedini 1986; Thompson 2005: 135-6). For a discussion of the Vestals on these reliefs, see especially Thompson 2005: 114-44, with further bibliography. For a summary discussion of the issues surrounding the date of the Cancellaria Reliefs, see Oppermann 1985: 44-52; Klein 1992: 191-2.
(Fig. 14) are also shown wearing short hair beneath their infulae.\textsuperscript{18} This evidence has prompted some scholars to speculate that the Vestals actually wore their hair in a short “bowl” cut and arranged their woolen infulae in imitation of the seni crines.\textsuperscript{19} These scholars find support for their hypothesis in Pliny the Elder’s reference to a “hair tree” (capillata), where the Vestals hung their cut hair.\textsuperscript{20}

Pliny, however, does not say that the Vestals cut off \textit{all} of their hair and brought it to the tree. He may simply mean that they deposited the clippings when they had their hair trimmed. Perhaps the Vestals observed a ritual similar to that required of the flamen and flaminica Dialis, who had to bury their hair and nail clippings beneath a “fruitful tree” (felix arbor).\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, Molly Lindner has argued that the infula could not have represented the seni crines, since, as she notes, not every Vestal portrait depicts the infula wound around the subject’s head six times.\textsuperscript{22}

Joanne Thompson has attempted to place the closely cropped hairstyle of these Flavian and Trajanic Vestals within the context of Domitian’s program of social and moral reform.\textsuperscript{23} Thompson points out that closely cropped hair is a sign of asceticism in many cultures, and speculates that the Vestals began wearing their hair in this way during the reign of Domitian, perhaps at his behest, in order to communicate their chastity and moral probity. As pontifex maximus, Domitian took seriously his supervisory role over the Vestals. On three occasions during his principate, Domitian pursued accusations of incestum. In A.D. 82, Varronilla and the Oculata sisters were found guilty.\textsuperscript{24} Cornelia, the \textit{virgo Vestalis maxima}, was acquitted in a trial held sometime before A.D. 89, but was convicted and buried alive in A.D. 90 or 91.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{18} The late Flavian or early Trajanic head of a Vestal is now in the collection of the Antiquario Forense in Rome (Inv. No. 634). The late Trajanic head is now in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence (Inv. No. 1914/150). Though short locks of hair are visible at the nape of the neck, both statues appear to wear wigs arranged to resemble the “turban coiffure,” a hairstyle popular during the Hadrianic and early Antonine periods. For a discussion of both of these heads, see Jucker 1961; La Follette 1994: 59; Lindner 1996: 296-308.

\textsuperscript{19} See, for example, Sensi 1980-1: 68; La Follette and Wallace 1993; La Follette 1994: 57-9; Martini 1997b: 477-9.

\textsuperscript{20} Pliny H.N. 16.235: \textit{antiquior, sed incerta eius aetas, quae capillata dicatur, quoniam Vestalium virginum capillus ad eam defectur} (… still older [than the five hundred year old tree in the grove of Lucina], though the age is uncertain, is the [tree] called the “hair tree,” because the Vestal Virgins bring their hair to it). See also Festus 50L.

\textsuperscript{21} Gell. N.A. 10.15.15, 26.

\textsuperscript{22} Lindner 1996: 67-81.

\textsuperscript{23} Thompson 2005: 122. For Domitian’s social legislation, which included a renewal of the \textit{lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis}, see Grelle 1980: 340-52. For his moral program in general, see D’Ambra 1993.

\textsuperscript{24} Suet. Dom. 8.4.

\textsuperscript{25} Suet. Dom. 8.4; Pliny \textit{Ep.} 4.11.9.
The zeal with which Domitian prosecuted these Vestals for incestum reflects his commitment to reviving traditional morals and religious practices. The appearance of the Vestal on the Cancelleria Reliefs and the two roughly contemporaneous portrait heads may have been intended to signify a return to austerity and closely guarded chastity within the order. Nonetheless, the choice to abandon the *seni crines*, which appears to have symbolized the Vestals’ castitas throughout much of the order’s history, is perplexing. Though the Vestals either wore or were depicted as wearing their hair closely cropped during the Flavian and Trajanic period, this style was not long lasting. The two Vestal heads from the Antonine period, for example, are shown with long hair in keeping with earlier practice (Figs. 1-2).

With the exception of the Cancelleria Reliefs, the relief sculptures depict the Vestals with their hair dressed in a relatively uniform style. The portrait statues from the *atrium Vestae*, on the other hand, exhibit considerable iconographic variation with respect to their hairstyles. Several of the statues show their subjects wearing the *infula*, *suffibulum* and *palla*, which allow only a glimpse of how the hair beneath was arranged. On the portrait head of a Vestal from the Hadrianic period, for example, a single braid, perhaps one of the six plaits used to achieve the *seni crines*, is visible between a roll of hair on the Vestal’s forehead and the first turn of her *infula* (Figs. 15-6). A similar arrangement is visible on a late Hadrianic portrait of a Vestal now in the collection of the Museo Nazionale Romano (Fig. 17). While the pronounced roll of hair on these portrait heads differs from the more subdued hairstyle visible on the reliefs, it appears that the sculptors have carefully depicted each element of the Vestals’ unique head covering, including the *seni crines*. These two portraits seek to present a complete picture of the Vestals’ sacerdotal status.

While the two Vestals from the Hadrianic period are shown with full regalia, the hairstyles of other portrait statues from the *atrium* imitate those of the women of the imperial family and therefore cannot depict the *seni crines*. Did the Vestals wear their signature hairstyle only on important festival days? Perhaps, though the portraits may not depict the

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26 The provenance of this head is unknown. It was acquired by a private collector in 1922 and purchased by the British Museum in 1979 (Inv. No. 1979, 1108.1). The head has been dated to the Hadrianic period on the basis of a similarity with portraits of the empress Sabina, making it one of the earliest surviving Vestal portraits (Lindner 1996: 281-2). For a discussion of this portrait head, see Lindner 1996: 279-83.

27 This portrait was excavated by Lanciani in the *atrium Vestae* in 1884. It is now in the collection of the Museo Nazionale Romano (Inv. No. 639). For a discussion of this portrait, see Lindner 1996: 284-9.

28 La Follette (1994: 59) and Lindner (1996: 65, 80-97) note that given the variety of hairstyles present and their close relationship to imperial portraiture, the coiffures depicted on the Vestal portraits cannot depict the *seni crines*. 
Vestals as they actually appeared. What is certain is that some chose to be represented in their portraits with elaborate and stylish coiffures. By adopting the hairstyle of the current empress, Vestals may have hoped to advertise their close relationship with the women of the imperial family.\textsuperscript{29} The cooptation of imperial hairstyles was a common feature of Roman portraiture during this period, and the Vestals may have sought to demonstrate that they too were culturally relevant and socially adept. As we shall see, however, the portraits clearly advertise the sacerdotal status of their subjects in other ways.

In conclusion, neither the literary nor visual evidence provides a conclusive picture of how the seni crines was achieved. Aside from the Vestal on the Cancelleria Relief, whose short “bowl” cut cannot represent the traditional hairstyle, Vestals on other large-scale public monuments appear heavily veiled. The Vestal portraits, on the other hand, are quite varied in their treatment of their subjects’ hair. These statues reveal that during the imperial period, some Vestals sought to shape their identities with reference to the appearance of empresses. They may even have been free to dress their hair in this way on the days on which they were not participating in religious festivals.

Nonetheless, the seni crines, which symbolized the Vestals’ castitas and their membership in the Vestal order, likely remained an important visual marker of their status on public and religious occasions. Despite our ignorance regarding the details of the seni crines, it was presumably recognizable to most Romans and may have been one of the most readily distinguishable features of the Vestals’ ritual costume, particularly since the hairstyles worn by other women changed dramatically over time. Indeed, it is not surprising that by the late Republic, the hairstyle was regarded as “the oldest ornament” (ornatus vetustissimus, Festus 454L). For centuries, the seni crines had defined the Vestals as members of a group of six virgin sacerdotes.

\textit{The Infula and Vittae}

The manner in which the Vestals wore their hair was closely related to their distinctive ritual headdress, which included the infula, vittae and suffibulum. According to

\textsuperscript{29} For a discussion of the Vestal portraits’ emulation of the empresses, see Lindner 1996: 80-97.
Festus, the woolen *infula*, wrapped up to six times around the head of a Vestal, symbolized her status as a *sacerdos*. Isidore of Seville provides the fullest description:

> infula est fasciola sacerdotalis capitis alba in modum diadematis, a qua vittae ab utraque parte dependent, quae infulam vinciunt; unde et vittae dictae sunt, quod vinciunt. infula autem plerumque lata est, plerumque tortilis, de albo et coco (Orig. 19.30.4).

An *infula* is a small white band for a *sacerdos*’ head, shaped like a diadem. *Vittae* hang down on either side of it and fasten to the *infula*, whence also *vittae* are so named because they fasten (*vincire*). Most *infulae* are wide and twisted, and made out of white and scarlet. Both Fetus and Isidore emphasize the close connection between *sacerdotes* and the *infula*, though it should be noted that only the Vestals are depicted as wearing the headband in Roman art. The precise ritual significance of the *infula* is not fully understood. It seems to have indicated that the wearer was ritually pure and dedicated to the gods. The Vestals fulfilled both of these qualifications on a daily basis, and likely wore the *infulae* at all times as an emblem of their service at the hearth of Vesta. In fact, the symbolic function of the *infula* was so strong that the band was removed from the head of a Vestal accused of being unchaste.

*Infulae* are clearly visible on every extant Vestal portrait head and are therefore an essential criterion for identifying a statue as a Vestal (Figs. 13-20). Not every Vestal,

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30 Festus 100L: *infulae sunt filamenta lanae, quibus sacerdotes et hostiae templaque velantur* (*infulae* are woolen bands with which *sacerdotes*, sacrificial victims, and temples are draped).

31 Servius provides a very similar, although slightly abbreviated gloss of *infula*, which suggests that the two authors share a common source: *infula: fascia in modum diadematis a qua vittae ab utraque parte dependent, quae plerumque lata est, plerumque tortilis ex albo et coco* (The *infula* is a band similar to a diadem, from which *vittae* hang down on either side; most are broad and twisted in red and white in color, *Aen*. 10.538). For a discussion of Isidore’s sources, see Barney, Beach and Berghof 2002: 10-7.

32 Elaine Fantham (2008: 163) notes that the *infula* probably served a function similar to that of *stemma* (ribbons) in Greek rituals.

33 Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.89.4-5: καὶ ἕνας χρόνος μηνύσις ἀποδίδοται τοῖς ἱεροφάνταις, ὅτι τῶν παρθένων μία τῶν φυλαττοντός τὸ ἱερὸν πῦρ, ὃπως ὅνυμα αὐτή, τὴν παρθενίαν ἀφαρεθεῖσα μιᾶς τὰ ἱερά. οἱ δ’ ἐκ τοῦ βασάνου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀποδείξεων μαθόντες, ὅτι τὸ μηνύσιον ἦν ἀδίκημα ἀληθές, αὐτὴν μὲν τῆς κορυφῆς ἀφελόμενοι τὰ στέμματα καὶ πομπεύσαντες διά ἀγορᾶς ἐντὸς τείχους ζῶσαν κατώρυξαν (Thereupon strict inquiry was made by everyone, and at last information was given to the pontiffs that one of the virgins who guarded the sacred fire, Opimia by name, had lost her virginity and was polluting the holy rites. The pontifices, having by tortures and other proofs found that the information was true, took from her head the *stemma*, and solemnly conducting her through the Forum, buried her alive inside the city walls). Martini suggests that “*stemma*” refers to the *infula* (1997b: 483), although it could also refer to the *infula* and *vittae* together. Similarly, Roman Catholic priests who are deprived of the right to exercise the functions of their office are said to be “defrocked,” a term that highlights the very close association between clerical garments and priestly status.

34 Lindner 1996: 76. In addition to the visual evidence, Prudentius (*C. Symm.* 2.1086-7) and Ambrose (*Epist.* 18.11) associate the *infula* with the Vestals.
however, is depicted with the *infula* wrapped around her head the same number of times. Lindner has made the intriguing suggestion that the *infula* was also used to differentiate status within the Vestal order. She proposes that the eldest Vestal, the *virgo maxima*, wore six turns of the *infula*, the next in order five and so on down to the youngest, who wore only one turn.\(^{35}\) Literary sources imply that there was a hierarchy within the order and that the *virgo maxima*, the eldest Vestal, held a position of particular importance.\(^{36}\) If Lindner’s theory is correct, it provides further insight into the inner dynamics of the Vestal order and reveals how the status of each member was represented visually to the outside world.

*Infulae* are also visible on several of the Vestal reliefs, most clearly on the two Antonine heads in the Antiquario Palatino (Figs. 1-2). Both the frontal and the profile head wear four turns of the *infula*, which is marked with incised lines to suggest the texture of the twisted woolen band. At least one band of the *infula* is visible beneath the veil of each Vestal on the Palermo Relief (Fig. 5). The Vestal on the Cancelleria Relief also wears four bands of the *infula* (Figs. 11-2) while the figure on the British Museum fragment is shown with just two turns beneath her veil (Fig. 3). The heads of the Vestals on the altar frieze of the Ara Pacis Augustae and the Sorrento Base are not well preserved, but it seems likely that they also wore woolen *infulae*.

The *vittae*, which were attached to the *infula* and hung down over the shoulders, constitute the second element of the Vestals’ headdress. Symmachus, the fourth century A.D. pagan apologist, refers to the *vittae* as one of the honors of the Vestal order.\(^{37}\) According to Isidore, *vittae* were wide bands made of white and scarlet threads that attached to the *infula*.\(^{38}\) These woolen bands are clearly visible on the shoulders of a number of Vestal portraits (Figs. 13, 17, 20-1). The Vestals on the Cancelleria Reliefs also wear *vittae* (Figs. 11-2). On the remaining relief sculptures, however, the *vittae* (if present) are hidden beneath the Vestals’ *suffibula*.

\(^{35}\) Lindner notes that the practice seems to have changed in the early Severan period, when four roughly contemporary portraits were produced with six turns of the *infula* (1996: 78). Furthermore, the two Antonine heads in the Antiquario Palatino, which appear to have come from the same relief, both wear four turns of the *infula* (Figs. 1-2).
\(^{36}\) See below.
\(^{37}\) Symmachus Relat. 3.11: *ut vittae earum capiti decus faciunt, ita insigne ducitur sacerdotii vacare muneri bis* (As the *vittae* are the honor of their heads, so is their distinction drawn from their leisure to attend to their duties). Ovid also refers to the “honor of the *vittae*” (*vittae honor*, Ars 1.31), although with respect to their use by *matronae*.
\(^{38}\) Isid. Orig. 19.30.4, quoted above.
Ovid and Tibullus associate the *vittae* with chaste matrons and indicate that they were worn as a sign of modesty (*insigne pudoris*, Ov. *Ars* 1.31). Some scholars list the *vittae* as part of the traditional attire of the Roman *matrona*, and it has even been argued that the Vestals’ right to wear them is a sign of their matronal status. As others have noted, however, there are very few images extant in which women other than Vestals are depicted wearing the *vittae*. Kelly Olson suggests that *matronae* may only have worn the bands on religious or ceremonial occasions. This theory in no way contradicts the association between the *vittae* and purity, which was required of men and women who participated in religious rites. Rather, it reinforces the notion that clothing in general and religious ornaments in particular could also evoke certain moral qualities. The *infula* and *vittae* announced the Vestals’ *pudicitia* and, in combination with other elements of their special costume, their status as ritual agents.

*The Suffibulum*

When sacrificing, the Vestals also wore the *suffibulum*, a short veil described by Festus as white, bordered with purple, and fastened under the chin with a *fibula*. The Vestals on the Sorrento Base (Fig. 9-10) wear *suffibula* secured with rosette brooches, while the figures on Palermo Relief (Fig. 5) are shown wearing veils fastened with small round *fibulae*. The *suffibula* of the Vestals on the Banqueting Vestals Relief are particularly well articulated (Fig. 6). The short veil is fastened at the sternum with a round brooch and the cloth, which is clearly distinguished from the fabric of the *tunica*, falls over the shoulders of the Vestals. Although the heads of five of the six Vestals on the altar relief of the *Ara Pacis Augustae* are badly damaged, the smallest figure at the head of the procession does appear to be wearing a short veil fastened at her sternum (Fig. 8).

The *suffibulum* is also clearly visible on the late Hadrianic Vestal portrait now in the collection of the Museo Nazionale Romano (Fig. 17). This is the only statue that depicts the

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40 Beard 1980.
42 Olson 2008: 39.
43 Festus 475L: *suffibulum* vestimentum album, praetextum, quadrangulum, oblongum, quod in capite Vestales virgines sacrificantes habebant, idque fibula comprehendebatur (The *suffibulum* is a white, praetextate, rectangular garment, which the Vestal Virgins wear on their heads when they sacrifice; it is fastened with a *fibula*). See also Varro Ling. 6.21.
veil pinned at the sternum as it is on the relief sculptures. It falls over the Vestal’s shoulders, but has been arranged to allow the *vittae* to show as well. Although the figure is damaged, she was likely sprinkling grain or incense on a small altar with her lowered right arm and holding a *patera* or a small box in her extended left hand. As noted above, many Vestals apparently chose to have themselves represented wearing less exact versions of their costume. The subject of this portrait, however, is shown in the act of sacrificing and therefore is veiled with the *suffibulum*.

The praetextate border on the *suffibulum* warrants further consideration. Praetextate garments were worn by a variety of religious figures at Rome. Magistrates whose duties included participating in religious rites, the *augures*, the *pontifex maximus*, the *flamines*, and various other religious officials wore the *toga praetexta*. The Vestals wore a praetextate veil. *Popae* and *servi publici* assisting in public sacrifices wore the *limus*, a long rectangular skirt with a praetextate border. The purple border on a praetextate garment visually identified the wearer as a religious official, but it also served a more fundamental ritual purpose. Praetextate garments had to be made of wool, which was imbued with an apotropaic and ritual significance. The color purple was associated with blood, which symbolized life and was used in many ancient cultures to ward off evil forces.

In addition to their apotropaic function, praetextate garments proactively guarded against ritual pollution. The *praetexta* indicated that the wearer was *sacer* and warned those nearby to modify their behavior accordingly. According to Festus, “praetextate speech” (*praetextus sermo*) was speech devoid of obscenity. Those who wore praetextate garments were forbidden to use obscene language. The purple border also served as a warning for others to refrain from polluting words, gestures, or activities, particularly those associated with sexuality. The praetextate garment was an important visual indicator that communicated status and reinforced ritual rules regarding the segregation of the ritual sphere and persons from profanity and sexuality.

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*45* Serv. *Aen.* 12.120.

*46* Sebesta 1994: 47.

*47* Sebesta 1994: 47.


*49* Festus 282L.

*50* The young *patrimi et matrimi pueri* who shouted lewd words at the bride during her journey to her husband’s home removed their *toga praetextae* before the ceremony (Festus 282L).

Covering one's head during sacrifice was a quintessentially Roman practice.\textsuperscript{52} Men covered their heads with part of their togae, while women generally veiled themselves with their pallae when they participated in religious rituals. Vestals, it seems, wore a special veil to convey their sacerdotal status. When the suffibulum covered a Vestal’s head, it signified that she was sacrificing or was about to participate in a sacrifice.

The Vestals’ Dress: \textit{Tunica or Stola?}

Although the headdress of the Vestals is described in some detail by ancient authors, the nature of their other attire is less certain. No systematic discussion of this topic is extant, which suggests that the features discussed above were more important markers of their status. Generally speaking, ancient references to the Vestals’ clothing are vague and uninformative. According to Livy, Postumia and Minucia were accused of incestum in 420 and 337 respectively because they wore showy and frivolous clothing.\textsuperscript{53} Valerius Maximus says that Amelia miraculously reignited the flame on the hearth of Vesta with a garment made of fine linen (carbasus), but gives no further details.\textsuperscript{54} Finally, Ambrose, the fourth century A.D. bishop of Milan, implies that the Vestals wore purple robes (purpuratarum vestium murices, \textit{Ep.} 18.11). The context of this claim, however, is highly polemical and may be exaggerated. While the suffibulum had a purple edge, it is unlikely that all of the Vestals’ garments were died this color.

In the absence of more explicit information, some scholars have claimed that the Vestals wore the toga when sacrificing.\textsuperscript{55} The passage they cite in support of this hypothesis, however, is inconclusive: “a virgin sacrificing with the fold of her toga thrown back over her shoulder was called an armita” (\textit{armita dicebatur virgo sacrificans, cui lacinia togae in humerum erat reiecta}, Festus 4L). No other ancient source suggests that the Vestals wore the toga and none of the extant visual representations depict the women dressed in this garment. Moreover, the term virgo by itself is not sufficient proof that Festus is referring to the Vestals, whom he

\textsuperscript{52} For a recent discussion of the issue, see Fantham 2008.
\textsuperscript{53} For the trial and acquittal of Postumia, see Livy 4.44.11-2. For the trial and execution of Minucia, see Livy 8.15.7-8. See also below.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Val. Max.} 1.1.7: \textit{qua adorante, cum carbasum, quem optimum habebat, foculo imposisset, subito ignis emicuit} (She prayed and placed a linen cloth of fine quality which she was wearing upon the hearth, and suddenly a flame shot up). See also Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.68.5.
\textsuperscript{55} For this suggestion, see Giannelli 1913: 90; Guizzi 1968: 112, n. 49; Boëls-Janssen 1993: 102.
normally calls the *Vestales virgines*.\(^{56}\) It is more plausible that the *armitae* were young citizen virgins – Roman girls wore the *toga praetexta* until their marriage – who had a specific and otherwise unknown sacrificial role.\(^{57}\)

Other modern scholars have thought that the Vestals wore the *stola*.\(^{58}\) This long, slip-like garment with over-the-shoulder straps and a deep V-shaped neckline was worn over the *tunica* and belted under the breast with a plain cord (Figs. 22-3).\(^{59}\) The most important feature of the *stola* appears to have been its length. Tibullus refers to a *stola longa* (1.6.68), as does Ovid (Pont. 3.3.52). Ovid also uses the more general phrase “*longa vestis*” (Fast. 4.134) and the term “*instita longa*” (Ars. 1.32, Trist. 2.248). The *instita* was a wide band, perhaps purple in color, which was sewn onto the lower portion of the *stola*.\(^{60}\) This colored border on the *stola*’s lower edge would have been visible even when a *matrona* had wrapped her *palla* around the upper half of her body, thus concealing the neckline and shoulder straps.\(^{61}\) The *instita* does not appear in Roman sculpture, since it would have been rendered in paint that has not survived, but a lower border is sometimes visible in wall paintings.

The *stola* seems to have been virtually synonymous with matronly status in the Roman mind. According to Festus, *matronae* were “those women who had the right to wear the *stola*” (*matronas appellabant eas fere, quibus stolas habendi ius erat, 112L*). The *stola* was a mark of honor that distinguished the wearer as a member of a specific social group, the *matronae*.\(^{62}\) Recently, scholars have also begun to focus on the moral qualities that were embodied by the *stola*.\(^{63}\) In fact, the ancient sources are quite explicit about the garment’s moral symbolism. Ovid proclaims the *stola* a “sign of modesty” (*insigne pudoris, Ars 1.31-2*), while Nonius says that it was known as the “honorable garment” (*honestam vestem, 862L*).\(^{64}\) In addition to

\(^{56}\) See, for example, Festus 14, 454, 475L. See also Martini 1997b: 483, n. 115.

\(^{57}\) For the *toga praetexta* as a garment worn by young girls, see, for example, Cic. 2 Verr. 1.113; Prop. 4.11.33-4; Festus 282-41; Macrobi. Sat. 1.6.7; Arnob. Ad. Nat. 2.67. It seems likely that most girls wore a *tunica* on a daily basis, while the *toga praetexta* was reserved for ritual occasions. For the costume of young girls, see also Sebesta 1994: 46-7, 2005; Olson 2008: 15-20.


\(^{59}\) On the *stola*, see, for example, Sebesta 1994; Croom 2002: 75-8; Olson 2008: 27-33.

\(^{60}\) For a discussion of the *instita*, see Olson 2008: 30.

\(^{61}\) Olson (2008: 30) suggests that the *instita* was present in order to ensure that the *matrona*’s status was rendered visible at all times.

\(^{62}\) Sebesta 1997: 531; Olson 2008: 27.

\(^{63}\) See, for example, Sebesta 1997; Olson 2002, 2008.

\(^{64}\) See also Hor. Sat. 1.2.94-9; Tib. 1.6.67-8; Prop. 4.11.63; Ov. Pont. 3.3.51-2. Gellius notes that long garments are appropriate for women because they conceal the body (*vestem longe latque diffusam … ad ulnas cruraque adversus oculos protegenda, N.A. 6.12.2*).
communicating her social status, the long and concealing *stola* announced and protected a *matrona*’s modesty. Prostitutes and adulteresses, on the other hand, were forbidden to wear the garment because they manifestly did not exhibit chaste or modest behavior:

matronae, quae ob adulterium a maritis repudiabantur, togam accipiebant sublata stola propter ignominiam; toga autem meretrici apta. ita enim solebant prostare cum solis pullis togis, ut discernerentur a matronis; et ideo quae adulteri damnatae fuerant, hac veste utebantur. aliter: togatae dicebantur in publicum procedere feminae adulterii admissi <causa> (Acro. schol. Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.63).

Matronae who were repudiated by their husbands on account of adultery removed the *stola* and put on the *toga* because of their dishonor, since the *toga* was associated with the prostitute. For thus they were accustomed to prostitute themselves in dark *togae* only, so that they would be distinguished from matrons. It is for this reason that women convicted of adultery wore this garment. In other words, women were called *togatae* who appeared in public [wearing the *toga*] because of the crime of adultery.

These women were denied the honor of the *stola* not only because they occupied a different social category than *matronae*, but also because they had broken the moral code associated with the garment.65

Varro mentions the word *stola* several times, but the term does not appear to have been commonplace before the middle of the first century B.C.66 Though *matronae* were likely expected to wear long, modest garments throughout Roman history – Terence, Cato and Plautus mention clothes unique to *matronae* – the *stola* in particular may not have reached the height of its importance until the principate of Augustus.67 Suetonius suggests that the *princeps* legislated a return to the *toga* for male citizens.68 While the ancient sources do not mention similar legislation regarding the *stola*, it may have existed.69 Indeed, artistic evidence suggests a renewed interest in the *stola* during the Julio-Claudian period. The earliest depiction of a woman in a *stola* dates to the early first century B.C., but the vast majority of stolate statues are Julio-Claudian (Figs. 22-3).70 During the second and third centuries A.D., however, the *stola* virtually disappears from portrait statues and may have been abandoned all together in real life.71

65 Whether or not prostitutes and adulteresses were actually compelled to wear the *toga* is less clear. For a discussion of this question, see Olson 2002, 2008: 47-51.
66 Varro *Ling.* 8.28, 9.48, 10.27. For this suggestion, see Olson 2008: 27.
67 Olson 2008: 27.
68 Suet. *Aug.* 44.2.
69 See, for example, Sebesta 1997: 531. Olson (2008: 33), however, is more cautious.
70 See Olson 2008: 32.
71 See, for example, Lindner 1996: 244; Croom 2002: 76; Olson 2008: 32.
The *stola*, along with the *seni crines*, has formed the basis of much speculation regarding the origin of the Vestal order and the “sexual ambiguity” of its members.\(^{72}\) If the Vestals wore the *stola*, it has been argued, they must have been regarded at least in part as *matronae*.\(^{73}\) For this reason, it is worth examining the evidence for the association between the Vestals and the *stola*. The single surviving literary reference to a specific type of garment worn by a Vestal occurs in the *Epistulae* of Pliny the Younger, where the author notes that Cornelia, who was buried alive in A.D. 90, wore a *stola* to her tomb:

```latex
cum in illud subterraneum demitteretur, haesissetque descendenti stola, vertit se ac recollegit, cumque ei manum carnifex daret, aversata est et resiliuit foedumque contactum quasi plane a casto puroque corpore novissima sanctitate reiecit (4.11.9).
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When she [Cornelia] was taken down into the subterranean chamber for burial, her *stola* caught on something. She stopped and turned to free it, and when the executioner reached out a hand to help her, she flinched back to avoid his polluting touch—the last act of piety, it seems clear, to protect a pure and undefiled body.

The context of this comment, however, may blunt its force to some extent. Pliny is not making a prescriptive statement about the costume of the Vestals, but rather describing a dramatic event. The aim of the passage is to offer a subtle critique of Domitian by casting doubt on Cornelia’s guilt: “I do not know whether she was innocent or not, but she certainly appeared to be so” (*nescio an innocens, certe tamquam innocens ducta est*, 4.11.9). Furthermore, this passage may actually confirm that the Vestals did not normally wear the *stola*. As we have seen, disgraced Vestals were deprived of their ritual costume before being buried alive.\(^{74}\) If the *stola* had been an important part of the Vestals’ costume, Cornelia, who had lost her official status, would not have worn the garment to her tomb. The image of a Vestal wearing the dress of a *matrona* must have been jarring, and would have communicated her expulsion from the order and the community as a whole.

Although it is sometimes claimed that the *stola* is “clearly represented” in sculptures depicting the Vestals, this is not the case.\(^{75}\) The majority of relief sculptures that preserve enough detail for analysis show the Vestals wearing the *palla* over a long dress (Figs. 5-10). The *palla*, a large rectangular mantle that could be wrapped around the body and used to veil the head, obscures the details of the garment beneath it, making it impossible to determine

\(^{72}\) For the “sexual ambiguity” of the Vestals, see chapter 1.
\(^{74}\) Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.89.5. See further above.
\(^{75}\) Beard 1980: 16, n. 36. See also Wildfang (2006: 13), who writes, “[t]he various sculptures of senior Vestal Virgins found within the *atrium Vestae* … are all portrayed dressed in a *stola*."

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whether the distinctive shoulder straps and V-shaped neckline of the *stola* were present.\(^{76}\) The Vestal on the Cancelleria Relief, on the other hand, does not wear her *palla* drawn up over her head, but rather has wrapped it under her right arm and draped it over her left shoulder (Fig. 12). This arrangement reveals the Vestal’s right shoulder, upon which no sign of the strap of the *stola* is visible.\(^{77}\)

All of the Vestal portrait statues from the *atrium Vestae* wear a *tunica* and *palla*.\(^{78}\) The *tunica* was the basic garment of every Roman woman, though it varied in length and quality according to her social status.\(^{79}\) Several of the statues show the *tunica* belted beneath the breast with a Hercules knot to signify the Vestals’ virginity, and this may have been an important part of their costume (Figs. 17-8, 24).\(^{80}\) The portrait statues, however, must be used with great care as evidence for Vestal attire in any period. The drapery patterns on many of the surviving statues are obviously in dialogue with Hellenistic iconography and may not depict the way the Vestals actually dressed. The precise configuration of the *palla* was likely intended to communicate their status as *sacerdotes* according to artistic conventions developed in the Greek world.\(^{81}\) Figure 18, for example, shows the *palla* is wrapped around the right arm of the Vestal and arranged in a horizontal roll at her abdomen. During the classical Greek and Hellenistic periods, this drapery configuration indicated that a statue depicted a religious official.\(^{82}\) Roman sculptors appear to have adopted this motif in the imperial period in order to convey that the woman represented had an official religious role.

All of this evidence dates from the imperial period, which precludes a definitive judgment about the costume of the Vestals during the Republican period. At the very least, however, it is important to note that the visual evidence does not confirm that the Vestals wore the *stola*. Pliny is the only ancient source – textual or visual – to associate the Vestals with this garment, and, as we have seen, his testimony is problematic. Cornelia was a

\(^{76}\) For the *palla*, see Croom 2002: 89-91; Sebesta 1994: 48-9; Olson 2008: 33-6).

\(^{77}\) Although Thompson (2005: 191) mentions that the strap of the *stola* is visible, I was not able to discern any sign of the garment.

\(^{78}\) Lindner 1996: 83, 244. Although Wildfang claims that all of the Vestal statues from the *atrium Vestae* are dressed in the *stola*, this is incorrect (2006: 13). A lost Vestal portrait formerly in the collection of the Palazzo Giustiniani may wear a *stola*. As Lindner (1996: 336-41) emphasizes, however, the head and the torso do not belong together. The statue appears in the first catalog published by the owner of the Giustiniani collection in 1631, which indicates that the restoration had taken place even before this date.

\(^{79}\) For the *tunica*, see Croom 2002: 78-9; Olson 2008: 25-6.


\(^{81}\) Lindner 1996: 112.

\(^{82}\) For a discussion of the costume of priestesses in the Greek world, see Connelly 2007: 85-115.
disgraced Vestal, and it seems unlikely that she would have been dressed in the costume of the Vestal order. I argue that the Vestals did not wear the *stola*. The *sacerdotes* of Vesta were required to maintain their absolute physical virginity throughout their period of service. They were not married women and there is no evidence that the Romans saw them as such. One of the primary reasons that modern scholars have been willing to do so is their conviction that the Vestals wore the *stola*, a belief for which there is no ancient evidence.

As we have seen, a woman’s clothing rendered visible her character and moral standing. Modest *matronae* concealed their bodies with the *stola* and *palla*, protecting themselves from the gaze of outsiders, while prostitutes and adulteresses advertised their willingness to engage in sex by adorning themselves for public display. The Vestals were also expected to communicate their chastity and modesty through their clothing. Those who did not were subject to scrutiny and even on occasion accusations of *incestum*. According to Livy, Postumia was tried for unchastity because her attractive dress and open manner were inconsistent with her position as a Vestal. She was acquitted, but warned by the *pontifex maximus* “to dress with regard for sanctity rather than coquetry” (*pontifex maximus … colique sancte potius quam site iussit*, 4.44.12). Minucia was also suspected because of her elegant dress and was ultimately convicted of *incestum* on the testimony of her slave.

Although the details of these episodes, which reportedly took place in 420 and 337 respectively, may not be strictly historical, they demonstrate a familiar concern with the relationship between a woman’s dress and her morality. These stories also suggest that the Vestals’ dress was not strictly proscribed at all times. It seems likely that they were required to wear a particular garment on festival days, but were allowed more freedom on other occasions. The fact that the Vestals did not always wear their official costume underscores the symbolism of their dress, and their freedoms in real life. Dress was a field of activity in which the Vestals, and other elite women, were able to exercise their agency. Were Postumia and Minucia fond of bright colors or voluptuous fabrics? Coan silk, for example, was

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83 For the difference between the “normative” and “normal” appearance of the Roman woman, see Olson 2002, 2008: 40-1.
84 Olson 2002: 400-1. The elegiac poets emphasize that sight excites sexual desires. Propertius, for example, claims that his love for Cynthia grows stronger “by looking” (*crescit enim assidue spectando cura puellae*, 3.21.1). See also, Ov. *Am.* 2.2.3-4, 3.2.34; Ter. *De Spect.* 25.
85 Livy 4.44.11.
86 Livy 8.15.7-8.
criticized by Roman moralists and praised by elegiac poets for its sensual qualities.  

Though the style of Roman dress did not change a great deal over the course the Republic and early principate, men and women sought to distinguish themselves by varying the color and texture of their clothing. For the Vestals, upon whose chastity the wellbeing of the entire city depended, decisions about what to wear could be a matter of life and death.

**“Soft” Shoes**

The final element of the Vestals’ costume is their special shoes, known to modern scholars as “soft” shoes. They were likely made of very soft leather or felt, which allowed the toes to show beneath the material. These soft shoes are clearly visible on the feet of Vestals on the altar frieze of the Ara Pacis Augustae (Fig. 25), the Sorrento Base (Fig. 26) and the Cancelleria Relief (Fig. 27). They also appear on all of the Vestal statues whose feet have been preserved (Fig. 28). Although female members of the imperial family are sometimes depicted with footwear of this type, the shoes were generally reserved for male and female religious officials. Soft shoes were an important part of the Vestals’ costume that cannot be ignored. At Rome, footwear was another means of differentiating different social statuses. Senators, *equites*, soldiers, *sacerdotes*, actors, citizens and noncitizens all wore distinctive shoes that reflected their position in Roman society. The soft shoes worn by the Vestals marked their sacerdotal status and, for this reason, were carefully depicted on relief sculptures and portrait statues.

**The Medallion of the Virgo Maxima**

Two of the extant Vestal portrait statues were shown wearing large medallions, perhaps a status symbol reserved for the *virgo maxima*. On the first, a portrait from the late fourth century A.D., a large pendant hangs from a scarf around the Vestal’s neck (Fig. 29).

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87 Olson (2008: 14) emphasizes that the fabric of a garment in particular could communicate moral indiscretion.
88 See, for example, Sebesta 1994b.
89 Lindner 1996: 245.
90 For a discussion of Roman footwear, see Goldman 1994.
92 This portrait statue was unearthed on the Esquiline in 1591. It entered the collection of the Colonna family in the seventeenth century and is now on display in the Galleria Colonna (Inv. No. 87). The find spot suggests that portrait stood in the *domus* of Fabia Aconia Paulina, the widow of the prominent pagan senator and *pontifex* Vettius Agorius Prætextatus (*ca.* A.D. 315 – 384). According to the inscription on the statue base (*CIL* 6.2145 = *ILS* 1261), Paulina commissioned the statue in recognition of the Vestal’s decision to erect a statue in honor of her late husband. The statue has a complicated history. It was likely carved initially in the late first century.
It is carved as a three-part circle with a row of circular stones around the perimeter, perhaps to imitate gems. The widest circle contains alternating rectangular, oval and circular depressions that may originally have held gem or paste imitations. The medallion was carved separately and attached to the statue with cement. This portrait was found with an inscribed base that identified the woman honored as the *virgo Vestalis maxima* Coelia Concordia. The portrait of a Vestal from the Severan period also bears traces of a medallion (Fig. 20). Seven holes drilled across the *tunica* form a V across the chest (Fig. 30). These holes were likely for a necklace, which supported a large metal pendant that sat between the breasts. Though no comparable epigraphic text can be associated with this portrait, it may also depict a *virgo maxima*. Since these two are the only statues shown wearing a medallion, and since one can be identified positively as the *virgo maxima* Coelia Concordia, we may speculate that the chief Vestal was distinguished by a special ornament.

**Conclusion**

The costume of a Vestal Virgin encapsulated the virtues associated with her order and established her identity as a *sacerdos*. Each component of her dress should be understood as one part in a system of visual signs. The *tunica* and *palla*, for example, shielded a Vestal from the public gaze and advertised her moral character. The *seni crines* represented her absolute virginity, a central and defining characteristic of her *sacerdotium*, and symbolized the totality of the six-member Vestal order. The *influla* and *vittae* made it clear that a Vestal was free from all pollution and therefore was a suitable ritual agent. Her rank within the order may have been signified by the number of turns of the woolen headband. The praetextate border on the *suffibulum*, with which a Vestal veiled herself when she was about to sacrifice, reminded observers to refrain from polluting words, gestures or activities. Finally, her special soft shoes completed the ensemble and indicated that she was permitted to walk on sacred ground.

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A.D. as a portrait of a Roman empress. It was then recarved as a Vestal in the late fourth century A.D., when a new head, *vittae* and the large medallion were added. Finally, the statue was restored as a muse in the eighteenth century, at which time the *vittae* were removed and a new head was added to the body (the original was not found when the statue was excavated). For a discussion of this statue, see Picozzi 1990: 157-62; Lindner 1996: 262-9.

93 *CIL* 6.2145 = *ILS* 1261.
94 The portrait was found in the *atrium Vestae* in 1884 and is now in the Antiquario Forense (Inv. No. 4384). For a discussion of this portrait, see Lindner 1996: 377-83.
95 A reddish stain and a small amount of metal are visible on the original statue, though not on the copy in the *atrium.*
Like other Roman religious officials, the Vestals were distinguished more by their shoes, headgear and accessories than by their actual *tunicae*, which must originally have been standard dress for all Roman women. The emphasis on head covering, in particular on the *suffibulum*, suggests the importance of the Vestals’ sacrificial role. This special veil would have distinguished them from other Romans and, in a religious system that required sacrificants to veil their heads, allowed them to perform their ritual obligations. Thus certain elements of the Vestals’ costume were tied directly to their ritual activities and would have been worn on public and religious occasions.

It seems likely that the Vestals were allowed more freedom on a daily basis, though literary and visual evidence suggests that they wore their *infulae* at all times.96 The statues from the *atrium Vestae* preserve a surprising variety of elaborate coiffures and styles of dress. But the Vestals’ sartorial autonomy had limits. According to Livy, both Postumia and Minucia were accused of *incestum* on account of their stylish clothing. These episodes demonstrate that the Vestals were expected to advertise their *castitas* and *pudicitia* through modest attire. There is no evidence, however, that the Vestals wore the *stola*. While their long, concealing *tunicae* unquestionably aligned them with other respectable Roman women, the Vestals were not regarded as quasi-*matronae*. Similarly, the six braids of the *seni crines* symbolized the six members of the Vestal order and signified their absolute physical virginity. The hairstyle did not suggest, however, that the *sacerdotes* were perpetual brides and therefore permanently liminal figures. Although the Vestals stood outside the traditional categories outlined for women, they did belong to a very important social group – the Vestal order. Their distinctive dress and adornment was not intentionally ambiguous, nor did it suggest that their position in Roman society was problematic in any way. Instead, the Vestals’ costume differentiated them from other elite women and marked their status as Vesta’s virgin *sacerdotes*.

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96 Similarly, although a Roman Catholic priest wears his vestments only when celebrating the mass, his clerical collar and subdued clothing clearly mark his status on a daily basis.
Chapter Three
The Ritual Activities of the Vestal Virgins

The religious role of the Vestals differed from that of the majority of Roman religious officials in one very crucial respect.¹ The Vestals were (ideally) devoted to their religious responsibilities totally and on a daily basis, rather than on certain occasions and in addition to other occupations.² Most served for nearly their entire lives, taking office when they were no more than ten years old and remaining Vestals until they died. They lived in the atrium Vestae, their official residence within the temple precinct, so that they would always be near the eternal flame on the hearth of Vesta. Care for the flame was clearly their most important religious responsibility. The Vestals’ ritual activities, however, were far more varied than many ancient and modern sources suggest.³ In addition to tending the flame, the Vestals were responsible for the production and preservation of mola salsa, a task that connected them to every public sacrifice performed in Rome. They also participated in at least ten annual public rites arranged throughout the festival calendar, a fact that demonstrates how thoroughly they were integrated into the practice of public religion at Rome. Indeed, Dionysius of Halicarnassus claims that the number of Vestals was increased from two, the number originally chosen by Numa, to six “due to the great number of the sacred rites they perform” (διὰ πλῆρος τῶν ἱερουργιῶν ἃς ἐπιτελοῦσιν, Ant. Rom. 2.67.1).⁴ Their activities at these festivals were varied and do not easily fit into one descriptive category, a circumstance that underscores the need for a detailed analysis of their specific responsibilities alongside a more general consideration of the meaning of each ritual. Such a study will help to clarify the Vestals’ position within Roman religion and shed light on the ways in which this office was experienced by its occupants.

¹ Cancik-Lindemaier 1996: 138. A significant exception is the flamen Dialis, who is described as “celebrating daily” (cotidie feriatus, Gell. N.A. 10.15.16). For the flamen and flaminica Dialis, see chapter 5.
² Roman religious officials have been described as religious “amateurs” who served only part-time and received little to no training (see, for example, Scullard 1981: 28).
³ In her influential 1980 article “The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins,” Mary Beard called for further study of “the role of the Vestals in their ritual duties outside the service of the sacred flame” (26). Recent studies of the Vestals’ religious activities have begun to address this imbalance. See, for example, Wildfang 1999, 2001, 2006; Saquete 2000; Van Haepenen 2002.
⁴ See also Plut. Num. 10.1.
Membership in the *Collegium Pontificum*

Before proceeding to an analysis of the Vestals’ ritual activities, it is necessary to consider their institutional position within Roman religion. The Vestals were members of the extended pontifical college, which also included the pontifices, the rex and regina sacrorum and the flamines and flaminicae. The *collegium pontificum* provides an import context for understanding the Vestals’ place in the Roman religious system. The Vestals had a special relationship to the *pontifex maximus* in particular. His official residence, the *domus publica*, adjoined the *atrium Vestae* (Fig. 32). He was responsible for the selection and *captio* of new Vestals. It is often noted that the Vestals were also under the authority of the *pontifex maximus*, whose duty it was to punish any ritual negligence on their part, while the pontifical college as a whole was responsible for trying a Vestal suspected of *incestum*. There was evidently a hierarchy of authority within the extended pontifical college, and it seems clear that the Vestals were subordinate to the male pontifices with respect to discipline. It is important to note, however, that the *pontifex maximus* exercised jurisdiction over all other religious officials, including the *rex sacrorum* and the *flamines maiores*, who technically outranked him in the sacerdotal hierarchy recorded by Festus. When placed within this context, the argument that subordination to a male official was a defining and unique characteristic of female religious service becomes less compelling.

Other aspects of the Vestals’ relationship to the pontifical college have not been explored as fully. The Vestals cooperated with other members of the college on a number of ritual occasions. Pontifical *cenae* (banquets) also provided opportunities for members of the college to create and solidify social bonds. Macrobius notes that four Vestals were present at an extravagant banquet put on in 69 to honor the inauguration of L. Cornelius Lentulus Niger as *flamen Martialis*. The guest list included the distinguished consulars Q.

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5 Some scholars argue that the women in this group were closely associated with the college but were not full members. For the composition of the *collegium pontificum*, see Wissowa 1912: 501; Van Haeperen 2002: 80-4.
6 For the selection and *captio* of Vestals, see chapter 1.
7 For the trial of wayward Vestals, see Johnson 2007.
8 Festus 198L.
9 Scheid 1993: 57.
10 Macro. Sat. 3.13.10-1: refero enim pontificis vetustissimam cenam quae scripta est in indice quarto Metelli illius pontificis maximi in base verba: Ante diem nonum Kalendas Septembres, quo die Lentulus flamen Martialis inauguratus est, domus ornata fuit: triclinia lectis eburneis strata fuerunt: duobus tricliniis pontifices cubuerunt, Q. Catulus, M<am>. Aemilius Lepidus, D. Silanus, C. Caesar, ... rex sacrorum, P. Scævola sextus, Q. Cornelius, P. Volumnius, P. Albinovanus, et L. Iulius Caesar augur qui eum inauguravit: in terto triclinio Popilia Perpennia Licinia Arruntia virgines Vestales et ipius uxor Publicia flaminica et Sympronia sores eis (Here I bring to your attention a very early pontifical dinner, described in the following terms in the fourth digest of the Metellus who was *pontifex maximus*: On the ninth day before the
Metellus Pius (cos. 80), Q. Lutatius Catulus (cos. 78) and Mam. Aemilius Lepidus (cos. 77).\textsuperscript{11} Popillia, Perpennia, Licinia and Arruntia shared a \textit{triclinium} at the banquet with Publicia, the new \textit{flaminica Martialis}, and her mother Sempronia. It is also possible that the wives of the other male officials were present though unnamed by Macrobius’ pontifical source.\textsuperscript{12} These banquets were often extraordinarily elaborate. The \textit{cena aditialis} of Lentulus is the most lavish private banquet on record, while Seneca notes that even otherwise frugal men spent millions on their inaugural celebrations.\textsuperscript{13} It is evident that the Vestals were connected to many of the most powerful men and women in Rome by virtue of their position within the pontifical college.

A similar pontifical \textit{cena} may be the subject of a fragmentary relief from a state monument of the Claudian period (Fig. 6).\textsuperscript{14} The so-called “Banqueting Vestals” Relief depicts the six women seated behind a low table. They are clearly identifiable by their \textit{suffibula}, which suggests that the occasion was a religious one. The first five Vestals from left to right are shown frontally while the sixth, whose head is lost, is partially reclining with her back to the viewer. Several female figures, possibly attendants, are visible in the background. A seventh seated female figure depicted in profile on the far right of the relief holds her hand beneath her chin in a gesture reminiscent of the so-called \textit{pudicitia} pose of the Roman \textit{matrona}. It seems possible that this woman represents a \textit{flaminica}.\textsuperscript{15} The scene bears a striking resemblance to Macrobius’ account of the pontifical banquet in 69, when the Vestals

\textsuperscript{11} For this episode, see below.
\textsuperscript{12} The first two \textit{triclinia} held a total of eighteen \textit{pontifices} (Tansey 2000: 247, n. 40), which suggests that the third could have accommodated three additional female guests.
\textsuperscript{13} Sen. \textit{Ep.} 95.41, with D’Arms 2004: 431.
\textsuperscript{14} The fragment, which is now in the Museo dell’Ara Pacis Augustae (Inv. No. 2391), was discovered in the excavations of the Campus Martius near the Via del Corso in the 1930s. Together with the Della Valle-Medici reliefs, the fragment was originally assigned to a monument identified as the Ara Pietatis Augustae (Van Buren 1934). In the 1980s, however, Gerhard Koeppel (1982, 1983) demonstrated that this altar never existed. For the suggestion that the whole group of fragments be assigned to an Ara Reditus Claudii, which was decreed in A.D. 43 upon the return of the \textit{princeps} from his expedition in Britannia, see La Rocca 1992, 1994. The relief depicts the six priestesses seated behind a low table, perhaps at a banquet honoring the inauguration of Claudius as \textit{flamen Augustalis} (for this suggestion, see Ryberg 1955: 72-3). For a recent discussion of the Banqueting Vestals Relief, see Thompson 2005: 174-8, with further bibliography.
\textsuperscript{15} For this suggestion, see Thompson 2005: 177.
shared a dining couch with the *flaminica Martialis* and her mother. Indeed, it has been suggested that the relief represents a banquet honoring the inauguration of Claudius as *flamen Augustalis*.\(^{16}\) While the lack of context for this relief precludes precise identification of its meaning, it nonetheless illustrates an important facet of the Vestals’ participation in social and religious life at Rome, one that is corroborated by the literary sources.

**Within the Precinct of Vesta**

Many of the Vestals’ religious activities took place within the precinct of Vesta, which sat at the southeast end of the *forum Romanum* near the *regia* and the *domus publica*, the house of the *pontifex maximus* (Figs. 31-5). Though some ancient authors ascribed the foundation of Vesta’s temple to Romulus, most credited Numa.\(^ {17}\) Archaeological evidence suggests that the precinct emerged as a cult site over the course of the sixth century.\(^{18}\) The temple was round and was reportedly constructed of wattle and daub with a thatched roof in the manner of a primitive Italic hut.\(^{19}\) The building retained its round form and diminutive size throughout its history, perhaps to emphasize the antiquity of the cult.\(^{20}\) The late Republican *aedes* appears as a round building with six columns on a *denarius* issued by Q. Cassius Longinus in 55 (Fig. 36). A figure holding a scepter and perhaps a *patera* stands on the peak of the roof and large gryphon-head antefixes adorn the eaves.\(^{21}\) The remains visible today date to the restoration carried out by the Severan empress Julia Domna following the fire of A.D. 191 (Fig. 37).

The Vestals’ primary ritual task was to care for the flame that burned on the hearth in the *aedes*.\(^{22}\) Ancient references to the *ignis Vesta* are almost always accompanied by a

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\(^{16}\) Ryberg 1955: 72-3. Felletti Maj (1977: 291) suggests that the scene depicts a *lectisternium*, but there is no concrete iconographical evidence in the relief to support this interpretation (Dunbabin 2003: 223, n. 6).


\(^{18}\) Scott 2009: 8-18. In addition to evidence produced by earlier excavators, investigations conducted between 1987 and 1996 confirmed that a place for sacrifice existed by the end of the sixth century, when the fourth *regia* was built.


\(^{20}\) Scott 2009.

\(^{21}\) Crawford 428. A curule chair is visible within the temple; a voting urn appears on the right and a tablet inscribed *A (absolvit) C (condemnit)* on the left. On the obverse, a head of Vesta, wearing a veil, inscribed VESTA. The issue refers to the presidency of L. Cassius Longinus Ravilla, ancestor of the moneyer, over a special *quaestio* set up in 113 to try three Vestals for *incestum*.

\(^{22}\) Cic. *Leg.* 2.20; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.64.5; Plut. *Num.* 9.5.
description of its ideally eternal nature. As long as it burned, the flame guaranteed the continuity of the city. At the conclusion of his impassioned speech against the proposed migration to Veii following the Gallic sack, Livy’s Camillus reminds the Romans “hic Vestae ignes” (here are the fires of Vesta, 5.54.7), implying that the flame could not be removed from its place in the Roman forum. The hearth in the aedes Vesta was the physical and symbolic center of the city, just as the family hearth was the focal point of the Roman home.

The eternal flame served as a kind of talisman, which meant that its extinction was believed to foretell the destruction of the city. This portentous occurrence was often seen as a sign that one of the Vestals had violated her vow of chastity. Following the list of prodigies reported in 206, Livy notes that the Romans were even more terrified by the news that the flame in the aedes Vesta had gone out. It was established that the Vestal in charge of the fire the night it went out had simply been careless, and so she was flogged by the pontifex maximus according to the usual custom. Although the flame had been extinguished on account of a Vestal’s negligence, it was nonetheless decided to hold a sacrifice and a supplicatio in the aedes Vesta. This decision indicates that even the accidental extinction of the fire was regarded as a serious matter.

In his speech in defense of M. Fonteius, whose sister Fonteia was a Vestal, Cicero affirms the central and active role the Vestals played in preserving the Roman state:

Do not, O judges, allow the altars of the immortal gods, and of our mother Vesta, to be reminded of your verdict by the daily lamentations of a holy virgin. Beware lest that eternal flame, which is now preserved by the nightly toils and vigils of Fonteia, should be said to have been extinguished by the tears of your sacerdos. A Vestal Virgin is stretching out towards you her suppliant hands, those same hands which she is accustomed to stretch out, on your behalf, to the immortal gods. Consider how dangerous, how arrogant a deed it

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23 For the ideally eternal nature of the flame, see, for example, Cic. Cat. 4.18.11 (illum ignem Vestae sempiternum); Livy 5.52.7 (aeternis Vestae ignibus); Ov. Fast. 6.297 (ignis inexstinctus); Vell. 2.131 (perpetuorum...ignium); Plut. Num. 9.5 (τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἀθάνατον).
24 See also Plut. Cam. 31.4.
25 See, for example, Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.67.5.
26 Livy 28.11.6: plus omnibus aut nuntiatis peregre aut visis domi prodigiis terruit animos hominum ignis in aede Vestae extinctus (what terrified the minds of men more than all the portents reported from the country or seen in the city was the extinction of the fire in the temple of Vesta).
would be for you to reject her entreaties, when, if the immortal gods were to despise her prayers, all these things which we see around us could not be safe.

According to Cicero, the Roman state was kept safe by the Vestals’ laborious and vigilant care for the eternal flame and by their prayers to the dii immortals.

The vital importance of the eternal flame to Rome’s continued safety, as well as the fact that the Vestals were subject to severe corporal punishment if it went out, raises the question of how much time the women actually spent with the flame. One nineteenth century scholar suggested that the Vestals worked in pairs tending the flame for eight-hour shifts.\(^{28}\) No ancient literary source addresses this question directly, though as we have seen, Cicero at least expected constant vigilance. The orator echoes his depiction of Fonteia’s commitment in a later treatise:

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\text{complexa sit, ei colendae <VI> virgines praesint, ut advigiletur facilius ad custodiam ignis, et sentiant mulieres <in> naturam feminarum omnem castitatem pati (Leg. 2.12.29)}.
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Six virgins should take care of her (Vesta’s) cult, in order that they may more easily be alert in guarding the fire and so that women may recognize that the nature of woman permits complete purity.

Several visual representations of the Vestals, however, indicate that all six women could be absent from the aedes Vestae at the same time. The Vestals appear as a group on the altar frieze of the Ara Pacis Augustae in a procession that may depict the anniversarium sacrificium, the annual sacrifice commemorating Augustus’ return from Spain and Gaul in 13 (Fig. 7).\(^{29}\) It seems unlikely that all six Vestals would have been depicted on such a visible and important monument if their presence outside of the aedes Vestae were regarded as dangerous or irregular in any way. This visual evidence suggests that the Vestals had assistants of some sort, perhaps servi publici, who cared for the flame while they were participating in other religious rites.

While guarding the ignis Vestae was undoubtedly the Vestals’ most important ritual obligation, this responsibility has tended to overshadow their other religious activities in the modern imagination. For instance, the Vestals were also responsible for the care of the penus Vestae. According to Festus, the penus was the innermost place in the aedes and was surrounded by screens to shield it from view (locus intimus in aede Vestae tegetibus saeptus, 296L).

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\(^{28}\) Jordan 1886.

\(^{29}\) For this rite, see below. For a detailed discussion of the altar relief, see Thompson 2005, with full bibliography.
This storeroom contained the seven *pignora imperii*, talismans for the preservation of Rome. The most prominent of these was the Palladium, the ancient statue of Pallas believed to have been brought from Troy by Aeneas. These sacred objects were evidently accessible only to the Vestals. Even the *pontifex* L. Caecilius Metellus (cos. 251), who saw the Palladium and the other *sacra* only while rescuing them from the burning *aedes* in 241, was allegedly stricken with blindness as a result. Through their care of the eternal flame burning and Vesta’s hearth and the pledges of Rome’s eternity in the *penus Vestae*, the Vestals ensured the continuity and safety of the Roman state.

The *aedes Vestae* and the *sacra* within it also required daily purification. Plutarch says that the Vestals used water drawn from the spring of Egeria outside the Capena Gate. Later, however, it seems that they employed the spring of Juturna near the *aedes Vestae* (Fig. 32). The mythical Vestals Rhea Silvia and Tarpeia both fetch water themselves (albeit with disastrous results), which suggests that Roman authors imagined this as a task that could be undertaken by them. According to Servius, the water used in rituals associated with the cult of Vesta was carried in a special vessel that would spill if set down:

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nam futtile vas quoddam est lato ore, fundo angusto, quo utebantur in sacris Vestae, quia aqua ad sacra Vestae hausta in terra non ponitur, quod si fiat, piaculum est: unde excogitatum vas est, quod stare non posset, sed positum effunderetur (*Aen.* 11.339).
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The futtile is a vessel with a wide mouth and a narrow base which they used in the rites of Vesta, since water drawn for the rites of Vesta is not placed on the ground. But if this happens, it is a matter for expiation (*piaculum*). For this reason a vessel was devised which could not stand up but would immediately spill when set down.

The care taken to ensure that water designated for purificatory purposes did not come into contact with the ground may reasonably be attributed to the chthonic associations of the earth. What is likely a representation of the futtile appears on the Severan entablature frieze of the *aedes Vestae* alongside other ritual implements utilized by the Vestals (Fig. 38). The

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30 According to Servius (*Aen.* 7.188), the others were the *quadriga fictilis Veientanorum*, the *cineris Orestis*, the *sceptrum Priami*, the *velum Ilionae*, the *ancilia* and the *acus matris deum*, but most authors confess their ignorance of the matter (see, for example, Dion. Hal. 2.66.6).


33 Plut. *Num.* 13.2. This spring watered the spot where the *ancilia* (shields) had fallen from heaven.

34 Scullard 1981: 149.

35 For Tarpeia, see Prop. 4.4.16. For Rhea Silvia, see Ov. *Fast.* 3.11-2.

36 Propertius describes Tarpeia’s water jar as a “*fictilis urna*” (earthen jar, 4.4.16). For the futtile, see Siebert 1999: 52, 219.
vessel sits upright on a base, which suggests that the *futile* could be stored in this way when not in use. The frieze provides striking visual confirmation of our literary source and suggests that the water carried in the *futile* was regarded as central to the ritual activities that took place within the precinct of Vesta.

The Vestals were also responsible for the preparation and preservation of *mola salsa*, an essential component of every Roman sacrifice. Servius provides the fullest description of the processes involved in the preparation of this substance:

Virgines Vestales tres maximae ex nonis Maiis ad pridie idus Maias alternis diebus spicas adoreas in corbibus messuariis ponunt easque spicas ipsae virgines torrent, pinsunt, molunt atque ita molitum condunt. Ex eo farre virgines ter in anno molam faciunt, Lupercalibus, Vestalibus, idibus septembribus, adiecto sale cocto et sale duro (*Ecl. 8.82*).

The three senior Vestal Virgins from the day after the Nones of May to the day before the Ides of May, on alternate days, place heads of grain in harvest baskets, and these heads the virgins themselves toast, pound, grind, and store what has been ground. From this *far*, the virgins three times a year make *mola*, at the Lupercalia, at the Vestalia and on the Ides of September, when cooked salt and hard salt have been added.

The manufacture of *mola salsa* evidently involved several distinct phases. The first of these took place on alternate days beginning “*ex nonis Maiis,*” by which Servius must mean the day after the Nones of May (8 May), rather than the Nones itself (7 May), and ending on the day before the Ides (14 May). The fact that the Vestals performed the necessary tasks on alternating days may be explained by a desire to avoid overlapping with the rites of the Lemuria, held on 9, 11 and 13 May.

Servius’ claim that the Vestals “place heads of grain in harvest baskets” (*spicas adoreas in corbibus messuariis ponunt*) implies that they spent at least part of these alternating days harvesting *far*. According to Varro, however, the normal harvest season for *far* fell between the summer solstice and the rise of Canicula, or from 24 June to 26 July.\(^{37}\) If the Vestals harvested the *far* they used to make *mola salsa* in early May, the grain they gathered was premature by over a month, maybe even two. Modern attempts to explain this chronological discrepancy by hypothesizing a symbolic association between unripe grain and the *lemures*, the wandering spirits of the prematurely deceased, have provided less than

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\(^{37}\) Varro *Rust.* 1.32. Pliny places the harvest in July (*H.N. 18.295-8*), while Columella says that in temperate places and along the coast, the harvest took place between the fifteenth of July and the first of August (*Rust. 11.2.53-4*). Studies of modern Italian agriculture indicate that the wheat harvest in the vicinity of Rome generally takes place around the thirteenth of June, which could indicate that these authors are writing for a Northern Italian audience (Broughton 1936: 355).
convincing results. According to Servius, the far was prepared and preserved for mola salsa, not offered to the lemures at the Lemuria. Perhaps the grain was harvested early in the expectation of a plentiful harvest in the weeks to come.

It is also possible that the chronological problem has a calendrical rather than a ritual explanation. It is a puzzling feature of the Roman festival calendar that even after the Julian reforms in 45, certain agricultural rites remained stranded at the wrong time of the year. The Consualia and the Opsconsivia, both harvest festivals, fell at the end of August, a month or more after the end of the harvest season. Under the pre-Julian Republican calendar, the disjunction between civil and natural time often was far more pronounced. The solar eclipse of 190, for example, which can be dated to 14 March on the Julian calendar, was observed in Rome on the fifth day before the Ides of Quintilis (11 July).

The Romans did have a way to circumvent the inadequacies of their system for tracking time. The Sementivae (Seed-Sowing Festival), for example, was one of the feriae conceptivae, movable feasts that did not have a fixed day on the calendar but were announced by the rex sacrorum each year. In his account of the sowing festival, Ovid addresses the problematic relationship between natural time and a fixed day on the civil calendar:

Ter quater evolvi signantes tempora fastos,
nec Sementiva est ulla reperta dies;
cum mihi (sensit enim) “lux haec indicitur” inquit
Musa, “quid a fastis non stata sacra petis?
utque dies incerta sacri, sic tempora certa,
seminibus iactis est ubi fetus ager” (Fast. 657-62).

I have searched the calendar three or four times but nowhere found the Day of Sowing. Seeing this the Muse said, “That day is announced, why are you looking for moveable days in the calendar? Though the day of the feast is uncertain, its time is known, when the seed has been sown and the land is productive.”

The Muse tells Ovid that although the calendar cannot track the Sementivae, the natural time for the celebration is easily discovered. Nonetheless, despite the existence of this

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38 For this suggestion, see Nagy 1985.
39 For the Roman calendar, see Michels 1967; Rüpke 1995; Feeney 2007. Roman authors were keenly aware of the difference between “the division made by nature” (natura discrimen), as Varro calls it, and “the names of the days as given by the city” (civilia vocabula dierum, Ling. 6.12). As Denis Feeney notes, “The inherent arbitrariness of the human plotting of time is an important theme in Ovid’s poem [Fasti], highlighting the way in which the Romans could appreciate that even the web that Caesar had thrown over the flow of time was fundamentally a convention, a human grid for human convenience, ultimately incommensurable with the phenomena it purported to capture” (2007: 203).
mechanism to ensure the synchronization of agricultural rites with the relevant time of year, the majority of festivals remained tied to specific dates on the civil calendar.

The lack of harmony between natural and civil time raises important questions about the ways in which agricultural festivals were experienced at Rome. The large number of agricultural rites in the festival calendar indicates that early Roman religion addressed the activities and anxieties of the peasant farmer. What happened when natural time and civil time began to drift apart? As the city became more urbanized, the disjunction between the natural cycle of time and the festival calendar likely became less of an issue. While agricultural festivals continued to be celebrated in the late Republic, many of them acquired new emphases. Mary Beard has argued that the festival calendar offered city-dwelling Romans of the late Republic one important way of “imaging Rome” by presenting “a picture of Romanness – linking the past with the present, and bringing together apparently diverse aspects of the Roman religious and cultural tradition. In a sense, the ritual calendar as a whole can be seen as a conceptual pageant of Rome and of what it was to be Roman.”

Festivals like the Parilia, for example, which coincided with the traditional date for the foundation of Rome, were interpreted and experienced in light of the historical circumstances of their origin, rather than their primitive agricultural “meaning.” In this way, Beard argues, the festivals remained relevant to the sophisticated urban culture of the late Republic. The meaning of religious festivals at Rome was therefore multivalent and open to new interpretation. Thus the precise implications of the time at which the Vestals harvested far may have changed over the course of the Republican period, even though the significance of the final product, mola salsa, likely remained the same.

In the second phase of the preparation process, the eldest three Vestals toasted, pounded and ground the far that would become mola salsa. Far is one of the oldest types of grain cultivated in Italy. Although the Romans grew a wide variety of grains to avoid the perils of dependence on a single crop, far held a central position in Roman conceptions of their agricultural and alimentary history. The Romans believed that far had provided the basis of their ancestor’s diet. It was also essential to a wide variety of religious rites. It is a

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41 Beard 1987: 281.
42 According to Pliny, far was the first grain cultivated by the ancient Latins, and was used to make porridge (puls), not bread (N.H. 18.83). Verrius Flaccus claimed that far was the only kind of wheat cultivated by the Romans for three hundred years (Pliny N.H. 18.62). Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.25.2 comments on the antiquity of far and its continued use in a religious context.
43 Purcell 2003: 332.
husked wheat, which means that the grains cannot be detached from the husk by threshing. Husked wheats must be roasted and then pounded with a mortar and pestle in order to extract the grain. At some point, the practical necessity of roasting far acquired the force of religio. According to Pliny, the Romans believed that far was not acceptable as a religious offering unless it had been roasted. Ovid’s account of the Fornacalia, a festival in honor of the oven goddess Fornax, suggests that the rite was a ritual reenactment of the transformation of raw grain into a form useful either for consumption or religious purposes. As the patron goddess of Roman bakers, Vesta was closely associated with Fornax, and it is therefore unsurprising that her sacerdotes were responsible for roasting the far used in the community’s religious rites. The roasting and pounding process likely took place in the atrium, where space was set aside for ritual activities. Indeed, an oven and a mill were discovered in two of the rooms in the southeastern corner of the complex (Fig. 39).

The Vestals’ activities in early May were a crucial first step in a process with wider ritual implications. According to Servius, the Vestals mixed the ground far with “cooked salt and hard salt” (sale cocto et sale duro, Ecl. 8.82) at the Vestalia in June, the Ludi Romani in September and the Lupercalia in February. It is generally assumed that the salt in question is the muries described by Festus:

Muries est, quemadmodum Veranius docet, ea quae fit ex sali sordido, in pila pisato, et in ollam fictilem coniecto, ibique operto gysatoque et in furno percocto; cui virgines Vestales serra ferrea secto, et in seriam coniecto, quae est intus in aede Vestae in penu exteriore, aquam iugem, vel quamlibet, praeter quam per fistulas venit, addunt, atque ea demum in sacrificiis utuntur (152L).

Muries is, as Veranius teaches, that which is made from unrefined salt, crushed in a mortal, and put in a jar made of clay, and there covered with gypsum and cooked thoroughly in an oven; to this, after it has been cut with an iron saw, and put into a cylindrical earthen vessel, which is within in the aedes Vestae in the outer penus, the Vestal Virgins add continually flowing water, even as much as they want, except that which comes through pipes, and at last they use it in sacrifices.

Like the roasting and pounding of the far, the preparation of muries likely took place in the atrium Vestae. Russell Scott suggests that the penus exterior was also located in the atrium.

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45 Pliny N.H. 18.8. The Romans offered first fruits to Ceres (see Festus 423L). An offering of far also began every burnt sacrifice (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.25.2).
47 Scott 2009: 30-1.
48 Coarelli 1994: 100.
Vestae, despite Festus’ belief that it was in the aedes proper.49 The existence of two storerooms within the Vesta complex is an intriguing possibility. The ancient sources state unanimously that the penus in the aedes contained the pignora imperii. Perhaps the outer penus, located in the atrium, was reserved for the production and storage of muries, mola salsa, and other ritual substances produced by the Vestals.50 This second penus, associated with the preservation of specially prepared far, may have been regarded as a public parallel to the household storeroom, just as the hearth in the aedes corresponded to the private hearth in each Roman home. In any case, the tasks involved in the preparation of mola salsa suggest that the ritual activities of the Vestals were not restricted to the aedes, but rather extended into the atrium as well.

The carefully ritualized process of preparation culminated in the immolatio (offering), when the sacrificant sprinkled wine and mola salsa on the head of the victim.51 This act simultaneously purified the animal and made it sacer (sacred), transferring it to the control of the deity concerned.52 The Latin expression immolatio, which came to signify the sacrificial act as a whole, originally described this preliminary step.53 The term suggests that the Romans regarded the act of dedication, rather than the actual slaughter of the victim, as the essence of sacrifice.54

The Vestals’ obligation to provide the substance that sustained the entire sacrificial system is further evidence of their centrality in Roman religion. Every public sacrifice in the city of Rome originated in the atrium Vestae, where the Vestals produced and preserved mola salsa.55 The centralization of this process also suggests that Roman religious practices were actually more systematic than is often assumed. Although different sacrificial victims were associated with individual deities according to their gender, sphere of influence and status within the pantheon, each victim was purified and dedicated with the same ritual substance. Mola salsa, and by extension the Vestals who had manufactured it, unified an otherwise disparate and seemingly chaotic collection of religious rites.

49 Scott 2009: 31, n. 34.
50 See below.
51 For the immolatio, see Prevosti 2007: 36-7, 102-9.
52 Cic. Div. 2.37; Tib. 1.5.14; Plin. H.N. 31.89; Festus 97, 124L; Serv. Aen. 2.133, 4.57.
53 Festus 97L; Serv. Aen. 10.541.
55 Koch (1932) and Scheid (1990: 335-6) argue that the Vestals provided mola salsa for every public sacrifice in Rome. It is not known whether the flame for each public sacrifice was ignited at the hearth of Vesta, although this would strengthen the symbolism.
Annual Public Festivals

In addition to their daily activities within the precinct of Vesta, the Vestals participated in at least ten annual public rites arranged throughout the festival calendar. Although we know the specific role played by the Vestals at some festivals, it remains unclear what their responsibilities were at others. This unfortunate circumstance is due in part to the uneven nature of the ancient sources. Ovid’s *Fasti*, our most comprehensive source for the Roman festival calendar, only covers the months from January to June, which means that details about rites that fell in the second half of the year must be pieced together from less complete sources. It must also be noted that Ovid is a problematic source. The *Fasti* is a sophisticated poetic work that engages with ritual and offers interpretations of it, and it would be misleading to suggest that the can be used as a mirror of reality. Nonetheless, we do hear more about the Vestals’ ritual responsibilities than about those of nearly any other sacerdos at Rome, a circumstance that reflects their significance in Roman religion and, perhaps even more importantly, ancient interest in their activities.56

Although the public rites in which the Vestals participated appear quite diverse at first glance, their activities fall into several broad categories. The first is related to the production and preservation of religious substances. As we have seen, one of the Vestals’ most important obligations was the manufacture of *mola salsa*, which was used at public sacrifices to purify the victim and made it *sacer*. They also collected materials at the Fordicidia and the October Horse and prepared a purificatory substance for use at the rites of the Parilia. Purification was a field of religious activity with which the Vestals were intimately connected. They cleansed and purified the *aedes Vestae* during the Vestalia and renewed the flame on the hearth on 1 March. The Vestals also participated in the rites of the Argei, an elaborate citywide purification ceremony. Other of the public festivals can be broadly defined as “agricultural rites,” including the Fordicidia, the Parilia, the Consualia, the festival of Ops Consivia, the October Horse, and the December rites of Bona Dea. The Vestals’ primary responsibilities in these ceremonies appear to have been connected to the production and preservation of the food supply, which is surely connected to their role as the guardians of the communal *penus* in the *aedes Vestae*.

The First of March

In early Rome, the new year began on 1 March. Although the civil calendar eventually adopted 1 January as New Year’s Day, religious rites associated with the new year remained fixed in their original place. Indeed, Ovid suggests that 1 March, when spring was just beginning, was the “natural” day to begin the new year. The poet asks the god Janus a leading question in book one of the *Fasti*: “*dic age frigoribus quare novus incipit anus, / qui melius per ver incipiendus erat?*” (Tell me, why does the new year begin in the cold season, when it would have been better for it to begin in the spring? 1.149-50). Ovid emphasizes the newness of the spring in the following lines, claiming that time itself is renewed in that season (*tunc est nova temporis aetas*, 1.151). The first of March was in fact marked by rituals that symbolized the renewal of the year:

> laurea, flaminibus quate toto perstii anno,
tollitur, et frondes sunt in honore novae.
ianua tum regis posita viret arbore Phoebi:
ante tuas fit idem, curia prisca, fores.
Vesta quoque ut folio niteat velata recenti,
cedit ab Iliacis laurea cana focis.
adde, quod arcane fieri novus ignis in aede

The laurel branch of the *flamines*, after remaining in its place the whole year, is removed, and fresh leaves are put in the place of honor. Then the door of the *rex* is green with the tree of Phoebus, which is set at it, and at your doors, ancient *curia*, the same thing is done. The withered laurel is withdrawn from the Ilian hearth, that Vesta also may make a brave show, dressed in fresh leaves. Besides, it is said that a new fire is lighted in her secret shrine, and the rekindled flame gains strength.

The previous year’s decoration of laurel branches were removed from the house of the *rex* and *regina sacrorum*, the *aedes Vestae*, the *curiae*, and the houses of the *flamines* and replaced with fresh garlands that symbolized the newness of the year. These buildings were among the oldest in the city, and the rite is likely an ancient one. It was likely regarded as a rite of purification, in which the remnants of the old year were removed and disposed of to make way for the new.

The Vestals also extinguished the previous year’s fire on the hearth of the *aedes Vestae* and kindled it anew. Festus describes the method used by the Vestals to obtain a new fire:

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57 The consuls first took office on the first of January in 153.
58 Feeney 2007: 204-5.
59 See also Macrob. *Sat.* 1.12.6.
60 Ov. *Fast.* 3.143-4; Festus 94L; Macrob. *Sat.* 1.12.6
flame when the fire was extinguished through neglect, and it seems likely that they employed
the same technique on 1 March:

ignis Vestae si quando interstinctus esset, virgines verberibus adficiebantur a pontifice,
quibus mos erat tabulam felicis materiae tam diu terebrare, quosque exceptum ignem cribro
aeneo virgo in aedem ferret (94L).

If the fire of Vesta was ever extinguished, the virgins were beaten with whips by the
pontifex. It was the custom for them to drill a board of favourable wood for a very long
time, a virgin then bore the fire taken from this into the aedes in a bronze sieve.\(^61\)

The renewal of the flame was highly symbolic, and may plausibly be compared to similar
rituals in the Greek world. Robert Parker has written that the rekindling of the communal
flame on the public hearth of the polis “was the most potent renewal a Greek community
could undergo, since, lodged in the individual hearths of houses and the collective hearth of
the city, fire was the symbolic middle point around which the life of the group revolved.”\(^62\)
In Rome, where the ignis Vestae served as a potent symbol of the inviolability of the
community and its relationship to the gods, the renewal of the flame must have been
particularly charged. The fresh laurel branches and the renewed flame, which guaranteed the
permanence and well-being of the community, ensured that the city would continue to
flourish and gain strength in the new year.

**The Fordicidia**

The next public rites in which the Vestals participated were those of the Fordicidia,
which took place on 15 April. Ovid describes the ritual in the fourth book of his *Fasti*:

Tertia post Veneris cum lux surrexit Idus,
pontifices, forda sacra litate bove.
forda ferens bos est fecundaque, dicta ferendo:
\[\text{hinc etiam fetus nomen habere putant.}\]
nune gravidum pecus est, gravidae quoquo semine terrae:
\[\text{Telluri plenae victima plena datur.}\]
pars cadit arce Iovis, ter denas curia vaccas
\[\text{accipit et largo sparsa cruore madet.}\]
est ubi visceribus vitulos rapuere ministri
sectaque fumosis exta dedere focis,
\[\text{igne cremat vitulos quae natu maxima virgo est,}\]
\[\text{luce Palis populos purget ut ille cinis (629-40).}\]

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\(^61\) Plutarch describes a second method involving sunlight (*Num. 9*). It is worth noting that the Vestal Tuccia,
accused of incestum ca. 230, proved her innocence by carrying water in a cribro from the Tiber to the aedes
Vestae (Val. Max. 8.1.5; Pliny *H.N.* 28.2). The fact that the bronze sieve was a ritual implement utilized by the
Vestals perhaps adds another layer of meaning to Tuccia’s miraculous accomplishment.
\(^62\) Parker 1996: 23.
When the third day shall have dawned after the Ides of Venus, pontiffs, offer in sacrifice a pregnant (forā) cow. *Forda* is a cow with calf and fruitful, so called from *ferendo* (“bearing”): they think that *fetus* is derived from the same root. Now are the cattle big with young; the ground, too, is big with seed: to teeming Earth is given a teeming victim. Some are slain in the citadel of Jupiter; the *curiae* get thrice ten cows, and are splashed and drenched with blood in plenty. But when the attendants have torn the calves from the bowels of their mothers, and put the cut entrails on the smoking hearths, the *virgo maxima* burns the calves in the fire, that their ashes may purify the people on the day of Pales.

Ovid’s lengthy aetiology suggests that the rites of the Fordicidia were designed to ensure the fertility of the flocks, herds, and most importantly the fertility of the fields. He explains the symbolism of the peculiar sacrifice as follows: “*nunc gravidum pecus est, gravidae quoque semine terrae: telluri plenae victima plena datur*” (now are the cattle big with young; the ground, too, is big with seed: to teeming Earth is given a teeming victim, 4.633-4). Because the earth and the cattle were both ‘pregnant’ at this time of year, a pregnant cow was sacrificed. The calf embryo symbolized the buried grain (*semen*), and its sacrifice was exchanged for the successful germination of the crop.

Thanks to Ovid’s description, it is possible to identify the role of the Vestals in this rite with some precision. The primary ritual was the parallel sacrifice of a pregnant cow (forā) to Tellus on the Capitol and in each of the thirty *curiae* of Rome. When the individual sacrifices were complete, the *virgo maxima* burned the remains of the calves in the fire of Vesta. It is very unlikely that the burning of the calves was regarded as a sacrificial act. Since the calf must have been dead when the *virgo maxima* received it, she did not slaughter it in the manner of a sacrificial victim. Moreover, the entire calf was burned on the altar, not just certain parts of the animal in accordance with traditional sacrificial practice. The sacrificial portion of the Fordicidia took place on the Capitoline Hill and in the thirty *curiae*, not in the *аedes Vestae*.

The *virgo maxima’s* role at the Fordicidia belonged to a secondary phase of the ritual. The ashes of the calves, together with beanstalks and blood from the tail of the October Horse, constituted the purificatory materials that she and the other Vestals would distribute.

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64 The sacrifice conforms to the ordinary symbolic rule that a divinity is provided with victims that are homologous to it (i.e. male or female, depending on its sex). It also provides the divinity, although in a different form, with what it is expected to produce in return for the sacrifice (Dumézil 1970: 371-2).

at the Parilia just a few days later.\textsuperscript{66} Thus the Vestals’ primary responsibility was the collection, preservation and production of a purificatory substance for use at a later festival.\textsuperscript{67} Their role in this festival is reminiscent of their responsibility for the manufacture and storage of \textit{mola salsa} and further elucidates this important aspect of their religious competence.

\textit{The Parilia}

The rites of the Parilia occurred just under a week later on 21 April. The Parilia coincided with the traditional day of Rome’s foundation, and much of the ancient evidence associates the festival with the furrow ploughed by Romulus to mark the \textit{pomerium}.\textsuperscript{68} Many of the rituals, however, seem to have been designed to purify and protect the flocks, and it is with these rites that the Vestals are associated.\textsuperscript{69} As we have seen, purification appears to have been a field of religious activity with which the Vestals were particularly concerned. Once again, the fullest description of the rites is found in Ovid’s \textit{Fasti}, where the poet even claims to have participated in the festival.\textsuperscript{70} Shepherds cleaned their sheep-folds and decorated them with garlands and fumigated their sheep with sulphur and fragrant plants. In the evening, the shepherd, and perhaps the sheep as well, had to pass through bonfires in what was evidently a boisterous and festive ceremony.\textsuperscript{71}

According to Propertius, the festival had a rural and an urban component.\textsuperscript{72} Some scholars speculate that the \textit{suffimen} mentioned by Ovid was related to the urban festival, presumably because it originated at the hearth of Vesta:\textsuperscript{73}

\begin{quote}
\begin{verse}
i, pete virginea, populus, suffimen ab ara;  
Vesta dabit, Vestae munere purus eris.  
sanguis equi suffimen erit vitulique favilla,
\end{verse}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{66} Ov. \textit{Fast.} 4.721-34.  
\textsuperscript{68} For the Parilia as Rome’s birthday, see Prop. 4.4.73-80; Cic. \textit{Div.} 2.98; Dion. Hal. 1.88.3; Vell. Pat. 1.8.4; Plut. \textit{Rom.} 12.1; Beard 1987.  
\textsuperscript{69} Ovid offers seven different explanations for the festival’s origins and significance (Ov. \textit{Fast.} 783-848, with Beard 1987).  
\textsuperscript{70} Ov. \textit{Fast.} 4.721-83. See also Prop. 4.4.73-80; Tib. 2.5.89ff.; Cic. \textit{Div.} 2.98; Varro \textit{Ling.} 6.15; Dion. Hal. 1.88.3; Vell. Pat. 1.8.4; Plut. \textit{Rom.} 12.1; Festus 248L; Ath. 8.361.  
\textsuperscript{71} Propertius refers to the drunken crowd (\textit{ebria turb\ae} 4.4.78) leaping through the fires.  
\textsuperscript{72} Prop. 4.4.73-8: \textit{urbi festus erat (divere Parilia patres), / hic primus coepit moenibus esse dies, / annua pastorum convivia, / Hussus in urbe, / cum pagana madent fercula divitiis, / cuncte super rivos faeni flammanatis aceros / traiicit immundos ebria turb\ae\ pedes (the city had a festival (the fathers named it the Parilia): it was the birthday of Rome’s walls, the yearly banquet of the shepherds, a time of urban revelry, when village dishes flow rich with plenty and over the scattered heaps of burning hay the tipsy crowd kicks high its grumpy feet).  
\textsuperscript{73} Beard, North and Price 1998: 175.
Go, people, seek materials for fumigation (suffi
den) from the virgin altar. Vesta will give them, by Vesta’s gift you shall be pure. The materials for fumigation will be the blood of a horse and the ashes of a calf; the third thing will be the empty stalks of hard beans.

Although Ovid does not explicitly mention the Vestals in the above passage, references to Vesta’s altar imply that they were involved in the distribution of the suffimen. As we have seen, the Vestals had procured one element of the suffimen, the ashes of a calf (vitulique favilla), at the Fordicidia a few days earlier. They had preserved the second ingredient, the blood of a horse (sanguis equi), for even longer, having collected it at the previous year’s October Horse. The stalks of hard beans (durae fabae) likely originated in the rites of another festival, though it is unclear what that festival might have been. No ancient source explains why the Vestals preserved the blood of the October Horse and combined it with the remnants of another sacrifice for use in a third ritual, but the shared materials, and the Vestals’ role in preserving and preparing those materials, created a link between the three festivals and provided a sense of continuity across the seasons.

The Argei

The Vestals participated in another important purification rite in the month of May. Each year on the Ides of May the Vestals threw human shaped dolls made from rush straw into the Tiber from the pons Sublictus, Rome’s oldest bridge (Fig. 40). The most detailed account of this ritual is provided by Dionysius of Halicarnassus:

ἐν ᾧ προθύσαντες ἱερὰ τὰ κατὰ τοὺς νόμους οἱ καλούμενοι Ποντίφικες, ἱερέων οἱ διαφανέστατοι, καὶ σὺν αὐτοῖς αἱ τὸ ἁθανάτον πῦρ διαφυλάττουσαι παρθένοι στρατηγοί τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πολιτῶν οὓς παρεῖναι ταῖς ιερουργίαις θέμις εἴδωλα μορφαῖς ἀνθρώπων ἐικάσμενα, τριάκοντα τὸν ἄριθμον ἀπὸ τῆς ἱερᾶς γεφυρᾶς βάλλουσιν εἰς τὸ ῥεῦμα τοῦ Τεβέριος, Ἀργείους αὐτὰ καλοῦντες (Ant. Rom. 1.38.2-3).

On this day, after offering the preliminary sacrifices according to the laws, the pontifices, as the most important of the hieris are called, and with them the virgins who guard the perpetual fire, the praetors, and such of the other citizens as may lawfully be present at the rites, throw from the sacred bridge into the stream of the Tiber thirty effigies made in the likeness of men, which they call Argei.

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74 See below.
75 Rüpke 2007b: 115.
76 For the date of the festival, see Graf 2000.
The Vestals, the pontifices, the praetors and a select group of citizens were permitted to attend the ceremony at the bridge. The pontifices first performed an initial sacrifice (προθυσία). Ovid and Festus confirm that the Vestals performed the central task of throwing the dolls from the bridge.

While Dionysius suggests that there were thirty Argei, Varro claims that there were twenty-seven, a number that corresponds to the twenty-seven sacrificia (shrines) also known as Argei to which a procession was made on 16 and 17 March. Although the ancient sources are silent about the details of the procession, scholars have often speculated that the Romans deposited the twenty-seven rush dolls in the twenty-seven sacrificia at this time. Ovid's wording, however, seems to contradict this assumption: itur ad Argeos (qui sint, sua pagina dicet) / bac, si commemini, praeteritaque die (If I remember rightly, on this, and the preceding day, they go to the Argei (their own page will tell who they are), Fast. 3.791-2). The rush dolls were already in the sacrificia in March and may have received offerings during the visitation. Whether or not the Vestals participated in the itur ad Argeos is an open question. The ancient sources do not specify a full list of attendees, but the Vestals' central role in the ceremony at the bridge strongly suggests that they participated in the procession in March as well.

The meaning of the ritual has been the subject of debate since antiquity. The ancient sources are unanimous in their belief that the rush dolls replaced real humans. These humans were either victims of human sacrifice in an early time, a rite abolished by Hercules in favor of sacrifice in effigie, or they were the bodies of the Argive companions of that hero who had died abroad and hoped to be carried home by the waters of the Tiber. Although some modern scholars have been willing to interpret the rite as a modified human sacrifice,

77 Dionysius offers no further explanation of why it was themis for some citizens to attend the ritual but not others.
78 Ov. Fast. 5.621-2: tum quoque priscorum virgo simulacra virorum / mittero roboreo scirpea ponte rolet (then too the virgin is accustomed to throw the rush effigies of ancient men from the oaken bridge); Festus 14L: Argoe vocabant scirpeas effigies, quae per virgines Vestales annis singulis taciebantur in Tiberim (Argei is the name of the rush effigies that are thrown into the Tiber each year by the Vestal Virgins). Varro Ling. 7.44 merely says that they were thrown “a sacerdotiis” (by the sacerdotes), which likely refers to the Vestals.
79 Varro Ling. 5.45-54: 7.44.
80 Livy (1.21), for example, mentions offerings at the Argei shrines: multa alia sacrificia locaque sacris faciendis quae Argoes pontifices vocant dedicavit (He [Numa] dedicated many other sacrifices and places for their performance, which the pontifices call Argei). See also Graf 2000: 99.
81 For modern discussions of the Argei rite, see, for example, Harmon 1978; Nagy 1985; Porte 1986; Radke 1990; Ziolkowski 1998-1999; Graf 2000.
82 Victims of human sacrifice: Ov. Fast. 5.631; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 1.38.2; Plut. Q.R. 32; Festus 450, 452L. Companions of Hercules: Ov. Fast. 5.639-60; Macr. Sat. 1.11.47
these aetiologies may tell us more about ancient perceptions of the rite than historical fact. It seems likely that the Argei was primarily a purification ritual. We are told that the flaminica Dialis attended with uncombed hair, a prohibition that she also observed during the purification of the aedes Vestae in June. Moreover, the act of throwing something into the Tiber was often related to cleansing and purification. On the final day of the Vestalia in June, the Vestals threw refuse (sterus) from the aedes Vestae into the Tiber, perhaps from the pons Sublicius. A parricida, a person who had contravened the most basic human laws, was cast into the river to drown, as were hermaphrodites and certain other prodigious beings. These abnormal figures could not be buried within Roman territory, where they might continue to pollute the community. Instead, they were thrown into the Tiber in an effort to cleanse the city of their presence. It is significant that the Vestals left the pomerium in an official capacity only on the Ides of May and on the final day of the Vestalia. On both occasions, they threw polluted materials into the Tiber in order to purify the city and its hearth.

Plutarch calls the Argei “the most important rite of purification” (τὸν μέγιστον ποιοῦνται τῶν καθαρμῶν, Q.R. 86). The ceremony at the bridge may be related to the Lemuria, which was observed privately on 9, 11 and 13 May. The Lemuria was designed to expel the lemures, the visiting spirits of one’s prematurely dead ancestors. Perhaps the rush dolls thrown into the Tiber on 15 May represented and made visible the absent dead bodies of these and any other spirits lurking throughout the city. As Adam Ziolkowski writes, “[t]he sacraria or, more precisely, the puppets deposited in them, would have acted as district vacuum-cleaners swallowing up ritual filth which eventually, like ordinary waste, ended up in the Tiber.”

83 See, for example, Fowler 1902: 115-9; Frazer 1929: 74-9; Hallett 1970: 219-27.
84 Lucy Holland (1961: 314-34) suggested that the rite was designed to allow the Vestals to get rid of the straw from preparing the mola salsa on the previous four days, but, as we have seen, the rush dolls were already in the shrines in March.
85 Gell. N.A. 10.15.30: ... cum it ad Argeos, quod neque comit caput neque capillum defectit (When she [the flaminica Dialis] goes to the Argei, she neither combs her head nor dresses her hair). Gerhard Radke (1990: 11) corrected Gellius’ text to read “cum it<ur> ad argos” because the flaminica Dialis is not explicitly named by Dionysius as a participant in the ceremony at the bridge (he is followed by Graf 2000: 101). According to his reading, the flaminica and her uncombed hair presumably stayed home during the ritual on the bridge. This is an unnecessary conjecture, however, if we assume that Dionysius included the flaminica among the “Ποντίφικες.”
86 For the Lemuria, see Ov. Fast. 5.431-44.
87 This explanation was first suggested by Frazer (1929: IV 89-90), who later abandoned it in favor of one that saw the ritual as a human sacrifice. Recently, Ziolkowski (1998-9) and Graf (2000) have revived the idea.
the Vestals played a central role.

*The Vestalia*

Vesta’s main festival, the Vestalia, was celebrated on 9 June. From 7 June to 15 June, the *aedes Vestae* and perhaps even the *penus*, if Festus is to be believed, were opened to the *matronae* of Rome.⁸⁹ Ovid claims to have seen a *matrona* making her way to the temple barefoot (*huc pede matronam vidi descendere nudo*, 6.398), but it is uncertain to what part of the ritual this notice is referring. The Vestalia proper on 9 June was evidently a baker’s festival, during which Roman bakers brought a grain offering to Vesta and honored their mills and donkeys with garlands and loaves of bread.⁹⁰ The Vestals likely received the gifts brought to the *aedes Vestae* on the day of the festival and may have burned them on the hearth in the temple.

Archaeological evidence supports a close association between Vesta and Roman bakers. Several *lararia* in Pompeian *pistrinae* depict the goddess and a donkey, including one in which she has displaced the Genius as the central figure in the scene (Fig. 41).⁹¹ A marble altar dated to the early first century A.D. depicts Vesta enthroned holding a *patera* and accompanied by a donkey, signifying her role as patroness of bakers (Fig. 42).⁹² Although the provenance of the altar is not known, it appears to have been commissioned for a private or semi-private context, perhaps even a bakery or the home of a baker. The so-called Baker’s Relief of Vesta depicts a very similar scene (Fig. 43).⁹³ This relief was dedicated in A.D. 144 by C. Pupius Firminus, *quaestor* of the *collegium pistorum* of Rome, and closely connects the goddess to bakers and organized bread making.

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⁸⁹ The calendar of Philocalus records “VESTA APERIT” on 7 June and “VESTA CLUDITUR” on 15 June. Festus specifies that it was the *penus* that was opened to the *matronae* (*Penus vocatur locus intimus in aede Vestae tegetibus saepus, qui certis diebus circa Vestalia aperitur*, 296L).

⁹⁰ Ov. *Fast.* 6.310-8: *fert missos Vestae pura patella cibos. / Ecce coronatis panis dependet asellis, / et velant scabrosa florid molas. / sola prius furnis torrebant farra coloni/ (et Fornacali sunt sua sacra deae: / subpositum cineri pistor dominum focus ipse/ parabat, / stratusque erat tepido tegula quassa sola. / inde focum servat pistor dominamque focorum/ et quae pumiceas versat/ asella molas* (A clean dish contains the food offered to Vesta. See, loaves are hung from garlanded mules, and flowery wreaths veil the rough millstones. Once farmers only used to parch far in their ovens, and the goddess of ovens has her sacred rites): The hearth baked the bread, set under the embers, on a broken tile placed there on the heated floor. So the baker honors the hearth, and the lady of hearths, and the she-ass that turns the pumice millstones). Seneca also describes this method of baking and attributes the custom to the early Romans (*quem primo cinis calidus et fervens testa percorrit, deinde furni paulatim reperti et alia genera, quorum fervor serviret arbitrio, Epist. Mor.* 90.23). For the association between Vesta and bakers, see also Prop. 4.1.21.

⁹¹ See, for example, Boyce 1937: Cat. Nos. 240, 313, 316 and 318.

⁹² For this relief, see Thompson 2005: 105-8, 188-9.

⁹³ For this relief, see Thompson 2005: 146-54, 193.
The rituals associated with the Vestalia indicate a concern for the production and preservation of the food supply. The *penus Vestae*, the symbolic storeroom of the Roman state, was opened to the *matronae*, who presumably brought offerings of some sort and may have prayed for their own storerooms to be blessed with abundance. Bakers also brought food offerings to Vesta and honored her role in bread making. Finally, the Vestals prepared *mola salsa*, which symbolized the transformation of raw grain into a substance suitable for consumption and sacrifice.\(^{94}\) In light of these associations, it is understandable that Vesta’s flame was such a potent symbol of Rome’s continuity and well-being. Without the hearth fire, civilized life as the Romans knew it could not have existed.

The festival days surrounding the Vestalia culminated in a ritual purification of the *aedes Vestae*. The days from 7 June to 15 June were considered *nefasti* and *religiosi*.\(^{95}\) In Ovid’s *Fasti*, the *flaminica Dialis* advises the poet not to marry his daughter during this period:

\[\text{donec ab Iliaca placidus purgamina Vesta} \\
\text{detulerit flavis in mare Thybris aquis,} \\
\text{non mihi detonso crinem depectere buxo,} \\
\text{non ungues ferro subsecuisse licet,} \\
\text{non tetigisse virum, quamvis Iovis ille sacerdos,} \\
\text{quamvis perpetua sit mihi lege datus.} \\
\text{tu quoque ne propera: melius tua filia nubet} \\
\text{ignea cum pura Vesta nitebit humo” (6.227-34).}\]

“Until the calm Tiber shall have carried down to the sea on its yellow current the filth (*purgamina*) from the temple of Ilian Vesta, it is not lawful for me to comb down by hair with a toothed comb, or cut my nails with iron, or touch my husband, though he is the *flamen* of Jupiter, and though he was given to me for life. Thou, too, be in no hurry; thy daughter will better wed when Vesta’s fire shall shine on a clean floor.

Later, Ovid dates the deposition of Vesta’s *purgamina* to 15 June.\(^{96}\) Varro and Festus concur that this was the day on which it was *fas* to remove the “filth” (*stercus*) from Vesta’s temple.\(^{97}\) It is unclear why this particular date was chosen for the purification of the *aedes*, but it is likely related to the fact that the building had been open to the Roman *matronae* for the previous two weeks and consequently needed tidying up. In any case, the task of cleaning the *aedes* likely fell to the Vestals, who were also charged with its daily upkeep and purification.

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\(^{94}\) Serv. *Ecl.* 8.82.  
\(^{95}\) The calendars indicate that the days surrounding the Vestalia were *nefasti* (Fowler 1899: 145-6). According to Festus (296L), they were also considered *religiosi*.  
\(^{96}\) Ov. *Fast.* 6.713-4: *hac est illa dies, qua tu purgamina Vesta, / Thybri per Etruscas in mare mittis aquas* (this is the day on which you, Tiber, send the filth of Vesta’s temple down the Etruscan water to the sea).  
\(^{97}\) Varro *Ling.* 6.32; Festus 310L.
The Vestals, who were responsible for the communal *penus* in the Vesta complex, also participated in the Consualia, a festival designed to protect the newly stored harvest. Celebrated on 21 August, the Consualia honored the god Consus. Horses and mules were garlanded with flowers and given a day of rest, and there were both horse and chariot races. According to Tertullian, the *flamen Quirinalis* and the Vestals sacrificed at the underground altar of Consus, which was located at the first turning post in the Circus Maximus (Fig. 40). Tertullian’s statement provides further evidence that the Vestals possessed some sacrificial capacity, though we do not know what their precise role in the ritual was, or even what was sacrificed. The name Consus likely derives from *condere* ("to hide," or "to store"), which connects the god to the storage of the harvested grain. It follows that the rites performed on 21 August not only celebrated the end of the harvest, but also ensured the protection of the newly stored crop. It would not be surprising to find in the Roman pantheon a deity whose sphere of influence included the protection of stored provisions. Losses to mildew and infestation were evidently considerable, and the amount of space devoted to advice on the construction and maintenance of granaries in Roman agricultural treatises indicates that the task of preserving stored crops was a difficult one. The Consualia would therefore have addressed a real source of anxiety in the life of the Roman farmer. The Vestals’ role in this festival reveals that their concern for the preservation of Rome’s food-stores extended beyond the maintenance of the *penus Vestae*.

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98 Varro *Ling.* 6.20; D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.33.2, 2.31.2; Plut. *Q.R.* 48; Festus 36, 135L. A mutilated reference to horses in the *Fasti Praenestini* for December 15 suggests that the races were held at the December Consualium, but the generally celebratory spirit of harvest-end festivals suggests that the August Consualium included races as well. Moreover, Dionysius notes that the races took place on the same day as the Rape of the Sabine Women, which Varro places in August (Fowler 1899: 207-8; Scullard 1981: 177-8).

99 *et nunc ara Consol i in circo demersa est ad primas metas sub terra cum inscriptione eiusmodic CONSSUS CONSLILO MARS DUELLO LARES COILLO POTMENTE sacrificant apud eam nonis Iuliis sacerdotes publici, XII. Kalend. September* *flamen Quirinalis et virgines* (Tert. *De spect.* 5.7). For the underground altar, see also Tac. *Ann.* 12.24; Serv. *Aen.* 8.636. The inscription mentioned by Tertullian is likely late and probably did not come from the altar (Fowler 1899: 207; Scullard 1981: 163).

100 Scheid (2005b) suggests the first fruits of the recently gathered harvest.


102 Consider, for example, the Penates, who were guardians of the household provisions stored in the *penus* (Gell. *N. A.* 4.1.1-23).

103 See, for example, Varro *Rust.* 1.57.2; Columella *Rust.* 1.9.10; Pliny *H.N.* 18.301, with White 1970: 189, 196-7.

The Opsconsivia

The festival of the Opsconsivia on the twenty-fifth of August was dedicated to Ops Consiva, the personified goddess of harvest and plenty. Festus says that Ops was equated with the earth (terra), and was worshipped because she supplied the human race with all its resources (omnes opes, 202L). The Opsconsivia fell three days after the Consualia and a connection between Ops and Consus is often presumed. According to Varro, Ops was a Sabine deity whose cult was introduced to Rome by Titus Tatius. Her oldest cult site in the city was a sacrarium in the regia, which only the Vestals and a sacerdos publicus (either the rex sacrorum or a pontifex) were allowed to enter (Fig. 32). Very little is known about the details of the festival of Ops. A passage in the lexicon of Festus implies that it included a sacrifice:

A praefericulum is a broad bronze dish open on the top, without a handle, like a basin, which they used for sacrifices in the shrine of Opis Consivae.

Despite the limited evidence, it seems that the Vestals were once again involved in a rite connected to the harvest and storage of the crops.

The October Horse

The Vestals also had a limited role in the rites of the October Horse, held each year on the Ides of October. Festus provides an overview of the ritual in the following passage:

The October Horse is the name for the right-hand horse of the pair that is victorious on the Campus Martius and which is sacrificed in the month of October every year to Mars. And it was the custom for the inhabitants of the Subara and the Sacra Via to compete strenuously over the head of the horse, so that the latter might affix it to the wall of the regia, and the

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105 For the Opsconsivia, see Livy 39.22.4; Varro, Ling. 6.21; Festus 292L.
107 Varro Ling. 5.74. See also Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.50.3.
108 Varro Ling. 6.21: Opeconsiva dies ab dea Ope Consiva, quouis in regia sacrarium, quod ideo actum ut ei praeter Virgines Vestales et sacerdotum publicum introvat nemo (The day named Opeconsivia is called from the goddess Ops Consivia, whose shrine is in the regia; it is so restricted in size that no one may enter it except the Vestal Virgins and the sacerdos publicus). The text is corrupt, and many corrections have been suggested for “quod ideo actum,” including adeo artum or ideo sanctum (Scullard 1981: 253, n. 233). See also Festus 292L.
former to the *turris Mamilia*. The tail of this horse is carried with the greatest speed into the *regia* so that its blood can be poured on the hearth and used in sacred rites.\(^{110}\)

According to Timaeus (as quoted by Polybius) the horse was a war-horse and was killed by a spear, which has led some to emphasize the militaristic aspect of the ritual and connect the rite to the purification of the army at the Aramilustrium on the nineteenth of October.\(^{111}\) Others argue that the ritual was agricultural, pointing to the fact that the head of the sacrificed horse was decorated with cakes and to Festus’ statement that “the sacrifice was made for the success of the crop” (*id sacrificium fiebat ob frugum eventum*, 246L).\(^{112}\) These elements, however, are not mutually exclusive. Agricultural and military activities were closely related in Roman society, and it is likely a mistake to place too much emphasis on either the military or the agricultural features of this rite.\(^{113}\)

According to Festus, the tail of the October Horse was taken to the *regia*, where its blood was poured out and the hearth. We know from Ovid that the Vestals collected this blood and later combined it with beanstalks and the ashes of calves sacrificed at the Fordicidia to prepare the *suffimen*, or ‘cleansing agent,’ which they distributed to the people at the Parilia on 21 April.\(^{114}\) Once again, though it does not seem that the Vestals participated in the sacrifice proper, they did receive a part of the victim once it had already been killed. Their role in the festival was closely related to their oversight of the communal *penus*, where the blood would be stored until the Parilia. The *penus Vestae* was clearly a focal point of Roman ritual practice, as were the *sacerdotes* who guarded it.

**The December Rites of Bona Dea**

Bona Dea, the “Good Goddess,” is a rather mysterious female deity from whose temple and ceremonies men were excluded.\(^{115}\) Her secret, nocturnal rites took place in early December at the home of a *matrona* whose husband had *imperium* and who was naturally required to be absent from the house. Aside from the Vestals, the participants were all *matronae*, undoubtedly members of the Roman elite. Although we might expect the details of these women’s only mystery rites to have been inaccessible to our male sources, some

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\(^{110}\) See also Pol. 12.4b.1; Plut. *Q.R.* 97; Festus 246L.


\(^{112}\) For a summary of this view, see Fowler 1899: 243-50.

\(^{113}\) See, for example, Scullard 1981: 193; Beard, North and Price 1998: 47-8.

\(^{114}\) Ov. *Fast.* 4.721-34; Prop. 4.1.19, although see Dumézil 1970: 220-4. For the Parilia, see above.

\(^{115}\) The most detailed study of Bona Dea and her cult is Brouwer 1989.
information is available. The house where the ceremony was held was decorated with twigs and vines while myrtle was banned.116 Music and dancing were involved and wine was drunk, although it was called milk and stored in a covered vessel called a honey pot.117 The Vestals sacrificed a porca, a responsibility that offers the fullest confirmation of their ability to officiate over a blood sacrifice.118

The ceremony has often been described as an occasion for women to release pent-up tension that resulted from their exclusion from male-dominated public life by means of ritual “inversion.”119 According to Cicero, however, the rites were celebrated “for the safety of the Roman people” (pro salute populi Romani, Har. Resp. 17.37), which confirms that the December festival was a public one. Although they were gender segregated, the nocturnal rites of Bona Dea did not simply confirm the marginalization of Roman women or serve as a much-needed distraction. Roman society fully sanctioned the religious activities of Roman women within the public sphere, and the rites of Bona Dea were just one of several occasions on which the female members of the community performed a ritual on behalf of the entire population. The Vestals presided over the ceremony and offered a sacrifice pro populo. Their presence and participation certainly confirms that the December rites of Bona Dea were an important and high profile public ritual.

The Parentalia

The dies parentales began on 13 February and culminated in the Feralia on 21 February. In contrast to the May rites of the Lemuria, which were designed to propitiate malevolent spirits and purify the city of their presence, the Parentalia was a period for remembering and honoring the dead. The rites seem to have been celebrated primarily by private individuals, who gathered at family tombs outside the city to make simple offerings to their ancestors. Ovid describes the traditional gifts in the Fasti:

\[
\text{Est honor et tumulis, animas placare paternas,}
\]
\[
\text{parvaque in exstructas munera ferre pyras.}
\]
\[
\text{parva petunt manes: pietas pro divite grata est}
\]
\[
\text{munere; non avidos Styx habet ima deos.}
\]
\[
\text{tegula porrectis satis est velata coronis}
\]

118 Although Plutarch claims that the matron of the household performed the sacrifice (Cic. 19), Cicero (Har. Resp. 17.37-18.38; Att. 1.13.3) and Asconius (Mil. 43) claim that the Vestals performed the sacrifice.
est sparsae fruges parcaque mica salis,
inque mero mollita Ceres violaque solutae:
haec habeat media testa relicta via.
nec maiora veto, sed et his placabilis umbra est:
adde preces positis et sua verba focis (2.533-42).

Honour is paid, also, to the grave. Appease the souls of your fathers and bring small gifts to
the tombs erected to them. Ghosts ask but little: they value piety more than a costly gift: no
greedy gods are they who in the world below do haunt the banks of Styx. A tile wreathed
with votive garlands, a sprinkling of corn, a few grains of salt, bread soaked in wine, and
some loose violets, these are offerings enough: set these on a potsherd and leave it in
the middle of the road. Not that I forbid larger offerings, but even these suffice to appease the
shades: add prayers and the appropriate words at the hearths set up or the purpose.

Individuals evidently provided whatever offering they could afford, and no official sacerdotal
involvement was necessary.

According to the fourth century A.D. calendar of Philocalus, a Vestal Virgin made an
offering to the dead (virgo Vestalis parentat) on the first day of the festival. The brevity of
the entry and the lack of any further information regarding the Vestals’ role in the rites
leaves open the question of which dead were the recipients of the offering. It seems
unlikely that a single Vestal’s sacrifice to her own ancestors would warrant mention on the
calendar of Philocalus. The notation may indicate that one of the Vestals made an offering
to deceased Vestals, or even to all the Roman dead on behalf of the Roman people. Perhaps
the rite was designed to ensure that even deceased Romans with no surviving family
members would be honored during the Parentalia. The Vestals’ unique position outside of
the traditional family structure may have rendered them particularly suited to make such an
offering to dead who were not their own ancestors.

The Vestals the Julio-Claudians

Augustus cultivated a close relationship with Vesta and the Vestals throughout his
public career. His wife Livia and sister Octavia had been associated with the order even in
the triumviral period, when they received certain Vestal honors, including sacrosanctitas

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120 CIL I² p. 254.
121 Mommsen suggested that the offering was made to Tarpeia (CIL I² p. 309). His arguments are refuted by
Latte, who proposed that the recipients were the ancestors of Rome’s kings (1960: 111). Wildfang argues that
the Vestal made an offering to deceased Vestals, who were her surrogate ancestors (2001: 227-30).
122 For the Vestals’ legal status, see chapter three.
123 For Augustus’ interest in Vesta, see, for example, Bömer 1987; Price 1996: 826; Grandazzi 1997: 167.
Livia was later granted the right to sit among the Vestals at the gladiatorial games. The Vestals also received a number of new religious responsibilities during the early principate that directly associated the order with the imperial family and its cult. Perhaps the most striking example of this reconfiguration occurred in 12, when the first princeps was finally elected pontifex maximus. Having lived comfortably on the Palatine for many years, Augustus was reluctant to leave his house in order to take up residence in the domus publica, the traditional home of the chief pontiff (Fig. 32). Instead, he donated the domus publica to the Vestal order, whose atrium was located nearby, and established his Palatine house as the official home of the pontifex maximus. On 28 April, Augustus founded a shrine to Vesta in a part of his residence that he had made public property. These two moves effectively redefined the position of the pontifex maximus and intensified the relationship between that religious office, the imperial household and the goddess Vesta:

\[\text{aufer, Vesta, diem: cognati Vesta recepta est}
\text{limine; sic iusti constituere patres.}
\text{Phoebus habet partem: Vestae pars altera cessit:}
\text{quod superest illis, tertius ipse tenet.}
\text{state Palatinae laurus, praetextaque quercu}
\text{stet domus: aeternos tres habet una deos (Ov. Fast. 4.949-54).}

Vesta, bear the day onwards! Vesta has been received at her kinsman’s threshold: so the senators justly decreed. Phoebus takes part of the space there. A further part remains for Vesta, and the third part that’s left, Caesar occupies. Long live the laurels of the Palatine; long live that house decked with branches of oak: one place holds three eternal gods.

Although no archaeological evidence has been found to support the existence of a Palatine cult of Vesta, two reliefs depicting Vesta and the Vestals in front of an architectural backdrop likely represent the new foundation.

The first of these, the so-called Sorrento Base, was unearthed in the early nineteenth century in the Roman ruins of Sorrento, the ancient Surrentum on the Bay of Naples (Fig. 9). All four sides of the base are decorated with figural reliefs that illustrate various divine

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124 See chapter 4.
125 In addition to Ovid’s Fasti, two Roman calendars, the fasti Praenestini and the fasti Caeretani, record the dedication. For the long-standing debate concerning the evidence for a Palatine cult of Vesta, see Degrassi 1955; Guarducci 1964; Degrassi 1966-7: 98-115; Kolbe 1966-7: 101-3; Guarducci 1971; Fraschetti 1988: 949-65; Capelli 1990; Fishwick 1993; Cecamore 1994-5; Thompson 2005: 73-113.
126 The Sorrento Base is now in the Museo Correale di Terranova in Sorrento (Inv. No. 3657). It has been dated to the late Augustan or early Tiberian period on the basis of style and the subject of the reliefs. For a discussion of the Sorrento Base, see, for example, Rizzo 1932; Ryberg 1955: 49-53, 74; Guarducci 1964; Kolbe 1966-7; Guarducci 1971; Capelli 1990; Cecamore 1994-5; Thompson 2005: 74-99.
and mythical figures associated with the Palatine Hill and therefore Augustus himself. On the left side of Side A, five Vestals stand facing right toward the center of the scene (Fig. 44). An expanse of drapery hangs between two Ionic columns and forms a curtain-like backdrop for the five Vestals, a likely indication of an interior setting for the scene, in this case perhaps the house of Augustus. On the right end of Side A, three additional figures appear in front of a similar architectural backdrop (Fig. 45). Enthroned at the center is the goddess Vesta. To her left stands the sixth Vestal, perhaps the virgo maxima, who holds a small figurine that may represent the palladium (or a copy) to be deposited in the new shrine (Fig. 46). To the right of Vesta, another veiled female figure in the pudicitia pose may represent Livia. Behind the figures is a continuation of the architectural setting, though the drapery gives way to reveal a small, circular building in the Ionic order. This building is likely the new Palatine shrine of Vesta.

The Palermo Relief depicts a similar scene (Fig. 5). On the right side of the panel stands a fragmentary togate figure whose right forearm is extended over a small round altar. Although the upper portion of his body is missing, the figure has been identified as Augustus on the basis of context. The princeps was likely shown presiding over the dedication of Vesta’s new shrine, and it may be possible to reconstruct a similar figure in the center of the damaged scene on the Sorrento Base. These two reliefs affirmed the new relationship that Augustus had cultivated between his household and the cult of Vesta. His house was no longer just one of many aristocratic residences on the Palatine; it had been transformed into a palace shared by three eternal gods – Augustus, Vesta and Apollo. The new shrine allowed Augustus to meld the public hearth of Vesta, with its implications for the

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127 Vesta and the Vestals are the subject of Side A. Side B is devoted to Apollo, Augustus’ patron deity, who is flanked by his sister Diana on the left and his mother Latona on the right. The figure of Apollo wears a belted peplos and a shoulder-pinned back mantle and holds a cithara (lyre) in his left arm. This iconography likely recalls the three cult statues on display in the Temple of Apollo Palatinus. The veiled figure of a prophetess or sibyl crouching at the feet of Latona may refer to Augustus’ decision to transfer the Sibylline Books from the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline to the Temple of Apollo Palatinus. On Side C, the Magna Mater, who also had a temple on the Palatine, appears seated on a throne with a lion crouching at its base. A corybas (a male attendant who engaged in ecstatic dances) is shown on her left, while a veiled female figure, perhaps Juno Sospita, appears to her right. Side D is badly damaged, but likely depicts the genius of Augustus in the company of Aeneas and perhaps Romulus as well. The corona civica (civic crown), which had been awarded to Augustus in 27, is visible near the top of the relief.

128 See, for example, Rizzo 1932: 25-6; Ryberg 1955: 49.

129 For the identity of this figure, see Ryberg 1955: 52; Thompson 2005: 77. Rizzo (1932: 47-9) and Guarducci (1971: 105-6) suggested Ceres instead.

130 For the identification of this figure as Livia, see Ryberg 1955: 96; Thompson 2005: 95-9.

well-being of the community and the continuity of the empire, with his own private hearth. The *princeps* (and his house) could now be understood to stand for the state.\(^{133}\)

The position of the Vestals in relation to the imperial household was also enhanced during the early principate. In 13, the senate voted to erect an Ara Pacis Augustae (Altar of Augustan Peace) in the northern Campus Martius in honor of Augustus’ return from Spain and Gaul. According to the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, they also ordered the magistrates, *sacerdotes* and Vestal Virgins to make a yearly sacrifice at the altar.\(^{134}\) This *anniversarium sacrificium* was celebrated on 30 January, the anniversary of the *dedicatio* of the Ara Pacis in 9 and, perhaps not coincidentally, Livia’s birthday.\(^{135}\)

The *anniversarium sacrificium* is likely the subject of the small figural frieze encircling the parapet of the altar (Fig. 7). All six Vestals appear wearing their *suffibula* and carrying various ritual implements, including a spherical incense jar, a *simpulum* and two rectangular objects that may represent tablets inscribed with prayers or directions for the ritual.\(^{136}\) The *simpulum* (also known as the *simpulium*), was a ladle with a long handle that allowed the religious official to taste the wine before pouring it on the head of the sacrificial victim.\(^{137}\) It was a symbol of pontifical status and may therefore communicate the Vestals’ membership in the *collegium pontificium*. Perhaps even more importantly, however, it indicates that the Vestals were actively involved in the sacrifice proper. The Vestals are accompanied by their *lictores* and followed by a procession of religious officials, victims and attendants.

The specific combination of victims on the altar frieze – a sheep or ram, a steer, and a heifer – led Inez Scott Ryberg to suggest that an offering was made to Janus, Jupiter and Pax respectively.\(^{138}\) When Augustus returned from Spain and Gaul in 13, he dedicated the laurel from his *fasces* in the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol.\(^{139}\) While Janus was not explicitly associated with Augustus’ return in 13, his temple gates were closed three times under Augustus, a gesture that symbolized the peace the princeps had brought to the empire. The offerings to Jupiter and Janus therefore recalled other rituals performed by the emperor in proclaiming the *pax Augusta*. The Vestals, alongside the magistrates and other *sacerdotes*, had

\(^{135}\) Ov. *Fast.* 1.709-22.
\(^{136}\) Thompson 2005: 45.
\(^{137}\) For the symbolism of the *simpulum*, see Siebert 1999: 47-51, 236-9. A Vestal on one of the so-called Sala di Vesta fragments also holds a *simpulum* (Thompson 2005: 165).
\(^{139}\) Cass. *Dio* 54.25.
an important and highly visible role to play in the commemoration of the initial declaration of this peace and the guarantee of its continuity.

Fragmentary evidence suggests that the Vestals may have appeared in the company of Augustus and his retinue on the elaborate processional frieze on the exterior of the precinct wall. The precise historical event represented by this procession is the subject of much debate, though the original supplicatio in 13 seems a likely candidate. Augustus appears capite velato, which signifies that he is preparing to sacrifice (Fig. 47). He is accompanied by the rex sacrorum and four flamines, identifiable by their characteristic headgear (galerus with apex), double toga (laena) and high-laced patrician shoes (calcei senatorii). Other togate figures in the vicinity of these figures may depict the pontifices. The composition of the processional scene reflects the efforts of the princeps to present himself as a model of pietas while at the same time furthering his dynastic agenda.

Under Claudius, the Vestals were placed in charge of the cult of the deified Livia. Following her death in A.D. 29, the senate had moved to vote the first empress divine honors. Although her cult had been widespread throughout the empire during her lifetime, this new proposal would have officially recognized her divinity in Rome and established a temple and religious official in her honor, making Livia the first woman to achieve the status of diva in Rome itself. Tiberius refused to accept the honor. Claudius, perhaps eager to enhance his own status by elevating that of his grandmother, had divine honors voted to Livia on 17 January, A.D. 42, the anniversary of her wedding to Augustus. He erected her statue in the temple of Augustus on the Palatine and ordered that women should use her name in taking oaths. Claudius also placed the Vestals in charge of making the appropriate sacrifices. The decision to entrust the cult of Diva Augusta to the Vestals, rather than to a newly established religious official as the senate had originally proposed, is noteworthy. The Vestals certainly would have lent considerable prestige and legitimacy to the new rites.

Claudius may also have hoped to further cement the relationship between the imperial household and the cult of Vesta first developed by Augustus. This close association

140 Fragments from the south frieze have been identified as belonging to the figure of a Vestal (Moretti 1948: 223-4; Thompson 2005: 59-64). It may even be possible to reconstruct more than one Vestal, along with at least four other togate figures, in the lacunae of the first and second panels.
141 For a summary of the discussion with bibliography, see Billows 2003: 80-7.
142 For a discussion of this issue, see Barrett 2002: 219-25.
143 Cass. Dio 60.5.2.
between the Vestals and the imperial family was maintained by later empresses, who supported the order financially.\textsuperscript{144} The statues of numerous empresses have been excavated from the \textit{atrium Vestae}, though none can be identified with certainty. Julia Domna, rather than her husband, restored the \textit{aedes Vestae} following the fire of A.D. 191, a gesture commemorated on a series of coins issued by the empress (Fig. 48). While the Vestals continued to perform their traditional responsibilities, they had acquired a new function as intermediaries between the Republican religious system and the altered religious landscape of the principate.

\textbf{Learning and Teaching the \textit{Sacra}}

The base of a portrait statue erected in honor of a \textit{virgo maxima} on June 9, A.D. 364 bears a remarkable dedicatory inscription:

\begin{verbatim}
OB MERITUM CASTITATIS PUDICITIAE ADQ(ue) IN SACRIS
RELIGIONIBUSQUE DOCTRINAE MIRABILIS C / / / / / / A V(rgini) V(estali)
MAX(imae) PONTIFICES V(iri) C(larissimi) PROMAG(istro) MACRINIO SOSSIANO
\end{verbatim}

In recognition of her chastity, purity, and her outstanding knowledge in ritual and religious matters, the illustrious \textit{pontifices}, under the promagistrature of the illustrious Macrinus Sossianus, (dedicate this) to C[----]a, \textit{virgo Vestalis maxima}.

The Vestal’s name was deliberately erased in an act of \textit{damnatio memoriae}, perhaps because she had converted to Christianity.\textsuperscript{145} Before her disgrace, however, this \textit{virgo maxima} was distinguished not only for her \textit{castitas} and \textit{pudicitia}, virtues closely associated with the Vestals in the ancient and modern sources, but also for her extraordinary knowledge of sacred rites and religious matters. Several dedicatory inscriptions unearthed in the \textit{atrium Vestae} commend their honorees for their piety and the care with which they carried out their ritual duties, but no others single out knowledge as an object of praise. Religious expertise is, generally speaking, more straightforwardly associated with the \textit{pontifices}, who developed and interpreted religious law, and modern scholars have tended to restrict discussion of this

\textsuperscript{144} For the relationship between the empresses and the Vestal order, see Lindner 1996.
\textsuperscript{145} This suggestion depends on identifying the \textit{C*** a} of this inscription with the Claudia named by the fourth century Christian author Prudentius (see, for example, Lanciani 1898: 171). In a passage celebrating the decline of traditional Roman religion, Prudentius claims, “\textit{aedemque Laurenti iuuan Vestalis intrat Claudia}” (the Vestal Claudia enters your church, Laurentius, \textit{Peristeph.} 2.527-8).
category of religious experience to these male religious officials.\textsuperscript{146} Other ancient sources, however, also emphasize the responsibility of Vestals to learn and teach the \textit{sacra}.

According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the Vestals’ thirty-year commitment was divided into three distinct parts, each defined by a different relationship to the \textit{sacra}:

\[ \text{ἐν ὧδε δέκα μὲν ἔτη μανθάνειν αὐτὰς ἐδει, δέκα δ᾽ ἐπιτελεῖν τὰ ἱερά, τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ δέκα διδάσκειν ἑτέρας (Ant. Rom. 2.67.2).}\textsuperscript{147}

During the first ten years their duty was to learn their functions, in the second ten to perform them, and during the remaining ten to teach others.

It is unlikely that this strict tripartite division of labor represents the reality of life in the Vestal order.\textsuperscript{148} It is overly artificial and does not take into account the likelihood that most Vestals would choose to remain in the order beyond the required number of years.\textsuperscript{149} Moreover, Dionysius is certainly mistaken in his belief that the final decade of service was devoted exclusively to the education of new Vestals rather than to active participation in ritual activities. As we have seen, certain rites involving the Vestals required the presence of the \textit{virgo maxima}, the eldest Vestal, while others, such as the preparation of \textit{mola salsa}, included the eldest three. Nonetheless, Dionysius’ emphasis on the Vestals’ obligation to teach the \textit{sacra} to the next generation is undoubtedly well placed. Seneca alludes to a similar, although slightly more fluid, division of responsibility within the order:

\[ …\text{virginum Vestalium more, quae, annis inter officia divisis, discunt facere sacra et, cum didicerunt, docent (De ot. 2.2).} \]

…after the custom of the Vestal virgins, whose years are allotted to varied duties while they are learning to perform the sacred rites, and, when they have learned, they begin to teach.

Valerius Maximus describes a Vestal who allowed the eternal flame to burn out as the pupil (\textit{discipula}) of the \textit{virgo maxima} Amelia.\textsuperscript{150} The responsibility of older Vestals to educate and

\textsuperscript{146} Clifford Ando (2008) has recently argued that all Roman religious behavior should be understood in terms of “knowledge,” which he constructs as an alternative to “belief.”

\textsuperscript{147} Plutarch (\textit{Num. 10.1}) repeats the same assertion: \textit{ὡρίσθη δὲ ταῖς ἱεραῖς παρθένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως ἁγνεία τριακονέτις, ἐν ὧδε μὲν πρώτην δεκαετίαν ἃ χρὴ δρᾶν μανθάνουσι, τὴν δὲ μέσην ἃ μεμαθήκασι δρῶσι, τὴν ὅ τρίτην ἑτέρας αὐταὶ διδάσκουσιν} (It was ordained by the king that the sacred virgins should vow themselves to chastity for thirty years; during the first decade they are to learn their duties, during the second to perform the duties they have learned, and during the third to teach others these duties).

\textsuperscript{148} Wildfang 2001: 253-4. Martini is more willing to accept the scheme (1997a: 259-63).

\textsuperscript{149} The Vestal Occia, for example, served for fifty-seven years (Tac. \textit{Ann}. 2.86).

\textsuperscript{150} \textit{maximae vero virginis} Aemiliae \textit{discipulam extincto igne tulam ab omni reprehensione Vestae numen praestitit, qua adorante, cum carbasum, quem optimum habebat, foculo imposuisset, subito ignis eminuit} (Val. Max. 1.1.7).
train new initiates was evidently widely recognized by ancient authors, and must surely rank among the order’s most important ritual duties.\textsuperscript{151}

**Conclusion**

The various ritual obligations assigned to the Vestals demonstrate that these sacerdotes were central to the practice of religion at Rome. The level of nearly lifelong and intense full-time commitment required of Vestal Virgins is unique within Roman religion, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they were essentially professionals. They were charged with the care and preservation of the eternal flame on the hearth of Vesta, the symbolic center of the community and a pledge of its continuity. They were also competent to offer blood sacrifices on behalf of the Roman people (pro populo), as they did at the December rites of Bona Dea. The Vestals’ appearance on the public stage in nearly every month of the year also ensured that the Vestals were among the most visible religious officials in the city of Rome. Although their religious activities varied widely and resist simple categorization, it is possible to impose some structure on them.

First, the Vestals were often associated with purification rites, undoubtedly because they embodied constant physical and ritual purity.\textsuperscript{152} Perhaps most importantly, they were responsible for maintaining the purity of the aedes Vestae. The Vestals purified the temple and the sacra in the penus with water on a daily basis. They performed a more elaborate rite of renewal on 1 March, replacing the laurel garlands and rekindling the fire on the hearth. At the Vestalia on 15 June, they swept the temple and disposed of the sternus in the Tiber. The Vestals also participated in the rites of the Argei, a festival designed to purify the city of malevolent spirits. Furthermore, they prepared and preserved certain materials required for the performance of other rites of purification, including the suffum then distribute at the Parilia on 21 April and mola salsa, a substance used at every public sacrifice to purify the victim and make it sacer. Thus the Vestals were present by proxy at all public rites performed within the city. Their responsibility to produce and preserve these purificatory substances is also related to a second field of religious activity with which the Vestals were intimately connected.

\textsuperscript{151} Technical handbooks do not seem to have been common a common feature of Roman religious service (Rüpke 2007b: 131-2). The Vestals likely relied on oral traditions and emphasized learning through observation and participation.

The Vestals were involved in many rites concerned with the preservation of the food supply and the transformation of raw grain into a form useful either for consumption or ritual purposes. They maintained the *penus Vesta*, where they stored ground *far, muries* and *mola salsa* as well as the materials necessary for the production of the *suffumen* distributed at the Parilia. This public *penus* corresponded to the private *penus* at the heart of the Roman home where food (oil, wine, grain, vegetables, etc.) and other essentials were kept.\(^{153}\) The Vestals also participated in the festivals of the Consualia and Opsconsivia. Both were associated with the storage of the recently harvested grain crop. In their capacity as *sacerdotes* of the communal *penus*, their involvement in these rites seems natural.

Many of the ritual tasks assigned to the Vestals were domestic in nature. Care for the hearth and the *penus* as well as the preparation of food would have fallen to the female members of a traditional Roman family. This point has long been used by scholars on both sides of the debate over whether the Vestals originated as and later represented the wife or the daughters of the early Roman king.\(^{154}\) In reality, these tasks could have been performed by the either the *materfamilias* or her daughters. Furthermore, it is important to note that the Vestals were not associated with every sphere of domestic activity. For instance, they do not seem to have engaged in wool working, an activity central to the identity of the ideal Roman *matrona*. Instead, they were primarily concerned with the communal hearth and *penus*, as well as the production and preservation of the food supply.

The Vestals acted to unify the seemingly disparate elements of Roman religion. They provided the *mola salsa* that was used at every public sacrifice in Rome, which suggests that the Roman ritual system was actually quite systematic. The range of festivals in which they participated also demonstrates that the Vestals were key figures within the religious system as a whole. Indeed, Sarolta Takács has suggested that the Vestals “were the constant element that linked festivals and bridged the months.”\(^{155}\) The public rites in which the Vestals participated took them out of their complex in the *forum* and into public view. Year after year, they could be seen sacrificing at the altar of Consus in the Circus Maximus, processing to the Argei shrines, and throwing rush dolls into the Tiber from the ancient *pons Sublicius*. Through their public religious activities and those that were carried out within the seclusion

\(^{153}\) *Dig.* 33.9.3.  
\(^{154}\) For the terms of this debate and the issues at stake, see chapter 1.  
\(^{155}\) Takács 2008: 44.
of the *aedes Vestae*, the Vestals worked to ensure the well being and continuity of the city and citizenry of Rome.
Chapter Four  
The Vestal Virgins in Roman Law and Society

When a young Vestal began her new life as a sacerdos, she did so with remarkable legal privileges for a person of her age and gender. The legal status of an ordinary Roman woman was defined by her relationship to the men in her life.¹ A daughter was subject to the potestas of her paterfamilias. A wife might be under the control (manus) of her husband. During the Republican period, a woman who had become legally independent (sui iuris) upon emancipation or the death of her father or husband passed into the guardianship (tutela) of her nearest male relative. A Vestal, however, stood outside all traditional categories outlined for women by Roman law and social practice. Having been freed from patria potestas, she was no longer a daughter, nor did she enter the tutela of another man.² She was unmarried and so not a wife, a virgin and so not a mother. A Vestal’s position in Roman society was unique and defined in relation to the community as a whole, rather than to an individual family. As a result of her unique legal status, she was ideally suited to embody and represent the city and citizenry of Rome.

While a Vestal’s legal status was closely related to her ritual and symbolic functions, it had practical consequences as well. It seems likely that many Romans viewed these legal provisions as a mark of respect. Gaius, the celebrated second century A.D. jurist, believed that the ancients (veteres) had exempted the Vestals from guardianship “on account of the honor of their sacerdotium” (in honorem sacerdotii, Inst. 1.145). Although this explanation is likely the product of late Republican juristic thought, it does reveal what Romans in that period believed about the Vestals’ unusual legal status. Membership in the Vestal order was considered an honor.

The Vestals’ position in Roman society was unparalleled. They enjoyed a degree of respect and deference that was afforded to no woman outside their order before the principate of Augustus. Indeed, the exceptional nature of their status can be inferred from

¹ For a discussion of the legal status of Roman women, see especially Gardner 1986.
² Some scholars have argued that the Vestals were in the potestas of the pontifex maximus (Fowler 1899: 147; Wissowa 1912: 158, n. 7; Lacey 1986: 126), but this is not correct. Although the pontifex maximus had the authority to discipline errant Vestals, they were not under his potestas (Gardner 1986: 23; Staples 1998: 183, n. 39; Parker 2004: 573). On the Vestals’ exemption from tutela, see below.
the fact that the public position of Livia, the wife of Augustus and first empress of Rome, and Octavia, his sister, was often closely modeled on that of the Vestals. Exemption from *patria potestas* and *tutela* allowed the Vestals to manage and distribute their wealth without the interference of a guardian. Their special costume and right to be attended by a lictor enhanced their visibility within the city and ensured that they would be noticed wherever they went. Similarly, the Vestals’ right to sit in reserved seats at the arena must have made a dramatic visual statement about the position held by these women in Roman society.

Although the names and activities of the vast majority of Vestals are lost to us, the ancient sources reveal that some utilized their status and privileges to pursue their own political agendas. In fact, there is much evidence to suggest that the Vestals took an active role in the social and political life of the city, a topic that will be the focus of the second half of this chapter. As we shall see, there was more to being a Vestal than virginity and service at the hearth of Vesta.

**The Legal Status of the Vestals**

According to Aulus Gellius, a Vestal’s legal relationship to her *paterfamilias* changed immediately upon entrance to the order:

Virgo autem Vestalis, simul est capta atque in atrium Vestae deducta et pontificibus tradita est, eo statim tempore sine emancipatione ac sine capitis minutione e patris potestate exit et ius testamenti faciundi adipsicitur (N.A. 1.12.9).

Now, as soon as the Vestal Virgin is taken, led to the *atrium Vestae* and handed over to the *pontifices*, she immediately at this time passes from the power of her father without the ceremony of emancipation and without the diminution of her rights, and acquires the right to make a will.

Exemption from *patria potestas* was necessary in order for a Vestal to fulfill her new religious role. Following the rite of *captio*, a Vestal belonged to and represented the collective, rather than an individual family. Gellius is careful to indicate that the initiation ceremony itself released a Vestal from *patria potestas* rather than any of the normal legal procedures used to achieve this change in status. The procedure had to be unique since *coemptio*, a form of ritual

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3 Aside from the death of the *paterfamilias*, *patria potestas* could be extinguished through emancipation, adoption, the loss of citizenship through *capitis diminutio maxima*, or, in the case of a daughter, marriage *cum manu*. The fact that the Vestals were not removed from *patria potestas* by any formal legal procedure has led some scholars to speculate that her father’s *potestas* was merely suspended, like that of the father of a child captured in war (Guizzi 1968: 66, 196, with further bibliography). Gardner (1986: 25) rejects this hypothesis, pointing out that a captive had no rights, while the Vestals enjoyed many legal privileges.
sale, would simply have placed the initiate into someone else’s power. A new Vestal was removed from her father’s potestas without passing into tutela and thus into the control of another man. Unlike a man who became sui iuris, however, a Vestal did not become the head of her own familia with her own potestas. Her legal and social status was unique in every respect.

In a state that continually emphasized the importance of the family, the Vestals must have stood out as the only Romans without one. Even the flamen Dialis, who was also released from patria potestas upon taking office, had a wife and children. A Vestal’s unusual position outside of the traditional family structure, which made it impossible for her to identify fully with any established social group except for her Vestal colleagues, was closely related to her ritual and symbolic functions. Legal isolation allowed her to better represent the Roman people as a sacerdos of Vesta. Moreover, as Ariadne Staples and Holt Parker have stressed, a Vestal was not only in charge of a cult central to the religious community at Rome, she was also the embodiment of that community. Her very existence, as long as she remained chaste, guaranteed the well being of the entire community.

In addition to the symbolic significance of release from patria potestas, a Vestal’s isolated legal status had important practical side effects, particularly with respect to her inheritance rights. A Vestal lost her rights of intestate succession and if she died without a will, no one had rights of intestate succession to her property. Gellius quotes the relevant passage from Labeo:

Praeterea in commentariis Labeonis, quae ad duodecim tabulas compositum, ita scriptum est: “Virgo Vestalis neque heres est cuiquam intestato, neque intestatae quisquam, sed bona eius in publicum redigi aiunt. Id quo iure fiat, quaeritur ” (N.A. 1.12.18).

Moreover, in the commentaries of Labeo, which he composed concerning the Twelve Tables, the following is recorded: “A Vestal Virgin is not heir to any intestate person, nor is

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4 For this observation, see Parker 2004: 572-3.
5 Mary Beard (1980: 17), on the other hand, has suggested that her legal status was therefore “defined in male terms.” For further criticisms of Beard’s analysis of the Vestals’ legal status, see Gardner 1986: 24-5; Staples 1998: 141.
6 Culham 2004: 142.
7 For the legal status of the flamen Dialis, see Tac. Ann. 4.16; Gai. Inst. 3.114; Ulp. 10.5.
9 For the symbolic function of the Vestals, see Staples 1998: 129-43; Parker 2004. See also chapter 1.
10 It is not specifically attested whether the flamen Dialis lost his rights of intestate succession, although Gardner is inclined to think he did not (1986: 24). Under Justinian, sons who reached the consulship or became bishops were released from their father’s potestas without any loss of inheritance rights (Nos. 81.pr.3), a provision that could have been based on the privilege granted to flamines Diales.
anyone her heir should she die without making a will, but they say that her property reverts to the state. It is uncertain what legal principle is involved.”

Roman law observed strict rules concerning the designation of an heir in the case of intestacy. The *sui heredes*, who were first in the line of succession, were all those who had been in the *potestas* of the deceased man, that is, his male and female children, including adopted children, his sons’ children, and his wife if she had married *cum manu*. The *sui heredes* inherited equal portions of the estate irrespective of gender. If there were no *sui heredes*, agnatic relatives could be named as heirs, and finally, if all other options had been exhausted, members of the deceased’s *gens*.

Vestals, however, were explicitly excluded from the line of intestate succession. Having been removed from her father’s *potestas* upon entrance to the order, a Vestal was no longer one of her *sui heredes* and therefore had no right of intestate succession. She also lost the right to inherit from her agnates, whose relationship to her had been determined by her position as a child in *potestate*. The loss of automatic inheritance rights was reciprocal. If a Vestal died without a will, her property automatically passed to the state, which stood in the place of her agnates. This provision reflects and reaffirms the notion that the Vestals belonged to the Roman community as a whole, rather than to an individual family.

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12 Although women could not have *sui heredes*, they could be *sui heredes* as daughters, granddaughters, or wives *in manu* (Gardner 1986: 190).
13 Agnates were all persons who were descended from the same male ancestor and who would be in that ancestor’s *patria potestas* if he were still living. Both male and female agnates could inherit through intestate succession, but succession between generations could pass through the male line only, since a woman’s children would not be in the *potestas* of her father. A woman could therefore inherit from her father’s brother, while a man could not inherit from his mother’s brother. At some unknown date, the ability of women to inherit through agnatic succession was limited, and only the sister of the deceased could be named his heir in the case of intestacy. This restriction was likely intended to ensure that property was not transferred to other families (Gardner 1986: 191).
14 Labeo notes that, “the legal principle involved is an unsettled question” (id quo iure fiat, quaeritur, Gell. N.A. 1.12.18). Scholars have questioned the source of Labeo’s confusion. Moyle (1912: 183) argued that his uncertainty is inexplicable if the answer were simply that the Vestals had no agnates. He speculated that the property of an intestate Vestal passed directly to the state for sacrificial purposes because her life had been devoted to the service of the gods. Moyle’s explanation has been criticized by Gardner (1986: 23) and Wildfang (2006: 66), who argue that the Vestals dedicated their lives to the service of Vesta, not all the Roman state gods, and point out that there is no indication in the ancient sources that their property was used for sacrificial purposes. Guizzi (1968: 166-7) and Gardner (1986: 23-4) have argued that Labeo was likely perplexed to find a provision concerning the reversion of property to the state in the Twelve Tables, since, with respect to the unclaimed estates of other Romans, this practice was a much later development in Roman law. Labeo may also have been confused when he compared the inheritance rights of Vestals to those of the *flamen Dialis*, who was also released from the *potestas* of his *paterfamilias* but did not lose his right to intestate succession (see Tac. Ann. 4.16; Ulp. 10.5).
Although their religious office prevented Vestals from benefiting from the rules of intestate succession, they could still receive specific bequests and were free to make their own wills by virtue of their exemption from *tutela*. The latter privilege set them apart from other Roman women, who received testamentary powers only gradually. In Roman law, a will was valid only if it was made by someone possessing testamentary capacity (*testamenti factio*). Although many of the conditions necessary to attain this capacity were equally valid for men and women, others affected them differently. Testators were required to be legally independent (*sui iuris*), for example, which meant that men and women with a living *paterfamilias* as well as women married with *manus* could not make their own will. Until the reign of Hadrian, a freeborn woman who wished to make a will was also required to sever all legal ties to her agnates by undergoing a *coemptio*, or a change of status. Once the *coemptio* was complete, she obtained a new *tutor*, whose consent was necessary in order for her will to be valid. During the Republican period, the only women exempt from tutorial consent were the Vestal Virgins.

The Vestals appear to have been released from entering guardianship at an early date. According to Gaius, the privilege was guaranteed by the Twelve Tables. Ordinarily, adult women who became *sui iuris* either through a formal *coemptio* or upon the death of their father or husband were subject to *tutela mulieris*. A *tutor* was designated for most women in the will of their father or husband. In cases where no provision had been made, the office fell to her male agnates, either collectively or to the one most closely related. *Tutela* was designed to safeguard the interests of the family with respect to the property of a woman who was not *in potestate*. The consent of a *tutor* was therefore required for any action that

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15 Gell. N.A. 1.12.9; Plut. Num. 10.3.
17 Freedwomen and daughters emancipated by their *paterfamilias* were not required to undergo *coemptio* because they had already undergone a change in status.
18 Under the *lex Julia* of 18 and the *lex Papia Poppaea* of A.D. 9, freeborn women were exempt from *tutela* if they had three children, freedwomen if they had four.
19 Gai. Inst. 1.144-5: *vetere ... enim voluerunt feminas, etiam aiunt perfectae actatis sint, propter animi levitatem in tutela esse ... loquimur autem exceptis virginitatibus Vestalibus, quas etiam veteres in honorem sacerdotii liberas esse voluerunt: itaque etiam lege XII tabularum...* (The ancients desired women to be under guardianship, even if they were of full age, because of their levity of mind … Those whom we speak of do not include the Vestal Virgins, whom the ancients desired to be free on account of the honor of their *sacerdotium*; hence this was provided by the law of the Twelve Tables). Plutarch (*Num. 10.3*) claims that Numa granted the Vestals an exemption from *tutela*, which led Guizzi (1968: 3-30) to speculate that the privilege was originally granted by a *lex regia* and later incorporated into the Twelve Tables.
might diminish the estate and transfer property out of the family, including marriage *cum manu* or the creation of a dowry.\textsuperscript{21}

The Vestals’ exemption from *tutela* provided them with an unusual degree of legal and financial independence.\textsuperscript{22} Unlike most women during the Republican period, they were free to manage and to dispose of their own estates, which may often have been quite substantial. According to Livy, the Vestals received a yearly *stipendium* at public expense.\textsuperscript{23} The primary source of their fortunes, however, must have been bequests from family members and wealthy patrons.

Literary evidence indicates that the Vestals did own slaves and property. In 337, for instance, Minucia was accused of *incestum* and ordered to “keep her slaves in her power” (*familiamque in potestate habere*, Livy 8.15.7-8). Licinia was accused of *incestum* with M. Licinius Crassus (cos. 70) because they had met together in private, but the pair was able to prove that Crassus was merely interested in buying a piece of Licinia’s property.\textsuperscript{24} Several Vestal portrait statues erected in the *atrium Vestae* bear dedicatory inscriptions from freedmen thanking their former mistresses for their patronage and support.\textsuperscript{25} Three bronze sheets of guarantee (*tabellae aeneae*) from the imperial period also reveal that the Vestals enjoyed special legal privileges with respect to their property. A *tabella aenea* proclaimed that the horse wearing the plaque on its harnesses was exempt from conscription into military service. One

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\textsuperscript{21} Actions that might diminish the estate included the alienation of *res mancipi* (i.e., the manumission of slaves), undertaking contractual obligations, creating a dowry, marrying *cum manu*, accepting an inheritance, and making a will (Gardner 1986: 18). Women were therefore in complete control of all property considered *res nec mancipi*, including, for example, jewelry, clothes, furniture, and houses and land outside of Italy. They were also free to make purchases without tutorial consent and could even lend money. Unlike the *tutor* of a minor, the *tutor* of an adult woman did not administer her property; rather his power was essentially negative, enabling him to prevent an action (Gardner 1986: 21).

\textsuperscript{22} Exemption from *tutela* has been regarded by modern scholars as an aspect of their “masculine” identity (see especially Beard 1980: 19). Gardner (1986: 24), on the other hand, has argued that technically speaking, *tutela* over a Vestal was simply superfluous. The function of a tutor was to preserve the estate in the interests of the family. Since a Vestal had been formally removed from the control of her *paterfamilias* and no longer had the right of intestate succession, a *tutor* was unnecessary. Since Vestals could be named as heirs, however, *tutela* may not have seemed as irrelevant to agnatic relatives as Gardner suggests. More recently, Parker (2004: 574) has emphasized that a Vestal’s freedom from guardianship was a “side effect” of the process of freeing her from all male control.

\textsuperscript{23} Livy 1.20.3. Mommsen (1887: II 64) suggested that the *stipendium* should be regarded as a kind of dowry, while Gardner (1986: 24) equates it to the *peculium*. Both the dowry and the *peculium*, however, were one-time gifts. As Wildfang (2006: 71) notes, a *stipendium* was the pay given to a soldier at the end of each annual campaign, which suggests that Vestals received an annual sum.

\textsuperscript{24} Plut. *Crass. I.2.*

\textsuperscript{25} See Lindner 1996: 60.
The unique legal position of the Vestals served important ritual and symbolic functions. It was evidently crucial that the Vestals be legally isolated from their birth families. This process of isolation operated on a number of different levels. A newly selected Vestal was physically removed from her father’s household and taken to the atrium Vestae in the Forum, where she lived throughout her tenure of office. She was also formally released from the legal authority of her paterfamilias, which allowed her an unparalleled degree of legal autonomy. Finally, a Vestal was isolated by her perpetual virginity, which prevented her from joining a new family through marriage. The Vestals were the only Romans without a legal family. While other women were expected to maintain the household cult of their father or husband, the Vestals tended the eternal flame of Vesta, the common hearth of the Roman community. All of this suggests that the Vestals were ideally meant to belong to the entire Roman people, rather than an individual family. These same legal privileges, however, also had important practical consequences. Freedom from patria potestas and tutela allowed the Vestals to transact business, manage their estates, and make their own wills without consulting a male guardian. Before Augustus exempted mothers of three children from tutela as well, these rights would have distinguished the Vestals from all other women at Rome.

Like other aspects of Vestal identity, the study of their legal and social status has been shaped in recent years by the work of Mary Beard. The privileges under discussion in this chapter lie at the heart of her claim that the Vestals were regarded, at least in part, as men. As Beard herself has subsequently pointed out, however, gender categories are not objective cultural “givens.” The Vestals, as prominent actors in the religious system, contributed as much to the construction of gender categories as gender categories contributed to the construction of the Vestals. In order for the Vestals to fulfill their religious obligations, it was necessary for them to stand outside of all traditional social categories. Only then could they truly embody and represent the entire religious community.

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26 CIL 6.2146 and 15.7127. A second tabella aeneae names the virgo maxima Sossia (CIL 6.2148 and 15.7128), while a third mentions the virgo maxima Flavia Publicia (CIL 6.2147 and 15.7126).
28 Beard 1995: 169. Beard 1995 offers “an affectionate critique” of Beard 1980. Nonetheless, parts of the original article have taken on a life of their own. Perhaps the most enduring legacy of Beard 1980 is found in the work of John Scheid, who used the Vestals status as “honorary men” to explain away the reality of female priesthood at Rome (1992, 1993).
at Rome. A Vestal’s legal status set her apart from other Roman women, but it also set her apart from Roman men. Her position was wholly unique and tied directly to her role as a *sacerdos* of Vesta.

**Vestal Privileges**

Alongside their unique legal status, the Vestals enjoyed a variety of special privileges. Some of these were closely related to their ritual and symbolic functions. The Vestals were permitted, for instance, to ride in *carpenta* (covered carriages) within the city on festival days and to be buried within the *pomerium.* Burial within the city was an honor otherwise granted only to distinguished individuals by a grant of the senate and was typically associated with a funeral at public expense. This Vestal privilege also underscores the order’s close symbolic link with the city of Rome. A Vestal’s virgin body served as a metaphor for the unpenetrated walls of Rome. As long as she performed her ritual responsibilities in purity, the city of Rome remained safe from assault. It is understandable, therefore, that the guarantors of Rome’s inviolability would be buried within the city.

The Vestals were also permitted to employ a lictor. This privilege has a ritual basis, but it must have made a striking visual statement as well. It would have distinguished the Vestals not only from other Roman women, but also from most Roman men. Along with her distinctive costume, the presence of a lictor was an unmistakable marker of her status as a religious official. The most visible and well-known function of lictors was to accompany high-ranking Roman magistrates, making way for them in public and serving as a physical and symbolic representation of their *imperium.* When an angry mob broke the *fasces* of Bibulus in 59, it was the ultimate sign of their disrespect for the consul and his authority.

The right of certain religious officials to be attended by a lictor has understandably perplexed scholars both ancient and modern. According to Festus, the *flamen Dialis* was

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30 See Parker 2004: 568.

31 For the Vestals’ right to a lictor, see Plut. *Num.* 10.3; Cass. Dio. 47.19.4; Sen. *Conscr.* 1.2.3, 7.

32 For lictors in general see, for example, Mommsen 1887: 1335-6, 374-93; Purcell 1983; Brennan 2000: *passim*; Gizewski 2005.

33 Cass. Dio 38.6.3.

34 Plutarch (*Plut. Q.R.* 113), for example, wondered why the *flamen Dialis*, who was rarely elected to high office, was granted the right to employ a lictor, use the curule chair, and wear the *toga praetexta.*
assigned a lictor because of his religious responsibilities. The lictor flaminius was a member of the lictores curiati, who were supervised by the pontifex maximus and assisted religious officials with their ritual tasks. These lictores carried only two fases and were therefore readily distinguishable from their civil counterparts. It is likely that the lictors assigned to the Vestals belonged to the lictores curiati as well. Indeed, the two togate figures that accompany the Vestals on the altar frieze of the Ara Pacis Augustae (Fig. 49) and the bearded youth on the Cancelleria Reliefs (Fig. 11) each hold just two fases.

The lictors of a religious official, like those of a magistrate, served both a practical and symbolic purpose. They were part of the insignia of his office, visibly marking his status. Lictors must also have provided physical protection to the official they accompanied, a duty that would have been particularly important in the case of the Vestals, whose bodies were inviolable and sacrosanct. A Vestal’s lictor would have announced her status as a religious official and ensured that ordinary Romans kept their distance.

Mary Beard has argued that the Vestals’ right to a lictor “would tend to invest the virgins with elements of a masculine status.” The lictores curiatii, however, were assigned to religious officials irrespective of their gender, as evidence from the imperial cult clearly demonstrates. Beginning with Livia, women of the imperial family were granted the services of a lictor when they attended to the cult of the divinized emperors. The right was carefully limited to a religious context, however, so that there could be no mistaking the

35 Festus 82L: flaminius lictor est, qui flamini Diali sacrorum causa praesto est (the flaminius is the lictor who attends the flamen Diali on account of the sacra).
36 Ryberg 1955: 41. Perhaps we should compare the fases carried by the lictores curiatii to the “dummy rods” carried by the lictors of the consul whose imperium was dormant for the month. Although these alternate fases did not signify the full powers of the consulship, they still clearly identified the man as a consul. For the dummy rods, see Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 5.2.1; Cass. Dio 53.1.1; Staveley 1963: 466-7; Brennan 2000: 41.
37 Mommsen 1887: I 356, 391. The lictores curiatii summoned the comitia curiata (Gell. N.A. 15.27), assisted at sacrifices pro populo Romano (CIL. 6.1846-7, 1852, 1885-92, 14.296), and accompanied the flamines (Ov. Fast. 2.21-4; Festus 82L; Plut. Mor. 291b; CIL. 12.6038). Although Dio claims that the Vestals were given the right to be accompanied by one lictor each because one of the members of the order had been insulted on her way home from dinner (ὅτι τις αὐτῶν ἀπὸ δείπνου πρὸς ἑσπέραν οἰκάδε ἐπανιοῦσα ἠγνοήθη τε καὶ ὑβρίσθη, 47.19.4), there is no need to assume that they were not assigned lictores curiatii. In fact, it may even be possible to speculate that the Vestals had previously been attended by lictors when carrying out their ritual responsibilities, but, following the incident in 42, they were permitted to travel with a lictor at all times.
symbolism of the gesture. Religious officials at Rome, both male and female, derived the
privilege not from their gender but from their status within public religion.

The Vestals received additional privileges during the principate of Augustus, including the right to sit in very prominent seats at the gladiatorial games. This honor was likely bestowed at the time of the lex Julia Theatralis, which imposed new restrictions on seating in the amphitheatre as part of Augustus’ multi-faceted effort to restore the discrimina
ordinum (distinction of the orders). According to Suetonius, the princeps relegated all women to the upper levels of the amphitheater with the exception of the Vestals, who were granted an exclusive section in the lower level opposite the praetor’s tribunal. Although Cicero’s pro Murena indicates that the Vestals had reserved seats during the Republican period as well, the location of their special box would presumably have been even more prominent following the lex Julia Theatralis, when men and women no longer sat together at the games.

Despite the unusual degree of visibility guaranteed by their privileged position in the lower level, it does not necessarily follow that the women were invested with an aura of masculinity. The Vestals, along with other prominent Roman religious officials, received their own place in the amphitheater on account of their role in public religion, just as male and female religious officials regularly sat in the prohedria (front seats) in Greek theaters. According to Arnobius, all of the major religious colleges at Rome had special seats. An inscription from the Colosseum that identifies those reserved for the Arval Brethren appears to confirm this assertion. The Vestals’ reserved seats reflect the esteem in which the order was held at Rome. Their prominent position in the amphitheater indicates that the Vestals enjoyed visibility within the community even when they were not participating in religious ritual. Moreover, the Vestals appear to have been the only female religious officials

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41 Tiberius refused to allow Livia to be attended by a lictor except when she was serving as flaminica Divi Augusti (Tac. Ann. 1.14.2; Cass. Dio 56.46.2). Even if the new privilege was granted in conscious imitation of the Vestals, as Beard claims (1980: 17), this does not weaken my claim that the right was associated with their religious service. On the Vestals as a model for the public persona of Livia, see, for example, Willrich 1911; Bauman 1981; Barrett 2000: 142-4.
43 Suet. Aug. 44.3.
44 For the Republican period, see Cic. Mur. 73, with Rawson 1987: 97. See also below.
46 Arnob. Adv. Nat. 4.35.4. See also Tac. Ann. 2.83.2.
47 ILS 5049.
permitted to sit among the male spectators, a fact that attests to their relative importance within the religious hierarchy.

The *lex Papia Poppaea* of A.D. 9, which amended and supplemented certain provisions in the *lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus*, guaranteed the Vestals the same privileges as mothers of three children.\(^{49}\) Although they already enjoyed freedom from *tutela*, the grant of the *ius trium liberorum* was necessary in order to exempt the Vestals from a provision in the *lex Papia Poppaea* that prevented the unmarried and childless from inheriting testamentary bequests.\(^{50}\) The restriction applied only to those whose estates were valued at more than one hundred thousand sesterces, which suggests that some Vestals controlled considerable wealth by this period.\(^{51}\)

The efforts of Augustus to enhance the profile and privileges of the Vestals should be considered alongside his desire to associate the order and the cult of Vesta more closely with himself and his household.\(^{52}\) Suetonius associates the privileges with other religious reforms undertaken by the princeps when he finally became *pontifex maximus* following the death of Lepidus in 12:

\[
\text{sacerdotum et numerum et dignitatem sed et commoda auxit, praecipue Vestalium virginum (Aug. 31.3).}
\]

He [Augustus] increased the number and importance of the *sacerdotes*, and also their benefits, especially those of the Vestal Virgins.

In 29, Augustus had been granted the power to appoint priests, even beyond the usual number.\(^{53}\) He did not, however, increase the number of Vestals, nor did he initiate a member of his own family. Instead, Augustus contented himself with increasing the honors and benefits of membership in the order.

Perhaps Augustus’ most pressing motivation to augment the Vestals’ privileges was persistent elite resistance to surrendering their daughters to the order. As we have seen, however, it was not the incentive of further material rewards that galvanized the senatorial class, but rather the fear of seeing a freedman’s daughter selected as a Vestal.\(^{54}\)

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\(^{49}\) Cass. Dio 56.10.2: καὶ ταῖς ἀειπαρθένοις πάνθ’ διαπερ αὐτὶ τεκούσαι ἔχον ἔχαρισατο (and he [Augustus] granted the Vestal Virgins all the privileges enjoyed by women who had borne children).

\(^{50}\) Gardner 1986: 24.

\(^{51}\) The source for this stipulation is the *Gnomon* of the Idios Logos, which could indicate that it was part of a later modification. Brunt (1971: 565), however, argues that it was in the original Augustan legislation.

\(^{52}\) For the special relationship between Augustus and the Vestals, see chapter 3.

\(^{53}\) For Augustus’ religious reforms, see, for example, Price 1996; Scheid 2005.

\(^{54}\) See above.
whether or not Augustus’ policies were effective in attracting women to the order, the
privileged legal and social status of the Vestals was maintained and even enhanced during the
Augustan period in parallel to the special status of Octavia and Livia.

According to Tacitus, Tiberius was also anxious to increase the prestige, and
evidently the enthusiasm, of the Vestals:

\[ \text{utque gisceret dignatio sacerdotum atque ipsis prompti animus foret ad capesandas}
\]
\[ \text{caerimonias, decretum Corneliae virginis, quae in locum Scantiae capiebatur, sestertium}
\]
\[ \text{viciens, et quotiens Augusta theatrum introisset, ut sedes inter Vestalium consideret (Tac.}
\]
\[ \text{Ann. 4.16).}
\]

In order that the dignity of the priestesses would be enhanced and their minds more willing
to undertake their ritual duties, two million sesterces were voted to the virgin Cornelia, who
was taken in the place of Scantia; while Augusta, whenever she entered the theatre, was to
take her place among the seats reserved for the Vestals.\(^{55}\)

Tiberius’ monetary gift to Cornelia was quite substantial. To put the amount in perspective,
Augustus had imposed a property qualification of one million sesterces for entrance to the
senatorial \(\text{ordo}.\)\(^{56}\) Five years earlier, in A.D. 19, Tiberius had given one million sesterces to the
runner up in that year’s selection process. These financial incentives were likely intended to
increase interest in the order at time when candidates were evidently still scarce. Tacitus also
notes that Tiberius allowed Livia to sit with the Vestals during gladiatorial games, a move
that associated the order more closely with the imperial household and undoubtedly
benefited both parties.\(^{57}\)

Many of the privileges and honors associated with the Vestal order appear to have
had ritual explanations. In every case, however, the provisions also enhanced the Vestals’
prestige and distinguished them from ordinary Romans. The Vestals were public religious
officials, and like other public office holders at Rome, they enjoyed special privileges and
honors. Not surprisingly, as we shall see in the next section, some Vestals were able to use
the benefits of their order to their own advantage.

\(^{55}\) Most translators of this passage render \textit{caerimonias} as “rituals” or “rites.” \textit{Caerimonium}, however, can also
characterize the ritual rules and prohibitions imposed on certain priests. Livy uses the word in this way when
discussing the establishment of the Vestal order by Numa (\textit{virginitate alitique caerimoniis venerabiles ac sanctas fecit},
1.20; see also Gell. \textit{N.A.} 10.15.1; Serv. \textit{Aen.} 4.29, 374, 8.552, 11.76; Vanggaard 1988: 88). If this sense is
understood here, it may suggest that Tacitus believed the incentives were necessary to compensate Vestals for
the limitations their new life would entail, among which absolute virginity was the most prominent.

\(^{56}\) Cass. Dio 54.17.3.

\(^{57}\) In 35, Livia and Octavia had been granted other Vestal honors, including exemption from \textit{tutela} and
\textit{sacrosanctitas}.
The Vestals in Roman Politics

On May 12, A.D. 240, a military tribune by the name of Aemilius Pardalas dedicated a portrait statue in honor of the *virgo Vestalis maxima*. In the accompanying inscription, Pardalas praises Campia Severina for her kindness (*benignitas*), and thanks her for providing the necessary patronage to obtain his military post and membership in the equestrian order:


To Campia Severina, senior Vestal Virgin, most holy and most kind. In gratitude for the benefits of equestrian rank and a military post of the second rank that she obtained for him, Aemilius Pardalas, honored at her request with the command of the first cohort ‘Aquitanica,’ erected this.

This same Vestal was commemorated by another *eques*, Q. Veturius Callistratus, who had been made superintendent of the imperial libraries on her recommendation (*suffragio*).\(^{58}\) Campia, it seems, had the ear of the emperor, perhaps by virtue of their shared membership in the pontifical college. She was not alone. Other dedicatory inscriptions from the *atrium Vestae* suggest that the Vestals regularly secured concrete *beneficia* for their freedmen, close relatives, and clients. During the imperial period, the Vestals were women of distinction and influence whose close relationship with the emperor allowed them to act as powerful *patronae*.

While the sociopolitical climate was quite different under the Republic, our sources suggest that the Vestals were prominent and influential figures during this period as well. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine a series of episodes in which Republican Vestals actively engaged with their social and political context.\(^{59}\) These stories have been noticed individually before. When considered as a group, however, the material reveals a more vibrant picture of the Vestal order than we might otherwise expect. In addition to obvious tangible benefits, special privileges like sacrosanctity and reserved seats at the arena allowed the Vestals to press their political agendas in ways that other elite women could not. The Vestals were certainly aware of their unique position in Roman society and, like their male counterparts, understood how to turn the benefits of religious office to their own advantage.

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\(^{58}\) *CIL* 6.2130 = *ILS* 4928.

\(^{59}\) Richard Bauman (1992) and Robin Lorsch Wildfang (2002) have examined many of the examples under consideration in this section. Bauman’s work has a broader and different scope, that of the political action of Roman women in general. Wildfang offers an analysis of the political activities of the Vestals, but her conclusions differ from my own in many respects.
Before turning to the political activities of individual Vestals, I would like to consider briefly the political implications of their position within the pontifical college. Although their responsibilities were less obviously political than those of prominent male religious officials, Vestals did occasionally exert their influence within the public sphere. Among other things, members of the pontifical college were charged with advising the senate on religious matters, an explicitly political function. Evidence from the late Republic suggests that the Vestals occasionally participated in this process.

In 62, Publius Clodius Pulcher was accused of disguising himself as a woman and infiltrating the all female rites of Bona Dea, held that year in the house of Julius Caesar, the praetor and new pontifex maximus. This secretive celebration was a state festival that involved the sacrifice of a pig by the Vestal Virgins and prayers for the well being of the Roman people. Since the rites were celebrated on behalf of the Roman state, Clodius’ intrusion was believed to have ruptured the pax deorum and endangered the entire community. The Vestals immediately repeated the ceremony in order to repair the damage. Although the affair quickly became a political controversy, it was first and foremost a religious issue. The senate therefore referred the matter to the Vestals and the pontifices. The Vestals had presided over the ceremony and must have actively engaged in the college’s deliberations about the possible infraction. They may even have voted on whether or not to declare Clodius’ intrusion a crime. The so-called Bona Dea scandal demonstrates that the Vestals could be asked to advise the senate on matters related to their sphere of responsibility, a category of official religious activity from which the Vestals are almost always excluded by modern scholars. The scandal and its aftermath therefore suggest that the Vestals had a more visible and official role within the pontifical college than is often assumed.

There is also evidence that the Vestals used their institutional position to promote their own political agendas. Claudia, the daughter of Ap. Claudius Pulcher (cos. 143), took advantage of her position as a Vestal to influence the outcome of a potentially explosive political situation in the mid second century. Claudia’s father, who served as consul in 143,

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60 Caesar was praetor in 62 and the newly elected pontifex maximus. The profanation of the rites in his house could hardly have reflected well on his brief tenure. For a detailed modern account with full bibliography, see Tatum 1999: 62-86.
61 This point does not receive adequate consideration from Bauman (1992: 62-3) or Wildfang (2006: 98-9).
62 Michael Johnson (2007: 159, 162-3), for example, hypothesizes that the Vestals may have possessed a vote on this matter.
63 See, for example, Beard 1990; Scheid 1993.
won a victory over the Alpine Salassi in that year.⁶⁴ On his return to Rome, Claudius asked the senate for public funds to pay for a triumph, evidently presuming that the honor itself would be awarded.⁶⁵ The senate, however, refused his request, citing the heavy losses he had sustained during the campaign.⁶⁶ One late source claims that Claudius had killed 5,000 Salassi, the minimum number required for a triumph, but had lost just as many of his own men. The consul was undeterred. Although the relevant portion of the Fasti triumphales is missing, later sources indicate that he celebrated an unsanctioned triumph at his own expense.⁶⁷

Unable to thwart the consul by withholding official sanction, Claudius’ opponents were forced to act more directly. One tribune attempted to forcibly remove the general from his chariot. Valerius Maximus describes the scene with characteristic flair:

*quae, cum patrem suum triumphantem e curru violenta tribuni manu detrahi animadvertisset, mira celeritate utrisque se interponendo amplissimam potestatem inimicitiae accensam depulit. igitur alterum triumphum pater in Capitolium, alterum filia in aedem Vestae duxit, nec discerni potuit utri plus laudis tribueretur, cui victoria an cui pietas comes aderat (Val. Max. 5.4.6).*

When she saw her father at his triumph being dragged from his chariot by the violent hand of a tribune, she interposed herself between the two with amazing speed and so drove off a mighty power inflamed by enmities. Then the father led one triumph to the Capitol while the daughter led another to the aedes Vestae, nor could it be determined which of the two should be granted more praise, he who had victory as a companion or she who had piety.⁶⁸

Claudia evidently intervened just as the situation threatened to devolve into violence and protected her father by means of her sacrosanctity as a Vestal.⁶⁹ Claudia’s actions seem quite

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⁶⁴ Livy Per. 53; Cass. Dio fr. 74.
⁶⁵ Cass. Dio fr. 74. The ancient sources indicate that the senate had the power to award triumphs and allocate public money to pay for them (see, for example, Pol. 6.15.7-8; Livy 3.63.9-10; Dion. Hal. 3.22.2, with Brennan 1996: 316; Pittenger 2008: 35-7).
⁶⁶ Orosius 5.4.7.
⁶⁷ Orosius says that Claudius paid for the triumph with his own money (*usus privatis sumptibus, 5.4.7*).
⁶⁸ See also Cic. Cael. 34.11. According to Suetonius, Claudia intervened at her brother’s triumph (*Tib. 2*), but this may be an error rather than an alternative version of the event (Rüpke 2008: 609, n. 2, No. 1152).
⁶⁹ Although Hans-Friedrich Mueller suggests that Claudia actually led a procession to the aedes Vestae (2002: 54-5), the parallel is more likely to be metaphorical.
⁷⁰ Scholars have generally assumed that the tribune was attempting to interpose his veto (Bauman 1992: 47; Flower 2002: 164; Wildfang 2006: 92). Indeed, Suetonius claims that Claudia accompanied her brother “in order to make it an act of sacrilege for any of the tribunes to veto or hinder his triumph” (*ne vetare aut intercedere fas cuiquam tribunorum esset, Tib. 2*). As Corey Brennan (1996: 319) has noted, however, this is not strictly accurate. Claudius had bypassed the senate and the popular assembly, the two bodies had the power to authorize a triumph in this period, and therefore had not given the tribune an opportunity to use his veto. Instead, he was forced to resort to violence, “a desperate act – prompted by the frustration of having nothing to veto” (Brennan 1996: 319).
unprecedented. Sacrosanctity protected the Vestals from physical harm and ritual impurity by making it a religious crime to touch them. Claudia, however, employed her personal inviolability to secure a triumph for her father, inserting herself directly into the public spectacle and enabling her father to contravene accepted political behavior by triumphing without the approval of the senate or the people. Despite this affront to the mos maiorum and the tribune’s attempt to intercede, ancient authors appear to have accepted Claudius’ triumph as legitimate, thanks in large part, no doubt, to the support offered by his Vestal daughter. The episode illustrates how a Vestal might use the privileges of her office in an unorthodox manner in support of her own or a family member’s political agenda.

The Claudia episode also reveals a tension inherent in the Vestals’ position in Roman society. As we have seen, various legal privileges held by members of the order suggest that they were ideally regarded as isolated figures. We might therefore expect Claudia to be criticized for her overt intrusion into political life on behalf of her father. She is instead praised for her achievement and idealized as a paragon of female virtue. As we have just seen, the episode appears in Valerius Maximus’ chapter on pietas. Claudia also features as an exemplum in a well-known passage from Cicero’s pro Caelio, in which the orator admonishes the infamous Clodia for failing to imitate the example set by her illustrious ancestor. She was even commemorated on a coin minted by Gaius Clodius Vestalis, who served as a mint official in 41 (Fig. 50). The Vestal is depicted seated on an elaborate chair holding a

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70 Flower 2002: 164.
71 Most scholars agree that the sanctitas of the Vestals and tribune of the plebs. Bauman (1981) however, draws a distinction between the two.
72 All of the sources indicate that the triumph was successfully completed, and the vir triumphalis of Macrob. Sat. 3.14.14 likely refers to Ap. Claudius (Brennan 1996: 331, n. 25, contra Broughton 1951-86: III 56). Although Claudius lacked senatorial or popular approval for his triumph, Brennan (1996: 319) has suggested that he may have convinced the college of augurs to issue a decretum allowing him to keep his military auspices within the pomerium on the day of the triumph. Claudius’ father, C. Claudius Pulcher (cos. 177), had been an augur for twenty-eight years (Livy 33.44.3, 45.44.3), and Claudius may already have been a member of the college by this year. This theory adds a further layer to the picture of how priestly powers could be manipulated for political purposes.
74 Flower 2002: 164; Pittenger 2008: 48. The sources are more ambivalent about Claudius’ determination to triumph at all costs. Dio, for example, claims that his decision to attack the Salassi was motivated by jealousy for his colleague, M. Claudius Metellus (fr. 74). Nevertheless, the scandal apparently did not impede Claudius’ subsequent political career. He served as censor in 136 (Cass. Dio fr. 81; Festus 360L), appointed himself princeps senatus (Plut. Ti. Gracch. 4.1), and was a member of the Gracchan land commission (Cic. Leg. Agr. 2.31; Vell. Pat. 2.2.3; Val. Max. 7.2.6; Plut. Ti. Gracch. 13.1; App. B. Civ. 1.13, 18-19).
75 Cic. Cael. 34. Clodia was the son of Ap. Claudius Pulcher (cos. 79), the sister of P. Clodius Pulcher (tr. pl. 58), and the niece of the Vestal Claudia.
76 Crawford 512/1 with Flower 2002b: 169. C. C. f. Clodius Vestalis is later attested as proconsul of Crete and Cyrene (CIL 11.3310a).
sacrificial vessel, her hair bound by the characteristic infiulæ and vittae. Although Clodius chose not to depict the triumph itself, the portrait was likely enough to evoke the scene in the mind of the viewer. These sources indicate that by the late Republic at least, Claudia’s filial piety had essentially overshadowed her role in assisting Claudius’ blatant disregard for the senate and the mos maiorum.

The afterlife of this remarkable episode also suggests that it was not unacceptable or surprising for a Vestal to maintain close ties to her family in spite of the legally constructed ideal. Claudia’s intervention on her father’s behalf reveals that social practice did not always correspond exactly to cultural ideology. Other evidence suggests that her experience was not entirely unique. Cicero, for example, emphasizes the importance of a Vestal’s connection to her birth family in a speech on behalf of Marcus Fonteius, whose sister Fonteia was a member of the order. The orator warns the jury that if they convict Fonteius, the tears of the Vestal, bereft of her brother, will extinguish the eternal flame on the hearth of Vesta. Fonteia’s position, Cicero insists, is particularly vulnerable:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
cui miseræ quod præsidium, quod solacium reliquum est hoc amissō? nam ceteræ feminæ
gignere ipsæ sibi præsidia et habere domi fortunārum omnium socium participemque
possunt; huic vero virgini quid est praeterea fratrem quod aut iucundum aut carum esse possit?
\end{center}
\end{quote}

(Font. 47).

What protection, what comfort is left to the poor woman, if he [Fonteius] is lost? Other women can bear protectors for themselves and can have in their own homes a companion and a participant in all life’s chances. But to this virgin what is there that can be dear or delightful except her brother?

The sentiment expressed here may have been a familiar one. Because of the unique requirements of their religious office, Vestals could look only to their birth families for support and affection. Cicero tugs at the heartstrings of his jury by reminding them that Fonteia will have no præsidium or solacium if she loses her brother. Indeed, the sight of the tearful Vestal herself, who was present at the trial, must have driven the point home and may have helped to secure an acquittal. Claudia, it seems, was not the only Vestal to preserve a close bond with her birth family. Indeed, loyalty to familial interests will prove to be an important trend in the political activities of Republican Vestals.

In 123, just twenty years after Claudia entered the political fray, Licinia dedicated an altar and a small shrine at the Aventine temple of Bona Dea. The dedication, which included an inscription identifying the Vestal as the dedicator, was likely costly and was
evidently quite prominent. The shrine advertised Licinia’s wealth and status as a Vestal and communicated something about her personal religious loyalties. It also became a political issue almost immediately. The urban praetor challenged Licinia’s right to make a dedication without the permission of the people. The senate referred the matter to the pontifices, who issued the following pronouncement:

cum P. Scaevola pontifex maximus pro conlegio respondit, “QUOD IN LOCO PUBLICO LICINIA CAI FILIA INIUSSU POPULI DEDICASSET, SACRUM NON VIDERIER” (Dom. 136).

Speaking on behalf of the college, the pontifex maximus Publius Scaevola on that occasion advised: “That which Licinia, daughter of Gaius, had consecrated on public ground without the people’s consent did not seem a valid consecration to them.”

Cicero goes on to explain that the senate ordered the urban praetor to remove the inscription and presumably the shrine as well.

The circumstances surrounding Licinia’s dedication raise a number of questions, including why she erected the altar without receiving the approval of the populus. A partial answer may be found in the contemporary political situation. Licinia made her dedication during a period of renewed conflict between patricians and plebeians over control of religious authority at Rome. In particular, the two groups disagreed over whether new religious officials should be appointed by existing officials or elected in the assembly. Licinia’s decision to erect her shrine without formal consent from the people has been read as a statement of her support for the patrician cause. In other words, it has been assumed that Licinia was attempting to arrogate religious authority to religious officials alone by ostentatiously bypassing the popular assembly.

If, however, Licinia was the daughter of Gaius Licinius Crassus, and she almost certainly was, this interpretation seems less compelling. First of all, it should be noted that the Licinii Crassi were plebeians. Furthermore, in 145, Crassus had attempted to pass a law

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77 For the inscription, see Cic. Dom. 137, quoted below.
78 Sometime between 174 and 154 a lex Papiria was passed forbidding the dedication of an aedis, terra or ara without the permission of the people (Cic. Dom. 127-8, with Johnson 2007: 167).
79 For a discussion of the religious and political struggles in this period, see Rawson 1974. Bauman (1992: 52-3) places Licinia in the patrician camp. Wildfang (2006: 93) has advanced the argument that Licinia “was attempting to demonstrate that her actions as a Vestal, and thus implicitly her order’s power, were not subjected to the dictates of the people.”
80 The filiation in Scaevola’s ruling and the fact that Licinia was defended by the orator L. Licinius Crassus against an accusation of incestus in 114 (Cic. Brut. 160) suggest that her father was C. Licinius Crassus (see Rüpke 2008: 765, No. 2219).
requiring vacancies in the four major religious colleges to be filled by popular vote.\textsuperscript{81} If, therefore, Licinia’s dedication were designed to reaffirm the authority of a closed circle of religious officials, it would have been made in direct opposition to the political interests of her father. Such independence and defiance is certainly not unimaginable, but it is an assumption that should perhaps give us pause. Although a Vestal was legally removed from her father’s \textit{potestas} upon entrance to the order, the obligation to demonstrate filial piety was not automatically dissolved as well. Claudia’s dramatic action on behalf of her father clearly demonstrates that close relationships were maintained.\textsuperscript{82}

In fact, the location where Licinia chose to dedicate her shrine may suggest that her political sympathies were actually closely aligned with those of plebeian magistrates like her father. According to Ovid, the Aventine sanctuary of Bona Dea was located just below the \textit{Saxum}, the place where Remus had taken his auspices during the infamous augury contest.\textsuperscript{83} As Peter Wiseman has argued, Remus emerged as the founder of the plebeian cause during the period of the Licinio-Sextian revolution.\textsuperscript{84} His observation point on the Aventine Hill was likewise associated with the plebeian struggle for political equality, since it was the traditional site of the second secession in 449.\textsuperscript{85} The Aventine was also home to several cults with plebeian associations, including that of Ceres, whose temple housed the records of the plebeian aediles.\textsuperscript{86} The Aventine cult of Bona Dea likewise attracted a diverse group of predominantly plebeian worshippers.\textsuperscript{87} Licinia’s expression of devotion to this healing cult, with which the Vestals did not have a particular connection, may have been calculated to advertise her solidarity with the plebeian cause.

In light of this evidence, we should also reevaluate the assumption that Licinia’s decision to dedicate her shrine without the approval of the people was intended as a statement of pro-patrician sentiments. In fact, Licinia may have taken her cue from contemporary popular politicians who often used religious dedications to make a political point. During this period, several \textit{popularis} tribunes attempted to dedicate to the gods the

\textsuperscript{81} Münzer 1920: 243; Bauman 1992: 53.
\textsuperscript{82} As noted by Bauman 1992: 53; contra Wildfang 2006: 93.
\textsuperscript{83} Ov. \textit{Fast.} 5.148-54.
\textsuperscript{84} Wiseman 1995.
\textsuperscript{85} Livy 3.50.10.
\textsuperscript{86} Livy 3.55.13.
\textsuperscript{87} Brouwer 1989 discusses fully the evidence for the worshippers of Bona Dea from each social class.
property of patrician magistrates with whom they were in conflict. In each case, the 
*pontifices* nullified the dedication because the tribune had not received the explicit consent of 
the people. If even popular leaning politicians bypassed the assembly on occasion, it seems 
unjustified to assume that Licinia intended to snub the people.

Any interpretation of this complicated evidence is open to a number of valid 
criticisms. Perhaps, for example, Licinia had been healed of some infirmity after visiting 
Bona Dea’s shrine on the Aventine. Unfortunately, the precise circumstances surrounding 
the dedication are ultimately irrecoverable. Nonetheless, the senate’s hostile reaction makes 
better sense if we assume that her political views were similar to those of her father. In 
other words, if we agree with previous scholars that Licinia’s dedication was in part a 
political act, we should likely understand her decision to erect a shrine at a site with plebeian 
overtones, rather than at the Temple of Vesta, for example, as one designed to communicate 
her sympathy with the plebeian cause. However the episode is interpreted, it suggests one 
concrete way in which an individual Vestal could advertise her wealth and status within the 
community. Licinia’s shrine was destroyed, a striking denigration of her *auctoritas* and 
position in the pontifical college. Perhaps, however, other Vestals were more successful in 
their efforts to leave a mark on the physical landscape of the city.

Six decades after Licinia’s failed dedication to Bona Dea, another Vestal bearing the 
same name inserted herself into a particularly heated consular election. In 63, this Licinia 
offered her reserved seat at the gladiatorial games to Lucius Licinius Murena, a candidate for 
the consulship of 62. According to Cicero, Murena and Licinia were closely related. If the 
Vestals sat together, as they did during the principate, the sight of Murena seated among the 
members of the college would have made for a particularly striking tableau. The gesture 
communicated Licinia’s political preferences to the large crowd present at the games and 
must have been calculated to enhance her kinsman’s candidacy.

Murena’s bid for the consulship was successful, but by late November he faced 
prosecution for electoral malpractice. The benefit he derived from Licinia’s favor seems to

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88 In 131, the tribune C. Antinius Labeo attempted to dedicate the property of Q. Metellus (cens. 131), who had 
ejected him from the senate (Cic. *Dom.* 123). In 70, the property of the censor Cn. Lentulus Clodianus was the 
subject of a similar dedication by an unnamed tribune (Cic. *Dom.* 124). Cicero implies that these were not 
isolated incidents, although in each case the dedication was unsuccessful (*Dom.* 124). Livy reports a similar 
incident as early as 169 involving Ti. Sempronius Gracchus and C. Claudius (43.16.10). See also Rawson 1974: 
196.
89 Rawson 2006: 329. Augustus granted the Vestals the right to sit in very prominent seats opposite the 
praetor’s tribunal at the gladiatorial games (*Suet.* Aug. 44.3, with Rawson 1987).
have been among the charges leveled against him. Although the details are unclear, Cicero, who spoke in defense of the consul-designate, argued that neither Murena nor Licinia had done anything wrong:

\[
\text{…nec si virgo Vestalis, huius propinqua et necessaria, locum suum gladiatorium concessit huic, non et illa pie fecit et hic a culpa est remotus (Mur. 73).}
\]

If a Vestal Virgin, a relative and close friend, gave this man her seat at the gladiatorial games, she acted dutifully and he is free from guilt.

Cicero emphasizes the close personal relationship between Licinia and Murena in an effort to minimize the objectionable nature of the gesture. Nonetheless, Licinia seems to have overstepped the bounds of acceptable Vestal behavior. At the very least, she miscalculated by allowing Murena to use one of her Vestal privileges for his political gain. Fortunately, Murena was acquitted. Licinia’s favor was likely exceptional in its particulars, but it does fit into a larger pattern. Like other Vestals before her, Licinia sought to advance the political interests of a male relative. Unlike Claudia, however, she was censured for her actions.

Just a few weeks after he had successfully defended Murena against the charge of bribery and misconduct, Cicero found himself in possession of definitive evidence against several leading Catilinarians. The conspirators were arrested on the third of December and confessed their role in the plot, but the senate failed to reach a decision regarding their fate. That night, as Cicero deliberated about whether or not the conspirators should be put to death, his wife Terentia hosted the nocturnal rites of Bona Dea. 90 The current political crisis must have loomed large in the minds of the participants on that particular evening. Already experiencing a mixture of relief and apprehension, the women’s emotions were further excited by an unexpected omen:

\[
\text{ταῦτα τοῦ Κικέρωνος διαποροῦντο, γίνεται τι ταῖς γυναιξῖ σημείων θυούσαις, ὁ γὰρ βωμός, ἢδη τοῦ πυρὸς κατακεκοιμῆθαι δοκοῦντος, ἐκ τῆς τέφρας καὶ τῶν κατακεκαυμένων φλωίων φλόγα πολλὴν ἀνῆκε καὶ λαμπρὰν. ὃς ἡς αἱ μὲν ἄλλαι διεπτοῆθησαν, αἱ δ’ ἱεραὶ παρθένοι τὴν τοῦ Κικέρωνος γυναῖκα Τερεντίαν ἐκέλευσαν ἵ
\]
\[
\text{τάχος χωρεῖν πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ κελεύειν, οἷς ἐγνωκεν ἐγχειρεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος, ὡς μέγα πρὸς τε σωτηρίαν καὶ ὀξίναν αὐτῷ τῆς θεοῦ φῶς διδούσῃ (Plut. Cic. 20.1-2).}
\]

\[
\text{… a sign was given to the women who were sacrificing. For the altar, although the fire seemed to have gone out already, sent forth from the ashes and burnt remnants a great and brilliant flame. The rest of the women were terrified at this, but the sacred virgins urged Terentia, the wife of Cicero, to go with haste to her husband and tell him to carry out what he had in mind on behalf of the country, since the goddess was giving him a great light to}
\]

90 Plut. Cic. 19.3. The festival was celebrated in the house of the highest ranking magistrate cum imperio present at Rome, who was naturally required to spend the night elsewhere (Brouwer 1989: 361).
The “omen,” and the Vestals’ interpretation of it, undoubtedly made a strong impression on the assembled matronae, who could reasonably be expected to report the event to their husbands. At a meeting of the senate on the fifth of December, Cicero threw his weight behind a recommendation that the conspirators be put to death and, after a heated debate, the senate voted to support this motion.

Cicero was certainly under pressure to justify his actions at a later date, but it may not be necessary to assume that he invented the omen after the fact. One of the Vestals in this period was Terentia’s half-sister Fabia. Cicero’s letters indicate that the sisters were very close. We know, for example, that Terentia fled to the House of the Vestals in 58, when Cicero’s house on the Palatine was looted and burned by a mob loyal to Clodius. Thus it is not difficult to imagine that Terentia and her sister coordinated the miraculous flame on the altar.

In fact, immediately following the passage just cited, Plutarch provides an assessment of Terentia’s character that underscores her reputation for taking an active interest in her husband’s political career.

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91 See also Cass. Dio 37.35.4: καί τινα παρὰ τοῦ δαιμονίου χρηστὴν ἐλπίδα ἀμα τῇ ἐῳ λαβὼν, ὃτι ἱερὰν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ ὑπὸ τῶν ᾿αιπαρθένων ὑπὲρ τοῦ δήμου ποιήθηκε τὸ πῦρ ἐπί μακρότατον παρὰ τὸ εἰκός ἠρθη (At dawn he [Cicero] received some divine inspiration to hope for the best; for in the course of sacrifices conducted in his house by the Vestals in behalf of the populace, the fire, contrary to custom, shot up to a very great height). Bona Dea appears to have been associated with prophetic gifts, although this is only reference to a specific omen in the ancient sources (Brouwer 1989: 335).

92 Although Cicero does not refer to the omen in the published version of the speech he delivered in the senate on the fifth of December (Cat. 4), the senators in attendance had likely heard the news from their wives. In contrast to the cult on the Aventine, the nocturnal rites of the Bona Dea were an exclusively aristocratic affair (Brouwer 1989: 256, 268). The participants, in other words, were married to the senators who would vote on Cicero’s proposal regarding the fate of the conspirators.

93 Sall. Cat. 50.3-53.1; Plut. Cic. 20.4-21.5; Cass. Dio 37.35.4-36.3.

94 As H. H. J. Brouwer (1989: 263), who has studied Cicero’s relationship to the Bona Dea in detail, notes, “It must be admitted that this token of divine approval appeared at the most convenient moment for Cicero, particularly in view of the amount of criticism of his mode of action afterwards. This does not imply that no “miracle” took place during this particular night, but one wonders whether Cicero’s contemporaries attached the same value as he did himself to this miracle, one which came in very handy for him.”

95 Terentia’s decision to seek refuge in the atrium Vestae in 58 may suggest that the half-sisters were close. Susan Treggiari (2007: 30-1), however, notes that Cicero never mentions Fabia or the possibility of exploiting her position as a Vestal in his letters.

96 Plut. Cic. 20.3: ἡ δὲ Τερεντία—καὶ γὰρ οὐδ’ ἄλλως ἦν πρεσίτας τις οὐδ’ ἄτολμος τὴν φύσιν, ἀλλὰ φιλότιμος γυνὴ καὶ μάλλον, ως αὐτὸς φησίν ο Κικέρων, τῶν πολιτικῶν μεταλαμβάνουσα παρ’ ἐκείνου φροντίδων ἢ μεταδίδουσα τῶν οἰκίσκων ἐκεινῶς—ταῦτα τε πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔφρασε καὶ παρὼν γονὴν ἕπι τοὺς ἄνδρας (So Terentia, who was generally of no mild spirit nor without natural courage, but an ambitious woman, and, as Cicero himself tells us, more inclined to make herself a partner in his political perplexities than to share with him her domestic concerns, gave him this message and incited him against the conspirators). The author of the Invectiva in Ciceronem may have had this incident in mind when he accused Terentia of engaging in sacrilege and perjury (sacrilega ac periuriis, 2). See also Treggiari 2007: 44-5.
the complicity of the Vestals, who oversaw the rites and performed the actual sacrifice, must also be acknowledged. Furthermore, without the interpretation they allegedly provided, the omen may have received little credence among the women. In this instance, the Vestals capitalized on their official position as well as the credibility it gave them to influence the course of events in the midst of a political crisis. Like Claudia and Licinia, Fabia seems to have acted to advance the political interests of a family member, in this case her sister and brother-in-law.

On at least one occasion, the Vestals may have been motivated to act on behalf of a fellow religious official. In 81, the Vestals petitioned Sulla to pardon his fellow patrician Julius Caesar. Caesar’s name had been added to the list of the proscribed when he refused to divorce his wife Cornelia, the daughter of Sulla’s bitter enemy Cinna. He fled Rome, took refuge in Sabine territory, was discovered and arrested, but managed to escape by bribing his captors. According to Suetonius, several prominent Sullans attempted to secure his pardon, including Aurelius Cotta, the cousin of Caesar’s mother Aurelia, and Mamercus Aemilius, a more distant maternal relation. Sulla was finally persuaded to relent by the Vestals, who joined forces with Caesar’s relatives.

Scholars have often wondered what arguments were made on Caesar’s behalf and why Sulla accepted them. But we must also consider what factors motivated the Vestals to intercede at this time of exceptional political violence. Two possibilities have been suggested. According to the first, the Vestals took action because they shared Caesar’s political sympathies. We can securely identify only three Vestals who were active during

97 Although Plutarch claims that the matron of the household performed the sacrifice, Cicero (Har. resp. 17.37-18.38; Att. 1.13.3) and Asconius (Mil. 43) say that it was offered by the Vestals. The testimony of Cicero, a native Roman whose wife once hosted the rites, seems more reliable. For a fuller discussion of the issue, see chapter 3.
98 Vell. Pat. 2.41.2; Plut. Caes. 1.1-3. Although not every scholar agrees that Caesar was actually proscribed, the evidence strongly suggests that he was. His patrimony and Cornelia’s dowry were seized, he was arrested (and escaped only by means of a bribe), and received an official pardon from Sulla (see Ridley 2000: 220, with further bibliography).
99 Cic. Lég. 32; Suet. Iul. 1.2; Plut. Sull. 31.
100 Münzer first elucidated the relationship of Caesar to these men (1920: 312-3, 326).
101 Suet. Iul. 1.2: …dones per virgines Vestales perque Mamercum Aemilium et Aurelium Cottam pro pinquinos et adfines suos ueniam impetravit (…he at length obtained a pardon through the intercession of the Vestal virgins, and Mamercus Aemilius and Aurelius Cotta, his near relatives).
102 For a discussion of the scholarship, see Ridley 2000.
103 Rawson 1974: 211.
this period.\textsuperscript{104} Fonteia, who entered the college by 91 at the latest, was the daughter of a Marian family.\textsuperscript{105} Perpennia, initiated around 100, also belonged to a relatively new political family that had sided with Marius and Cinna during the civil war.\textsuperscript{106} Our acquaintance Fabia, on the other hand, was likely from a patrician family, though it is difficult to determine with whom they had sided during the civil war.\textsuperscript{107} While it is not necessarily the case that Fonteia and Perpennia shared their families’ political affiliation, their action on Caesar’s behalf is suggestive. Nonetheless, thousands of Sulla’s political enemies were put to death during the proscriptions, and there is no evidence that the Vestals made an attempt to bring the widespread violence to an end (though this would have required quite an extraordinary influence over the dictator).

It is possible that the Vestals were motivated instead by Caesar’s connection to the \textit{flamnium Dialis}. The details of Caesar’s relationship to this office are fraught with difficulty, but it seems likely that Caesar was designated \textit{flamen Dialis} by Marius and Cinna and inaugurated in 84, the year in which he married Cornelia.\textsuperscript{108} The Vestals and the \textit{flamen} were colleagues in the pontifical college and they cooperated with his wife, the \textit{flaminica Dialis}, in several important religious rites.\textsuperscript{109} The members of the college also had opportunities to interact on social occasions. Macrobius reports that the Vestals attended a lavish banquet put on in 69 to honor the inauguration of L. Cornelius Lentulus Niger as \textit{flamen} of Mars.\textsuperscript{110} The guest list, which included a number of distinguished male religious officials, serves as a reminder that the Vestals were connected to many of the leading men at Rome by virtue of their membership in the pontifical college. The religious connection can also be extended to Aurelius Cotta and Mamercus Aemilius, who were both \textit{pontifices}.\textsuperscript{111} Their shared membership in the pontifical college may explain how the two men were able to persuade

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Arruntia (Rupke 2008: 545, No. 722) may also have joined the order by this year, but she would likely have been very young.
\item Rawson 1974: 211. Fonteia’s father died in 91, which means that she must have entered the order before this date (Rüpke 2008: 695, No. 1733). Vestal initiates were required to be \textit{patrima et matrima}, that is, to have both parents living (Gell. N. A. 1.12.2).
\item Rawson 1974: 211; Rüpke 2008: 830, No. 2642.
\item Rüpke 2008: 672, No. 1577.
\item Though not every modern historian agrees that Caesar was fully inaugurated (see, for example, Taylor 1941; Leone 1976; Liou-Gille 1999), Badian (1961: 598, 1990: 33), Sumner (1973: 137-8) and Rüpke (2005: 1574-9, 2008: 734-5, No. 2003) maintain that he was.
\item The \textit{flaminica Dialis} was present at the festival of the Argei (Gell. N. A. 10.15.30). She must also have participated in the nocturnal rites of the Bona Dea, at which the Vestals presided (see below).
\item Macr. \textit{Sat.} 3.13.10-1.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the Vestals to participate in the effort to secure a pardon for Caesar. For whatever reason, the Vestals did intercede with the dictator. His decision to listen to their plea underscores the influence they were able to wield even in times of great social and political turmoil.

During the triumviral period and early principate, the Vestals remained influential in Roman politics, though in a less obviously proactive way. We no longer hear about the political activities of individual Vestals, though the order continues to appear in the historical record as a group. In fact, the evidence for Vestal activity in this period suggests that the women were generally regarded as trustworthy and apolitical figures in spite of the evidence considered thus far. During this period, the Vestals were entrusted with the care of important legal documents, valuables, and even money. According to Suetonius, Caesar gave his will to the virgo maxima, the chief of the Vestal Virgins, who released it after his death in 44. A copy of the pact of Misenum, the treaty signed by Antony, Octavian and Sextus Pompey in 39, was also sent to the Vestals for safe-keeping.

Perhaps the most infamous document entrusted to the Vestals was the will of Marc Antony, seized by Octavian during his propaganda campaign against the triumvir and his Egyptian wife:

\[
\text{ἀπέκειντο δ' αὐταὶ παρὰ ταῖς Ἑστιάσι παρθένοις, καὶ Καίσαρος αἴτούντος οὑκ ἐδωκαν εἴ δὲ βούλοιτο λαμβάνειν, ἐλθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐκέλευον. Ἐλαβεν οὐν ἠλθὼν (Plut. Ant. 58.5-6).}
\]

[Antony’s] will was on deposit with the Vestal Virgins, and when Caesar asked for it, they would not give it to him. But if he wanted to take it, they told him to come and do so. So he went and took it.

The seizure of Antony’s will was the second violation of this kind since the creation of the triumvirate. According to Plutarch, the triumvir had confiscated money on deposit with the Vestals during the height of the proscriptions. Cassius Dio says that the violence and instability in the city prompted the Vestals to remove the sacred objects (ἱερά) from the

112 Indeed, the prestige of the Vestal priesthood increased markedly under Augustus, who gave them new legal privileges and religious responsibilities (see, for example, Suet. Aug. 44.3).

113 Suet. Iul. 83.1: postulante ergo Lucio Piso secero testamentum eius aperitur recitaturque in Antonii domo, quod Idibus Septemberibus proximis in Lavicano suo fecerat demandaveratque virgini Vestali maxima (At the instance of Lucius Piso, his father-in-law, his [Caesar’s] will was opened and read aloud in the house of Antonius. He had made it on the Ides of the preceding September at his villa in Lavicanum and entrusted it to the chief of the Vestal virgins).

114 App. B. Civ. 5.73; Cass. Dio. 48.37.1.

115 Dio says that Titius and Plancus told Octavianus “what was in his [Antonius’] will and the name of the man who had it” (καὶ τὰ ἐν ταῖς διαθήκαις αὐτοῦ γεγραμένα τὸν τε ἔχοντα αὐτάς ἔμαθε, 50.3.3).
Temple of Vesta. These violations of the sanctity of the temple and the integrity of the Vestals should certainly be viewed within the context of the excesses of the triumviral period.

Nonetheless, the Vestals’ reaction to Octavian’s audacity suggests that they may have been sympathetic to his cause. Although the Vestals refused to surrender the will, which would have violated their pledge to protect it, they offered their tacit approval to its removal. If Plutarch’s sources are correct, it must be acknowledged that the Vestals contributed to the manipulation of public opinion during the run-up to the final civil war. The contents of the will bolstered Octavian’s effort to depict Antony as a slave to Cleopatra who had lost touch with traditional Roman values. Plutarch says that Octavian read aloud in the senate particularly incriminating passages, including Antony’s desire to be buried in Alexandria beside his Egyptian “wife.” This shocking revelation, coupled with other damning testimony, was evidently enough to persuade the senate to declare war on Cleopatra.

Historians have long debated the authenticity of the provisions contained in the document produced by Octavian. Whether or not the publicized version was a forgery, there can be little doubt that Antony had deposited his will with the Vestals, otherwise Octavian would never have risked the censure he faced for admitting that he had removed it from their care. In any case, the fact that the document had been in their possession was apparently enough to guarantee its authenticity to the senate. Antony’s decision to entrust his will to the Vestals suggests that he had faith in their integrity and impartiality, an impressive testament to their importance in Roman society.

116 Cass. Dio 42.31.3.
117 H. Vidal (1965: 559) has suggested that after the death of Caesar, the Vestals were often entrusted with money and valuable documents because of the state of political unrest and insecurity in Rome. This episode demonstrates that no location was completely safe.
118 Wildfang 2006: 100. As Crook (1957: 37, n. 13) has noted, however, the Vestals “are not likely to have been unanimously in collusion with Octavian.” Once again, Plutarch’s habit of referring to the Vestals as an undifferentiated group may be misleading.
119 Plut. Ant. 58.6.
120 Plut. Ant. 58-60.
121 Ronald Syme (1939: 282), for instance, called the will “An opportune discovery – so opportune that forgery might be suspected, though the provisions of the will do not perhaps utterly pass belief.” For arguments against the authenticity of the will, see Crook 1957, 1989. Johnson (1978) has argued that the will was not a forgery, while Sirianni (1984) suggests that only some of the provisions were fabricated by Augustus.
122 None of the ancient sources indicate that there were suspicions about the will’s authenticity (Johnson 1978: 496). Dio, for example, has Antonius complain that Octavius dared to open his will while he was still alive, not that he falsified its contents (Cass. Dio 50.20.7).
Despite this rather unseemly episode in 32, Augustus deposited the final version of his own will with the Vestals in A.D. 13, a decision that was likely guided by the close relationship he had cultivated with the order.\textsuperscript{123} According to Tacitus and Suetonius, the Vestals themselves brought the will into a meeting of the senate where it was opened and read aloud, a gesture that undoubtedly contributed to the solemnity of the whole affair.\textsuperscript{124} The Vestals had also been entrusted with several testamentary annexes written in Augustus’ own hand.\textsuperscript{125} These included detailed instructions for his funeral, an account of his achievements (i.e., the \textit{Res Gestae Divi Augusti}), an assessment of the resources of the empire, and his famous admonition “to keep the empire within its present boundaries” (\textit{coercendi intra terminos imperii}, Tac. \textit{Ann.} 1.11). The \textit{Res Gestae} in particular was critical to Augustus’ efforts to shape his legacy and remains central to our perception of his principate. Prior to its publication, the text was in the care not of Livia or Tiberius, but of the Vestal Virgins.

It remains to consider why wills, treaties, and even money were regularly entrusted to the Vestals. The practice of depositing valuables and important documents in temples was well established in the Republican period.\textsuperscript{126} Although it was equally common to give copies to friends, potentially contentious documents were typically deposited in a temple in order to ensure that the proper legal authority would have access to a legitimate copy.\textsuperscript{127} The Temple of Castor was frequently used as a depository, though as we have just seen, the Temple of Vesta was popular during the triumviral period.\textsuperscript{128}

The Vestals may have been regarded as suitable custodians for a number of reasons. Their organization into a college of six members ensured that even if one died, others would

\begin{footnotes}
\item[123] Tac. \textit{Ann.} 1.8.1; Suet. \textit{Aug.} 101.1; Cass. Dio 56.32.1. For Augustus’ relationship to the Vestals, see above.
\item[124] Tac. \textit{Ann.} 1.8.1: \textit{nihil primo senatus die aggi passus [est] nisi de supremis Augusti, cuius testamentum inlatum per virgines Vestae Tiberium et Liviæ heredes habuit} (He [Tiberius] allowed nothing to be discussed at the first meeting of the senate except the funeral of Augustus, whose testament, brought in by the Vestal Virgins, specified Tiberius and Livia as heirs). Suet. Aug. 101.1: \textit{testamentum … depositumque apud se virgines Vestales cum tribus signatis voluminibus protulerunt. Qae omnia in senatu aperta atque recitata sunt} (His will … had been deposited with the Vestal Virgins, who now produced it together with three roles, which were sealed in the same way. All these were opened and read in the senate). Dio, however, says that Tiberius retrieved the testament from the Vestals and brought it to the senate (56.32.1).
\item[125] Suetonius refers to “three \textit{volumina} sealed the same” (\textit{Aug.} 101.1, 4), Dio to four \textit{Βιβλία} (56.33.1), while Tacitus records a single \textit{libellus} (Tac. \textit{Ann.} 1.11). The three authors agree on the basic content of the annexes. For a discussion of the issue, see Swan 2004: 314-5, with further bibliography.
\item[126] For a discussion of the evidence, see Vidal 1965.
\item[127] Vidal 1965: 550-3, 560-3.
\item[128] The temples of foreign deities such as Mithras, Isis, or Cybele were never used as depositories for valuables (Vidal 1965: 572). This may indicate that Romans did not trust foreign deities as much as native Roman gods, or perhaps more importantly that they did not trust the priests of foreign cults, who in many cases were foreign as well (Dion. Hal. \textit{Ant. Rom.} 2.19.3).
\end{footnotes}
remain to care for the objects deposited with them. The Vestals were also very closely
attached to their temple. The House of the Vestals was located within the same complex as
the Temple of Vesta in the Forum.\textsuperscript{129} Furthermore, depositors might reasonably expect that
the personal sanctity of the Vestals would guarantee the safety of any document left in their
care. As we have seen, however, this was not always the case. The Vestals were drawn
regularly into a tense political situations. Nonetheless, it seems clear that the Vestals could
generally be relied upon to keep treaties, wills and other important documents safe and
secure.

The Vestal Virgins were active members of Roman society whose influence extended
to various aspects of religious and political life. They provided advice to the senate and
acted as custodians of important legal documents and even money. These activities
reinforce the notion that they were ideally regarded as trustworthy and politically neutral
figures. On the other hand, individual Vestals also used the prestige and privileges of their
office to advance their own political agendas by defending and promoting the interests of
relatives and other close associates. Like other Roman women known to us from the
Republican period, some Vestals were evidently quite loyal to their family members and
willing to employ creative strategies to ensure their political success. In all likelihood, the
material in this chapter is not entirely representative. Claudia and Licinia were undoubtedly
remembered precisely because Vestals did not normally behave in this way. It seems very
likely, however, that these stories represent just the tip of the iceberg. At the very least, the
ancient evidence demonstrates that we cannot treat the Vestals simply as socially constructed
ciphers without any agency. These women were adept social actors who used their position
and its privileges to their advantage and to that of their birth families.

\textsuperscript{129} For the \textit{aedes} and \textit{atrium} of Vesta, see most recently Scott 2009.
Chapter Five

The Flamen and Flaminica Dialis

In 81, in the midst of one of the most horrifically violent political purges in Roman history, L. Cornelius Sulla (cos. 88), the newly appointed dictator, ordered C. Julius Caesar (cos. 59) to divorce his wife Cornelia. Cornelia was the daughter of Sulla’s staunch opponent L. Cornelius Cinna (cos. 87 – 84), who had been murdered by his own mutinous troops two years earlier. Caesar refused the demand and was promptly added to the list of the proscribed.¹ He fled Rome, took refuge in Sabine territory, was discovered and arrested by Sulla’s inquisitores, but managed to escape by bribing his captors.² The Vestals, acting in concert with several of Caesar’s relatives, finally persuaded Sulla to grant the young patrician a pardon, though Caesar remained in exile until the dictator’s death in 78.³

Most scholars have focused on the political implications of Caesar’s decision not to divorce Cornelia.⁴ Caesar’s political allegiances lay with the allies of his uncle Marius and his father-in-law Cinna. His refusal to renounce his affiliation with Cinna can easily be read as a sharp, if somewhat foolhardy, rebuke of Sulla and his new regime. We should also, however, take seriously the possibility that Caesar denied the dictator’s request for religious reasons as well. In 81, Caesar likely occupied the flamonium Dialis, an office bound by a variety of religious sanctions, the most important of which were related to the occupant’s marital status.⁵ Because the flamen’s wife, who held the religious title flaminica, shared in her husband’s religious office, he was absolutely prohibited from divorcing her and was obliged to vacate his religious office if she died. In other words, if Caesar had renounced Cornelia, he would have been forced to abdicate his position as flamen Dialis as well.

¹ Vell. Pat. 2.41.2; Plut. Caes. 1.1-3. Although not every scholar agrees that Caesar was actually proscribed, the evidence strongly suggests that he was. His patrimony and Cornelia’s dowry were seized, he was arrested (and escaped only by means of a bribe), and received an official pardon from Sulla (see Ridley 2000: 220, with further bibliography).
² Cic. Lig. 32; Suet. Iul. 1.2; Plut. Sull. 31.
³ Suet. Iul. 1.2. For the intercession of the Vestals, see chapter four.
⁴ Ridley (2000: 220-6) summarizes the various explanations that have been offered and adds his own; that Caesar, who was suffering from malaria, was not in his right mind when he refused Sulla’s demand.
⁵ Though not every modern historian agrees that Caesar was fully inaugurated (see, for example, Taylor 1941; Leone 1976; Liou-Gille 1999), Badian (1961: 598, 1990: 33), Sumner (1973: 137-8) and Rüpke (2005: 1574-9, 2008: 734-5, No. 2003) maintain that he was.
This chapter will consider the flamonium Diale as a type of religious office requiring the joint service of a married couple. I will argue that it belongs to a category of Roman religious offices that also includes the rex and regina sacrorum, the flamines and flaminicae maiores and minores and the curiones and their wives. Although the male holders of these offices have received attention in modern scholarship, very little has been said about their wives. Indeed, many scholars have either heavily qualified or even denied the official sacerdotal status enjoyed by these women. While the position of the flaminica Dialis, for instance, was certainly dependent upon that of her husband, she was not a passive tool, like the apex or the ritual knife. Instead, flaminicae and other women serving in joint offices were sacerdotes with the same capacity as their husbands to represent the populus Romanus. Their sacerdotal status was inseparable from that of their husbands and yet not wholly coextensive with it.

A flaminica was a sacerdos and the wife of a sacerdos, a dual role that is aptly captured by an entry in the lexicon of Festus:

*flammeo vestimento flaminica utebatur, id est Dialis uxor et Iovis sacerdos, cui telum fulminis eodem erat colore (82L).*

The flammeum was used by the flaminica, who was the wife of the [flamen] Dialis and the sacerdos of Jove, whose thunderbolt was the same color.

Festus explains that the flaminica, whose signature golden-yellow veil was the color of Jupiter's lightening bolt, was not only the uxor (wife) of the flamen Dialis, but also the sacerdos of Jove. The flaminica had an official position within the public religious system. For this reason, a joint religious office was very different from what sociologists have described as a “two-person single career,” in which wives gain vicarious achievement and wield indirect influence through their husbands’ positions. This model has been effectively employed to explore the activities of modern clergy wives, who often serve alongside their husbands in

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6 See, for example, Wissowa 1912: 503-8; Latte 1960: 402-4; Scheid 1993: 57. Vangaard (1988: 30-2) and Van Haepelen (2002) show greater appreciation for her role but neither supplies a full account of the office. Nicole Boëls-Janssen (Boels 1974, Boëls-Janssen 1989, 1991, 1993), on the other hand, provides a detailed treatment of the flaminica Dialis, but is primarily interested in proving that all of her ritual responsibilities were related to fertility, a proposition that does not seem to be supported by the evidence. Celia Schultz (2006: 79-81) has also argued that the flaminicae were public religious officials, but her focus is on the religious activities of women in general and she does not consider the office in detail.

7 Though Plutarch claims quite tentatively that the flaminica Dialis “seems to be the hieriea of Juno” (ἱερὰν τῆς Ἡρᾶς εἶναι δοκοῦσαν, Q.R. 86 = Mor. 285a), his statement, which is not corroborated by any other ancient source, has been largely discredited by modern scholars (see especially Fowler 1895). The flaminica, like the flamen, was the sacerdos of Jupiter.

8 Papanek 1973; Schwartz 2006: 2-3, with further bibliography.
ministry, yet lack an official title and position. Roman flaminicae, however, had an official position within the religious system.

The Roman women under consideration in these chapters were not restricted to the “wife of” role, though I will explore how and why marriage was absolutely critical to the ways in which the office was experienced by the couple and the community who witnessed their ritual activities. Instead, a flaminica had a religious title and functions and occupied a legitimate and official position within the public religious system. In keeping with traditional Roman gender roles, male flamines generally took the lead while their wives provided assistance. Nonetheless, the ancient evidence amply demonstrates that flaminicae did occasionally preside over religious rites and sacrifices. Each partner in a joint sacerdotium had an important and fully sanctioned role to play.

Cicero notes in the De legibus that the Latin title flamen designated an official who was devoted to the public cult of one particular god, as opposed to the pontifices, who were concerned with religious activity more broadly. At the level of official, city-wide cult, there were fifteen flamines and, in my opinion, fifteen flaminicae as well. These religious officials were distinguished from one another by a flaminical cognomen derived from the name of the deity whose cult they served. Only thirteen titles can be identified with certainty. The flamines Dialis, Martialis and Quirnalis were regarded as maiores, while the Carmentalis, Cerialis, Falacer, Floralis, Fur(r)inalis, Palatualis, Pomonalis, Portunalis, Volcanalis and Volturnalis were considered minores. In this chapter, I focus on the flamen and flaminica Dialis, about whom we are best informed. The remaining flamineae and flaminicae as well as the rex and regina sacrorum and married couples serving in the Roman curiae are the subject of chapter 7.

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9 See especially Shuly Rubin Schwartz’s (2006) study of American rebbetzins, wives who work in partnership with their rabbinic husbands to serve their congregations.
10 Cic. Leg. 2.8: divisique alii alii sacerdotes, omnibus pontifices, singulis flaminibus sunt (Let the different gods have different orders of sacerdotes. Let them all have pontifices in common; and let each separate god have his flamen).
11 Festus (144L) gives the number fifteen. Only the flaminica Dialis and the flaminica Martialis are specifically attested in the ancient sources. However, as I argue later in this chapter and the next, the evidence strongly suggests that each flamen had a flaminica.
12 Given the diversity of deities represented in the extant list, it is difficult to speculate about the identity of the gods served by the two unattested flamines. Based on a late Antonine epitaph from Numidian Cuicul, which records a sacerdos Neptunalis (ILS 9489), Rüpke (2008: 523, No. 572) has suggested that a flamen Neptunalis was one of the twelve minores. Although there is no other record of a flamen of Neptune and the inscription mentions a sacerdos rather than a flamen, Rüpke argues that during the principate, the title sacerdos replaced that of flamen for officials outside of the imperial cult. Elsewhere, Rüpke (2007: 225) suggests that the remaining two cognomina were Virbialis and Lucularis.
The Flamonium Diale: A “Complete” Sacerdotium

The existence of a cooperative sacerdotium is not unique in and of itself. Many of Rome’s most important religious offices were based on a collegial model. There are, however, several important differences between the flamoniate and other cooperative offices. The most obvious is their respective gender compositions. While the flamonium Diale required the service of a mixed-gender pair, joint magistracies and the major religious colleges were always filled by officials of the same gender. Related to this is the fact that the occupants of other multi-person offices generally shared the same degree of religious competence with their colleagues. For instance, each member of the college of augures possessed equal authority to interpret the auspices or inaugurate a new religious official. By contrast, the respective ritual competencies of a pair of married officials, who were necessarily of opposite genders, were by no means identical.

The Roman ritual system was defined in large part by a meticulous attention to detail and respect for established custom. Sacred rites had to be celebrated at the correct time, in the correct place, according to the correct procedure and by the correct person. Failure to observe any of these conditions automatically vitiated the entire proceeding. Dionysius of Halicarnassus notes that the wives of the curiones, married religious officials serving in the Roman curiae, shared in their husbands’ religious office in order to perform rites that men were forbidden by law to celebrate.13 Observing the appropriate division of gendered responsibilities was absolutely essential to the exercise of religious authority and the maintenance of the ritual system. Married couples were ideally suited to fill religious offices whose sacred obligations included some rites that could only be performed by men and others that could only be performed by women.

Plutarch makes a similar point when discussing the flamen Dialis’ obligation to resign the flamine if his wife should die:

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13 Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.22.1: Ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ διὰ γυναικῶν ἔδει τινὰ ἱερὰ συντελεῖσθαι καὶ διὰ παίδων ἄμφιθαλῶν ἐτερα, ἔνα καὶ ταύτα γένηται κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον, τάς τε γυναῖκας ἔταξε τῶν ἱερέων τοῖς ἑαυτῶν ἄνδρασι συνιερᾶσθαι, καὶ εἴ τι μὴ θέμις ἡν ὑπ’ ἄνδρων ὀργιάζεσθαι κατά νόμου τὸν ἐπίχώριον, ταύτας ἐπιτελεῖν καὶ παῖδας αὐτῶν τὰ καθήκοντα λειτουργεῖν (And because some rites were to be performed by women, others by children whose fathers and mothers were living, to the end that these also might be administered in the best manner, he [Romulus] ordered that the wives of the religious officials should be religious officials along with their husbands; and that in the case of any rites which men were forbidden by the law of the country to celebrate, their wives should perform them and their children should assist as their duties required).
Why did the flamen Dialis resign his office if his wife died? … Is it because a man who has married and then lost his wife is unhappier than one who has had none at all? The married man’s household is complete. That of a man who, after marrying a woman, loses her, is not only incomplete, it is mutilated. Or is it because the wife participates in her husband’s sacred ministry (since there are many ceremonies that he cannot perform without her assistance)?

Though each partner performed specific ritual duties based on their respective genders, Plutarch emphasizes the cooperative nature of the flaminate by drawing attention to the fact that the couple worked together: the flamen, he says, could not fulfill his sacred obligations without the flaminica. The flamen and flaminica served the gods together as an inseparable pair whose religious activities complemented one another. Both fulfilled an important role within the religious office they shared and both were integral to maintaining proper relations between the community and the gods. Whereas individual officials could join or quit the major religious colleges without influencing the status of the other members, the flamen and flaminica entered the flaminate as an indissoluble pair whose sacerdotal status was dependent upon the continuation of their marriage. The office, like the flamen’s household, was incomplete without the flaminica.14

Serving the Gods Together in Household Ritual

The incorporation of both genders in the practice of public cult mirrors the situation found in the private, domestic sphere.15 While the paterfamilias presided over household cult, it is clear that women also actively participated in rituals within the home. One of the primary responsibilities assigned to Roman women was care for the hearth, the seat of Vesta and the Lar familiaris, and the penus (storeroom), guarded by the Penates. The female members of the household also ensured that items necessary for religious rites were available

14 Plutarch’s description of the widower’s household as mutilated and incomplete reflects his well-known and enthusiastic affection for the institution of marriage. Indeed, he has been cited as the first ancient author to conceptualize marriage as a reciprocal relationship based on mutual understanding and affection rather than a formalistic union for the production of children (see, for example, Foucault 1986; Nikolaidis 1997, though this position has been challenged by Patterson 1992: 4714; Wohl 1997). Given his disposition, Plutarch would naturally be apt to highlight the cooperative nature of the flaminate. Fortunately, however, other ancient evidence indicates that his account is not grossly misleading.

15 For the role of women in domestic cult, see Boëls-Janssen 1993: 253-71; Schultz 2006: 121-37.
at the correct time. Incense and wine, both ritually important substances, were kept in the familial *penus*. Roman women were also in charge of grinding the *far* (a type of grain) needed for the daily grain offering. The significance of this aspect of women’s contribution to household religion is underscored by the fact that these duties were performed in the public sphere by the Vestals.

Ancient evidence for the active participation of women in domestic cult serves as a reminder not to over-interpret Cato’s famous assessment that “the master performs the household rites for the entire household” (*dominum pro tota familia rem divinam facere*, *Agr.* 143.1). While the *paterfamilias* was certainly the head of his household cult, he could not perform his religious responsibilities without the assistance and participation of other members of his family. In fact, Cato describes the religious responsibilities of the *vilica*, the wife of the farm manager, later in the same passage. Since the *vilicus*, the farm manager, acted as a religious surrogate for the absent landowner, it seems likely that the tasks assigned to the *vilica* were normally performed by the landowner’s wife:

*focum purum circumversum cotidie, priusquam cubitum eat, habeat. Kalendis, Idibus, Nonis, festus dies cum erit, coronam in focum indat, per eosdemque dies lari familiari pro copia supplicet* (143.2).

Let her [the *vilica*] clean and tidy the hearth every night before she goes to bed. On the Kalends, Ides, and Nones, and whenever a feast day comes, let her hang a garland over the hearth, and on those days pray to the *Lares familiares* as the opportunity offers.

According to Cato, the *vilica* was expected to care for the hearth on a daily basis and decorate it on festival days. Even more importantly, she was authorized to supplicate the *Lares familiares*, who resided at the hearth.

Rituals associated with the familial hearth were not the unique responsibility of women living in the countryside. Visual evidence from Pompeii supports the notion that women were involved in the cult of the *Lares familiares* in the city as well. A fresco from the *lararium* in the House of Julius Polybius incorporates many elements typical of painted shrines of this type, including the dancing *Lares* who frame the scene, a snake, small ritual assistants and a veiled male figure sacrificing at a central altar (Fig. 51). More unusual,
however, is the presence of a veiled woman, who is likewise depicted offering a sacrifice. Whether the image is meant to represent the *paterfamilias* and his wife, the *materfamilias*, or (more likely) the *genius* and *iuno* of these figures, it further suggests that the wife of the household was an important figure in domestic religion.

The whole family, including children and slaves, fulfilled clearly defined sacred obligations both in the course of daily ritual and on special occasions. Ovid imagines a charming scene in which each member of a rural family participates in the celebration of the Terminalia on 23 February:

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arafit: huc ignem curto fert rustica testo
    sumptum de tepidis ipsa colona focis.
    ligna senex minuit concisaque construit arte,
    et solida ramos figere pugnat humo;
    tum sicco primas irritat cortice flammias;
    stat puer et manibus lata canistra tenet.
    inde ubi ter fruges medios immisit in ignes,
    porrigit incisos filia parva favos.
    vina tenent alii: libantur singula flammis;
    spectant, et linguis candida turba favet (*Fast.* 2.645-54).
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An altar is set up. To it a rustic woman herself carries on a broken potsherd a flame taken from the warm home hearth. The old man splits the firewood and he arranges the broken pieces skillfully. Then he struggles to affix the branches to the solid ground. He stirs up the first flames with dry bark. The boy stands and holds the wide basket in his hands. Then, when he has tossed grain into the fire three times, the little daughter offers cut honeycombs. Others hold the wine; individual libations are poured for the flames; the white-clad company watches and speaks words of good omen.

Ovid’s description allows us to see how various ritual obligations might be divided among members of the family. The *rustica* brings the flame from the hearth for the sacrifice while the son and daughter place the offerings on the altar. Household cult offered structure for a family’s relationship with the gods and one another. Each member had a place in the family, and each played a role in worshipping the family’s gods.

The ancient evidence reveals that while the *paterfamilias* was the head of his religious community and the central figure in domestic cult, he did not perform his activities in

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20 For the role of children in domestic cult, see Mantle 2002: 100-2.
21 Horace describes a similarly inclusive family rite in honor of Silvanus, Tellus and the *genius* in *Epist.* 2.1.139-44: *Agricolae prixis, fortes paruoque beati, / ondita post frumenta leuantes tempore festo / corpus et ipsum animum spe finis dura / ferentem / cum sociis operum pueros et coniuge fida / Tellurem poro, Silvanum lacte piabant, / floribus et uino Genium / memorum breuis asci* (*The farmers of old, those tough men blessed with little, after harvesting their crops, with their faithful wives and slaves, their fellow-workers, comforted body and mind, that bears all hardship for a hoped-for end, by propitiating Tellus with a pig, Silvanus with milk, the genius who knows life’s brevity with flowers and wine*).
isolation. This model of household ritual clearly resonates with the structure of the flaminate. As we have seen, one of the primary tasks of the flaminica Dialis was to assist the flamen with his sacred obligations. The flamininus camillus and the flaminia sacerdotula, who accompanied the flamen and flaminica respectively, may even have been the couple’s own children. We know only that these young assistants had to be patrini et matrini, that is, to have both father and mother living, a requirement that the flamen and flaminica’s children would have fulfilled by definition. Dionysius of Halicarnassus claims that the curiones, who served in the Roman curiae, performed their sacred obligations with the assistance of their wives and children. Based on the similar structure of the two offices, we may be justified in suspecting that the flamen and flaminica Dialis were assisted by their children when circumstances permitted.

The image of an entire family serving a public cult together is striking, to say the least. It illuminates one of the fundamental differences between the flaminate and those religious officials most familiar to students of Roman history, namely the major collegia. These religious offices were composed entirely of male members of the political elite. Moreover, familial ties were explicitly prohibited by a rule that only one member of a family could serve in a particular college at any given time. Thus, while the pontifices certainly constituted a tightly knit social group, the connection of an individual pontifex to his colleagues was defined by their institutional position. The unique relationship of the flamen and flaminica, on the other hand, who were both a married couple and a pair of sacerdotes, ensured a unity unmatched by other types of religious office.

Given the central position of the family in Roman society, the similarities between the public and private religious spheres should not be surprising. In many ways, the organization of the family unit and its internal power dynamics represent a microcosm of the res publica. Men, women and children participated in religious rites celebrated by both communities. Indeed, Varro’s remark that “individual families ought to worship the gods as the state does, communally,” underscores the similarly collective dimension of both public and private religion at Rome. While the question of whether or not the personnel structure

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23 For a full discussion of this requirement, see chapter 1.
25 This may have been a provision of the lex Domitia of 104 (North 1990).
26 Bodel 2008: 249.
of the flaminate was developed in conscious imitation of household cult is ultimately unanswerable, it is important to think about the two as related phenomena.\textsuperscript{27}

Marriage by *Confarreatio*

Marriage was a central feature of the *flamonium Diale* for practical and ideological reasons. In many ways, the *flamen* and *flaminica Dialis* modeled the Roman ideal of a faithful, monogamous marriage. The *flaminica* was required to be a *univira*, that is, she could not have been married to another man before she wed the *flamen*.\textsuperscript{28} No other person was permitted to sleep in their marriage bed, and both spouses were prohibited from sleeping elsewhere more than three nights in a row.\textsuperscript{29} The *flaminica*’s signature golden-yellow veil, the *flammeum*, symbolized permanence and good fortune in marriage, since the *flamen* and *flaminica* were not permitted to divorce. For this reason, Roman brides wore the veil on their wedding day.\textsuperscript{30}

The *flamen* and *flaminica Dialis* also had to be married by a specific rite. The *flamen*, like his fellow *flamines maiores* and the *rex sacrorum*, was required to be the child of a confarreate marriage and had himself to be living in a marriage concluded by that rite.\textsuperscript{31} The Romans regarded *confarreatio* as the most ancient and religiously solemn form of marriage.\textsuperscript{32} The ceremony, concluded in the presence of at least ten witnesses and formalized by “certain and sacred words” (*certis et sollemnibus verbis*, Gai. Inst. 1.112), took its name from the cake of *far* which was offered to Jupiter Farreus and then shared by the bride and groom.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{27}It is possible that the rites performed by *flamines* and *flaminicae* were originally familial or gentilicial *sacra*, which would account for the incorporation of husbands, wives and children in these offices. We know of at least one example of a gentilicial rite that was later served by public officials. According to the ancient sources, the Potitii and Pinarii were given responsibility for the cult of Hercules at the Ara Maxima by the god himself (see, for example, Livy 1.7.12-4; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 1.40.3-5). In 312, however, the censor Ap. Claudius Caccus persuaded the Potitii to place the rite in the care of public slaves. For a discussion of gentilicial *sacra*, see Smith 2006: 38, 44-50.

\textsuperscript{28}Serv. Aen. 4.29. See also Boels 1973.

\textsuperscript{29}Gell. N.A. 10.15.14. See below.

\textsuperscript{30}Festus 79L: *flammeo amicitur nubens ominis boni causa, quod eo assidue utebatur flaminica, id est flaminis uxor, cui non licebat facere divorium* (Brides are veiled with the *flammeum* as a good omen, since it was worn on continuously by the *flaminica*, the wife of the *flamen*, for whom divorce is not permitted). For the *flaminica*’s costume, see below.

\textsuperscript{31}Gai. Inst. 1.112; Serv. Aen. 4.464. Linderski (2005: 223) has proposed that the *flaminica Dialis*, a full participant in the *flamonium*, was also expected to be the child of a confarreate marriage. Though this is an attractive suggestion, it is unlikely to have been the case for reasons explored below.

\textsuperscript{32}For *confarreatio* in general, see Corbett 1930; Treggiari 1991: 21-4; Linderski 2005.

\textsuperscript{33}The fullest description of the rite occurs in Gai. Inst. 1.112: *farreo in manum conveniunt per quoddam genus sacrificii, quod Iovi Farreo fit; in quo farreus panis adibetur, unde etiam confarreatio dicitur; compleura praeterea huibus iuvvis ordinandi gratia cum certis et sollemnibus verbis praesentibus decem testibus aguntur et finunt. Quod ius etiam nostris temporibus in usu est: nam flamines maiores, id est Diales, Martiales, Quirinales, item reges sacrorum, iuvi ex farreatio nati non leguntur. Ac ne ipse quidem sine confarreatione sacrestium habere possint* (Women come into manus by farreo through a type of sacrifice which is made to Jupiter Farreus. A loaf of *far* is used in this, and the name *confarreatio* derives from it. A
The bride may even have prepared the cake of far used in the ritual. This sacrifice was the first of many religious rites jointly celebrated by the couple as husband and wife.

Marriage by confrarreatio may have been preserved as a requirement for the flamines maiores and the rex sacrorum because of the rite’s evident antiquity and the religious aura that surrounded it. It was also a distinctly public ceremony with important social connotations. According to Servius, the flamen Dialis and pontifex maximus presided over marriages concluded by this rite.  

The presence of these two high-ranking sacerdotes undoubtedly imbued the ceremony with a distinctively official character very unlike that of a wedding concluded by other means. It is true that certain key rites common to all Roman marriages were performed before the community. During the domum deductio (the leading home), for example, the bride was publicly transferred to the house of the groom. Only confrarreatio, however, required the explicit sanction and intervention of prominent religious officials. Given significant interest of the religious establishment in the legitimacy of the union between a flamen maior and his wife, it is not surprising that they were required to be married by this overtly public and religious rite.

Since the flamen Dialis and pontifex maximus could not have presided over the nuptials of every couple in the city, this method of marrying would have been limited to a small group of elite families whose prestige and influence could command the attendance of two of the most prominent Roman religious officials. Though no ancient source explicitly states this fact, most modern scholars hold that the rite was in fact formally restricted to patricians. Furthermore, some have suggested that marriage by confrarreatio was a tool used by the patrician elite to control access to the religious offices for which it was a requirement. This

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number of acts and rituals take place in performing this procedure in due order. There are prescribed and solemn words and ten witnesses are present. This institution is still in existence today, for the flamines maiores, that is those of Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus, and also the reges sacrorum, are picked only from sons of parents married by confrarreatio, and they themselves cannot hold their sacerdotia unless married in this form). Festus (78L) defines farreum as a type of sacrificial cake made of far. Pliny (H.N. 18.10) notes that it was carried before the bride. For the significance of far in the Roman religious system, see chapter three.

34 Serv. G. 1.31: multis modis nuptiae iunt … farre, cum per pontificem maximum et Dialem flaminem per fruges et mola salsa coniunguntur, ex quibus nuptis patrimi et martrimi nascentur (marriages happen in many ways … by far, when the couple is joined by the pontifex maximus and the flamen Dialis through grain and mola salsa, and from these marriages patrimi et martrimi are born). For the problematic nature of Servius’ definition of patrimi et martrimi as the children of confrarreat marriages, see chapter one.


36 For a recent study of Roman marriage rites, see Hersch 2010.

37 Some modern scholars have argued that confrarreatio was the original form of Roman marriage and that it was always restricted to patricians (see especially Mommsen 1887: III 33-6, 78-80; Treggiari 1991: 22). Others have suggested that confrarreatio was created by the patricians ex nihilo, perhaps during the mid fifth century B.C., in
hypothesis neatly accounts for the fact that confarreate marriage was a precondition for the flamines maiores and the rex sacrorum, who had to be patricians throughout the historical period, but not for the flamines minores, who were predominantly plebeians.\textsuperscript{38}

The picture becomes more complicated, however, when the social status of the flaminica is taken into account. By the mid second century B.C. at the latest, plebeian women were marrying patrician men by the rite of confarreatio.\textsuperscript{39} Only two flaminicae maiores are known to us from the Republican period and both bear unquestionably plebeian names. In 154, Publicia was executed for having poisoned her husband, the flamen Martialis L. Postumius Albinus (cos. 154) in the year of his consulship.\textsuperscript{40} A second Publicia is named by Macrobius as the wife of the flamen Martialis L. Cornelius Lentulus Niger (pr. 61) and explicitly described as “flaminica.”\textsuperscript{41} Since the flamen Martialis was required to be married by confarreatio, we must conclude that patrician men and plebeian women were permitted to celebrate this rite.

A flaminica’s social status at birth was evidently not as important as her social status after marriage, which was dependent upon that of her husband. This circumstance should be attributed to the specific legal effects of marriage by confarreatio. According to Gaius, the sacrifice to Jupiter Farreus created manus (the controlling hand).\textsuperscript{42} In Roman law, the term manus expressed a relationship between a husband and wife based on the power of the former over the latter.\textsuperscript{43} A woman who entered manus transferred herself from her natal order to limit access to the flamonia maiora (Noailles 1936; Koschaker 1937). Linderski (2005: 225-30) has offered something of a compromise. He argues that confarreatio as described by Gaius developed in two distinct stages, which can be identified by distinguishing between the “private” and “public” elements of the ritual. In the former category he places the offering and consumption of the cake of far and the creation of manus. Linderski suggests that this private form of confarreatio was very ancient and open to both patricians and plebeians. The participation of the flamen Dialis and pontifex maximus, however, changed the character of the ceremony from an essentially private act to one that required the intervention of the state. For Linderski, this public aspect of the ceremony “reveals itself as an overtly political and chronologically posterior element,” one that by its very nature transformed confarreatio into “a class institution and an instrument of class policy.” He dates this transformation to the mid fifth century B.C., a period that witnessed the successful creation of a closed social class. Each of these reconstructions assumes that confarreatio was legally restricted to patricians.

\textsuperscript{38} Cic.\textit{ Dom.} 37-7; Livy 6.41.9; Tac.\textit{ Ann.} 4.16; Festus 137L; \textit{Schol. in Lucanum} 60 (Usener).
\textsuperscript{39} Linderski 2005: 228-9.
\textsuperscript{40} Livy \textit{Per.} 48 (where the name is given as Publilia); Val. Max. 6.3.8; Rüpke 2008: 861, No. 2853.
\textsuperscript{41} Macr. \textit{Sat.} 3.13.11; Rüpke 2008: 861, 2854.
\textsuperscript{42} According to Gaius (\textit{Inst.} 1.108-10), women came into manus in three ways: by \textit{usus}, \textit{farreum} and \textit{coemptio}. Linderski (2005: 225-6), however, argues that the offering of \textit{far} and the creation of \textit{manus} were separate legal and religious components of the ceremony. In his view, \textit{manus} was produced by \textit{coemptio}. But Gaius distinguishes between \textit{confarreatio} and \textit{coemptio} as two separate methods for the creation of manus. Furthermore, in the passage quoted above, the jurist states quite clearly that \textit{manus} was created by the offering of a loaf of \textit{far} to Jupiter Farreus.
family to the family of her new husband. She became a member of his kinship group for religious purposes and her legal rights were the same as those of a daughter. Thus a plebeian woman who came into her husband’s manus through marriage by confarreatio became a member of his patrician family. Like his children who were in potestate, a wife in manus had no property of her own before her husband’s death. She was sua heres (her own heir), which meant she would become sui iuris (legally independent) on her husband’s death and have an equal share with his children in his intestate estate.

The religious effects of marriage by confarreatio were as significant as the legal consequences. A woman in manus was a member of her husband’s religious community and a full participant in his sacra familiaria. The transfer of her allegiance from her natal cult to that of her husband’s family began on their wedding day. During the domum deductio, the bride offered a coin at the local compital shrine to announce her presence to the Lares compitales and indicate her intention to join the local religious community of which her husband was already a member. When she arrived at her new home, she placed a coin for the Lares familiares on the hearth and offered prayers to the household genius. In the days and years that followed, a wife in manus played a crucial role in the performance of household

44 Gell. N.A. 18.6.9: unde ipsum quoque “matrimonium” dicitur, “matrem” autem “familias” appellatum esse eam solam quae in mariti manus mancipioque esset, quoniam non in matrimonium tantum, sed in familia quoque mariti et in sui heredes locum venisset (Marriage itself has the same derivation [from mater (mother)]; but that woman only is called materfamilias (mother of the family) who is in the manus and possession of her husband, or in the manus and possession of the one under whose authority her husband is, since she had come not only into a state of wedlock, but also into the family of her husband and into the position of his heir). See also Serv. Aen. 11.476. 45 In fact, Gaius (Inst. 2.139) uses the legal term filiae loco (in the situation of a daughter) to describe the consequences of manus on the wife. 46 Cic. Top. 23: cum mulier viro in manus convenit, omnia quae mulieris fuerunt viri sint dotis nomine (When a woman enters the manus of her husband, everything which belonged to the woman becomes the husband’s as dowry). Any property which the wife acquired during the marriage also belonged to the husband (Corbett 1930: 110; Treggiari 1991: 29). It should be noted, however, that a husband’s disciplinary power over a wife in manus was more restricted than that over his children (Gardner 1986: 11; Treggiari 1991: 30). 47 Tit. Ulp. 23.5. 48 Non. 852L: ubi a tenerent, tamquam adversi causa, marito daret; alium, quem in pede haberent, in foco Larum familiarium poneret, tertium, quem in sacciperio condidissent, compito vicinali solere resonare (Brides, according to the ancient Roman law, were accustomed to carry three asses as they came to their husband and to give to their husband one of the coins, which they held in their hand, as if for the purpose of gaining his favor; the second, which they had in their shoes, they placed on the hearth of the Lares familiares; the third, which they had hidden in a small sac, they were accustomed [to throw] to the neighborhood crossroads [so as] to make [the coin] ring). This custom likely applied only to brides who were entering their husband’s manus, since women married without manus would not have joined their husband’s religious community. 49 Non. 852L. See also Arn. Nat. 2.67; Boëls-Janssen 1993: 254; Schultz 2006: 127; Hersch 2010: 176–7, 278–9. The bride had offered items associated with her childhood to the Lares familiares of her birth family on the night before the wedding (Varro apud Non. 863L).
rites. For the *flaminica*, concern for her husband’s *sacra familiaria* took on added significance, since she was also included in the *flamonium*. The creation of *manus* ensured that the *flamen* and *flaminica Dialis* belonged to the same community of worshippers in every sphere of religious activity.

In many ways, it seems that the creation of *manus* was at the heart of the mandate regarding marriage by *confarreatio*. In A.D. 23, Tiberius was evidently unable to find three candidates for the *flamonium Diale* who had been born into a confarreate marriage. According to Tacitus, the *princeps* noted that many families had abandoned *confarreatio* due to negligence (*incuria*) and a desire to avoid the difficulties inherent in the ceremony itself. Perhaps even more importantly, however, *confarreatio* was unpopular “since both the man obtaining the *flamonium* and the woman coming into the *manus* of the *flamen* were released from *patria potestas*” (*quoniam exiret e iure patrio qui id flamonium apisceretur quaeque in manum flaminis conveniret, Ann. 4.16*). *Confarreatio* created *manus*, which meant that a daughter married by this rite naturally left the *patria potestas* of her *paterfamilias*. For a variety of reasons, marriage with *manus*, and therefore *confarreatio* as well, had fallen out of favor by the early principate. As a result, it had become difficult to find a couple that fulfilled the requirements for selection to the *flamonium Diale*.

In the end, Tiberius was able to inaugurate the son of the previous occupant, who was naturally the son of confarreate parents. However, in order to rectify this untenable situation, Tiberius and the senate decided to revise the nature of *confarreatio*:

> itur tractatis religionibus placitum instituto flaminum nihil demutari: sed lata lex qua flaminica Dialis sacrorum causa in potestate viri, cetera promisco feminarum iure ageret (Tac. Ann. 4.16).

It was decided, then, after a discussion of the religious points that no change should be made to the institution of the flamineate; but a law was carried that the *flamen*’s wife, though in the *potestas* of her husband for the sake of the *sacra*, should otherwise have the same legal status as other women.

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50 See above.
51 Tac. Ann. 4.16: *vetusto more; neque adesse, ut olim, eam copiam, omissa confarreandi adsuetudine aut inter pascos retenta. plurisque eius rei causas adferret, potissimam penes incuriam virorum feminarumque; accedere ipsius caerimoniae difficultates quae consulta vitarentur* (The custom [confarreatio] was an ancient one, nor was there now as formerly a supply of candidates, since the habit of marrying by confarreatio had been dropped or was retained among a few. Here he [Tiberius] offered several reasons for this fact, the most important one being the indifference of both men and women, though there was also a deliberate avoidance of the difficulties of the ceremony itself).
52 Tac. Ann. 4.16; Rüpke 2008: 638, No. 1348.
According to Tacitus, the flaminica was granted the legal rights of a woman married without manus, though she remained in the control of her husband “causa sacrorum” (for the sake of the sacra). Gaius, in an apparent reference to the same senatorial decree, explains that in his day, a woman married by confrareatio no longer came into her husband’s manus unless a ceremony of coemptio (imaginary sale) was also performed.\textsuperscript{53} It was the character of confrareatio, rather than that of the flaminate, which was adjusted to meet the evolving needs of Roman society. Marriage by confrareatio was retained as a precondition for entrance to the flamonium Diale and the flaminica, who was granted some legal freedom, was required to remain in her husband’s manus for the sake of the sacra alone.

In light of this decree, we must conclude that manus had important implications for the sacerdotal status of the flamen and flaminica. The couple had to belong to the same domestic religious community in order to serve the populus Romanus as public religious officials. The creation of manus also necessarily implies a hierarchy of power within the marriage and the flaminate. Just as the paterfamilias was the head of his domestic cult, the flamen was the head of the religious office he shared with his wife. The creation of manus reinforced traditional gender dynamics within the couple’s marriage and their flaminiunm. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that while the flaminica was a subordinate partner, her participation was absolutely indispensable. The flamonium Diale was only a complete sacerdotium when both husband and wife served together.

**Becoming the Flamen and Flaminica Dialis**

As we have seen, the criteria for selection to the flamonium Diale focused primarily on the pair’s social and marital status. The flaminica was required to be a univira, while the flamen had to be a patrician born of a confrarreate marriage. Even more importantly, the couple had to be living in a marriage concluded by confrareatio. During the historical period, the pontifex

\textsuperscript{53} Gai. Inst. 1.136: Maximi et Tuberonis cautum est, ut haec quod ad sacra tantum videatur in manu esse, quod vero ad ceteras causas provinde habeatur, atque si in manum non convenissit. Eae vero mulieres, quae in manum conveniunt per coemptionem, potestate parentis liberantur (A woman placed in the hand of her husband by confrareatio is not, for this reason, at present, released from patria potestas unless the ceremony of coemptio has been performed; for it is provided by [the Lex Asinia Antistia enacted during the consulate of] Cornelius Maximus and Tubero (11), that [the flaminica Dialis] be in the manus of her husband as far as relates to the sacred rites; but in all other respects she is considered as not having come into manus. Where, however, women come into the manus of their husbands by coemption, they are released from patria potestas). Gaius, however, dates the law to 11, which could suggest that Tacitus is mistaken about the nature of the debate in A.D. 23 (see Treggiari 1991: 23). Regardless of the exact date of this decree, it is clear that the legal effect of confrareatio was deliberately altered during the early principate.
maximus chose a new flamen Dialis from a list of three nominees prepared by the pontifices, the same method used to appoint the other flamines maiores and the rex sacrorum.\textsuperscript{54} The new flamen was inaugurated before the comitia calata, a non-voting assembly that met under the presidency of the pontifex maximus in front of the curia calabra on the Capitoline Hill.\textsuperscript{55} The central rites of the inauguratio were performed by an augur, who impetrated Jupiter’s approval of the candidate and, provided the correct signs were observed, declared the flamen fully inaugurated.\textsuperscript{56}

Although the ancient sources are silent on the matter, it seems likely that the flaminica participated in this ceremony as well.\textsuperscript{57} The inauguratio was the crucial moment when the candidate, up to this point an average Roman citizen, was transformed into a flamen with all the attendant privileges and responsibilities. His wife and fellow sacerdos would have undergone a simultaneous change in status, and may even have been officially inaugurated alongside her husband. Both the prohibition against divorce and the interdiction requiring the flamen to abdicate his position if the flaminica predeceased him suggest that the couple was inaugurated as a unified entity, rather than two separate individuals.

It seems that at the very least, newly inaugurated flamines and their flaminicae celebrated their achievement together. Publicia, the wife of L. Cornelius Lentulus Niger, was present at the elaborate cena in honor of his inauguration as flamen Martialis and is explicitly described as flaminica.\textsuperscript{58} Lentulus and Publicia had both undergone a change in status and are

\textsuperscript{54} Tac. Ann. 4.16.2: nam patricios conffarreatis parentibus gentios tres simul nominari, ex quis unus legetur, retuso more (For, according to the ancient custom, three patricians born to parents married by conffarreatio were nominated simultaneously, and one of them was chosen). Although some have suggested that the list of three nominees was prepared by the senate, most scholars agree that this responsibility was assigned to the pontifices (see Van Haepereen 2002: 99-100, with further bibliography).

\textsuperscript{55} Labeo apud Gell. N.A. 15.27: “calata” comitia est, quae pro conlegio pontificum babentur aut regis aut flaminum inaugurandorum causa (the comitia calata (‘convoked assembly’) was held on behalf of the college of pontifices for the purpose of inaugurating the rex sacrorum or the flamines). On the comitia calata, see also Macrobi. Sat. 1.15.9; Botsford 1909: 152-67; Taylor 1966: 5; Palmer 1970: 191-7.

\textsuperscript{56} On the inauguration of religious officials by augures, see Cic. Brut. 1, Phil. 2.110; Macr. 3.13.11; Catalano 1960: 220-46; Linderski 1986: 2215-22. Livy (1.18.6-10) provides the fullest account of the ceremony in a passage that claims to describe the inauguratio of Numa as the second king of Rome, though the details clearly reflect the procedure observed at the inaugurations of religious officials in the late Republic. For a detailed discussion of this text, see Linderski 1986: 2256-96; Vaahtera 2001: 104-26.

\textsuperscript{57} Van Haepereen 2002: 101.

\textsuperscript{58} Macr. Sat. 3.13.10-1: Ante diem nonum Kalendas Septembres, quo die Lentulus flamen Martialis inauguratus est, domus ornata fuit: triclinia lectis eburneis strata fuerunt: duobus tricliniis pontifices cubuerunt, Q. Catulus, M. Aemilius Lepidus, D. Silanus, C. Caesar, rex sacrorum, P. Scaevola Sectus, Q. Cornelius, P. Volumnius, P. Albionavus, et L. Iulius Caesar augur qui eum inauguravit: in terto triclinio Popilia Perpennia Licinia Armentia virgines Vestales et ipsius uxor Publicia flaminica et Septimonia suornis eius (On 22 September (probably 69), when L. Corenius Lentulus Niger was inaugurated as flamen Martialis, his house was decorated as follows: three triclinia of ebony were made up; on two of them were placed the pontifices Q. Catulus, M. Aemilius Lepidus, D. Silanus, C. Julius Caesar, the rex sacrorum, 142
identified by their flaminal titles. The celebration, which was attended by the flaminica’s mother and four Vestals, her new colleagues in the extended pontifical college, belonged to Publicia as well as to her husband.

**Caerimoniae**

The flamen Dialis may be best known for the bewildering list of “caerimoniae” (ritual prohibitions), which regulated his dress, diet, behavior and even his interactions with the flaminica Dialis. The flaminica was affected by the same restrictions as her husband and even observed others separately, which surely supports the notion that she shared fully in the flaminate. The prohibitions are varied and often difficult to interpret, though they seem to fall into several broad categories. Not surprisingly, the first of these is related to the couple’s marriage. It has been noted already that the flamen and flaminica were not permitted to divorce and that the flamen was obliged to resign the flamonium if the flaminica died. It is evident that the flamonium Diale could only function when both occupants were present. It is also quite clear that their union as a married couple and as a pair of sacerdotes was regarded as exclusive and inimitable. Neither the flamen nor the flaminica could be replaced once inauguration had occurred.

Further regulations may have been designed to preserve the flamen’s manus over the flaminica. According to Gellius, the flamen was forbidden to sleep out of his bed for three

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P. Mucius Scaevola, Sextus, Q. Cornelius, P. Volumnius, P. Albinovanus (flamines minoris) and the augur L. Iulius Caesar, who inaugurated the flamen. On the third triclinium were the Vestals Popilia, Perpennia, Licinia, and Arruntia; and Lentulus’ wife, the flaminica Publicia, and Sempronia, his mother-in-law.

39 Aulus Gellius (10.15.1-32) provides the fullest description of these caerimoniae. He claims that his account is based on information found “in the books written on the public sacerdotes” (in libris qui de sacerdotibus publicis compositi sunt) and in the first book of Fabius Pictor. Ser. Fabius Pictor was a pontifex in the mid second century B.C. and the author of a commentary on pontifical law (Rüpke 2008: 677, no. 1600), thus we should probably assume that most of the ritual prohibitions mentioned by Gellius were current at the time Pictor was writing. Gellius also notes, however, that some of the requirements were relaxed over time. He cites the early first century A.D. jurist Masurius Sabinus in support of this observation: sine apice sub divo esse licitum non est; sub tecto uti liceret, non pridem a pontificibus constitutum Masurius Sabinus scripsit et alia quaedam remissa, 18 gratiaeque aliquot caerimoniarum facta dicitur (The flamen Dialis must not be in the open air without his apex; that he might go without it in the house has only recently been decided by the pontifices, so Masurius Sabinus wrote, and it is said that some other ceremonies have been remitted and he has been excused from observing them, 10.15.17-8). Unfortunately Gellius does not specify which prohibitions the flamen was allowed to ignore. Detailed modern discussions of the caerimoniae include Pötscher 1965; Boels 1973; Vangaard 1988: 88-104; Marco Simón 1996: 77-139.

60 Gell. N.A. 10.15.26-7: eaedem ferme caerimoniae sunt flaminicarum Dialis; alias seorsum aiunt observare (The ritual prohibitions of the flaminica Dialis are about the same, and they say that she observes others separately).

61 Gell. N.A. 10.15.22-3; Plut. Q.R. 50 = Mor. 276d-c.
nights consecutively (trinoctium). Since we are told that the flaminica observed the same restrictions as her husband, we may infer that her absence from the domus was also prohibited. Roman juristic sources describe a practice known as the trinoctium, according to which a wife remained outside the home of her husband for a period of three nights in order to interrupt the year of continual habitation required for the creation of manus by usus (continuous possession). Though a flaminica came into her husband’s manus by confarreatio, rather than by usus, the prohibition against either partner spending more than three nights outside the home may have been related to scruples regarding the preservation of this relationship. In any case, this caerimonia likely ensured that the flamen and flaminica Dialis spent the majority of their nights together in the domus flaminia, which appears to have held a cultic significance.

Other prohibitions ensured that the flamen and flaminica remained ritually pure and able to fulfill their daily religious obligations. Contact with death was prohibited with particular care. The flamen and flaminicae were not permitted to touch a corpse, approach a tomb or hear the sound of funerary flutes. The fear of death-pollution was strong in the ancient world. A person in mourning or one who had been in close contact with a corpse was prohibited from sacrificing for a period of time. For this reason, religious officials like the flamen Dialis were subject to stringent restrictions regarding contact with death in order to ensure that they would be able to carry out their ritual duties without interruption. In spite of these regulations, death was inevitable and it would have been unreasonable to prevent a flamen and flaminica from mourning the death of a relative or close friend. Gellius notes that

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62 Gell. N. A. 10.15.14: Pedes leti, in quo cubat, luto tenui circumlitos esse oportet et de eo lecto trinoctium continuum non decubat neque in eo lecto cubare alium fas est neque ... (The feet of the couch on which he sleeps must be smeared with a thin coating of clay, and he must not sleep away from this bed for three nights in succession, and no other person must sleep in that bed).
63 Cic. Flece. 34, 84; Gell. N. A. 3.2.12-3; Gai. Inst. 1.111; Treggiari 1991: 18-21.
64 See also Pötscher 1965: 229; Boels 1973: 79. Alternatively, Bernardo Albanese (1969) has suggested that the absence of three nights would have interrupted Jupiter’s potestas over the flamen and therefore invalidated his flamonium.
65 See below.
66 See especially Marco Simón 1996: 126-34.
67 Gell. N. A. 10.15.24: locum, in quo bustum est, numquam ingreditur, mortuum numquam attingit (He never enters a place of burial, he never touches a dead body). See also Cic. Tusc. 1.16; Festus 82, 212L.
68 See, for example, Lindsay 2000.
69 Serv. Aen. 11.2.
70 Lindsay 2000: 154-7.
the *flamen* was permitted to attend a funeral, though he was undoubtedly required to abstain from performing his ritual functions until he had been purified.\footnote{Gell. N. A. 10.15.25: *funus tamen exsequi non est religio* (Nevertheless, it is not forbidden for him to attend a funeral).}

The *flamen* and *flaminica* were also forbidden to touch, see or refer to yeast, raw meat, goats, dogs, ivy or beans.\footnote{Gell. N. A. 10.15.12: *capram et carnem incoctam et hederam et fabam neque tangere Diali mos est neque nominare* (It is not customary for the *Dialis* to touch, or even name, a she-goat, raw meat, ivy, and beans); 10.15.19: *farinam fermento inbutam adtingere ei fas non est* (It is not lawful for him to touch flour fermented with yeast). See also Plin. H. N. 18.119; Plut. Q. R. 109–1 = Mor. 289f–290d; Serv. Aen. 2.57; Festus 72L.}

While the objects on this list do not appear to have been inherently polluting in an every day context, they evidently threatened the ritual purity of the *flamen* and his wife. Beans, for example, were a staple of the ancient diet but were avoided by Egyptian priests and Pythagoreans because of their flatulent and aphrodisiac effects.\footnote{Festus 77L: *fabam nec tangere, nec nominare Diali flamini licet, quod ea putatur ad mortuos pertinent, nam e Lemuralibus iactur larvis, et parentalibus adhibetur sacrificiis, et in flore eius luctus litterae apparere videntur* (It is not lawful for the *flamen Dialis* to touch or name beans, because they are believed to relate to death, for they are thrown [to drive away] the Lemures, who are evil spirits, and are employed as a sacrifice to the ancestral spirits, and they appear to be in mourning when they are flowering).} In Roman society, beans were also closely associated with death and rituals to appease the dead, which may further illuminate the threat they posed to the purity of the *flamen* and *flaminica*.\footnote{Plut. Q. R. 111 = Mor. 290a.}

Plutarch suggests that goats were off limits on account of their reputation for lasciviousness while dogs were unsuitable companions due to their belligerence and their association with Hecate and the crossroads.\footnote{Gell. N. A. 10.15.19: *farinam fermento inbutam adtingere ei fas non est* (It is not lawful for him to touch flour fermented with yeast). See also Plin. H. N. 18.119; Plut. Q. R. 109–1 = Mor. 289f–290d; Serv. Aen. 2.57; Festus 72L.} In spite of the explicit prohibition, however, the well-attested presence of guard dogs at the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline would in fact have made it impossible for the *flamen* and *flaminica *Dialis* to avoid encountering one now and then.\footnote{Gell. N. A. 10.15.12: *capram et carnem incoctam et hederam et fabam neque tangere Diali mos est neque nominare* (It is not customary for the *Dialis* to touch, or even name, a she-goat, raw meat, ivy, and beans); 10.15.19: *farinam fermento inbutam adtingere ei fas non est* (It is not lawful for him to touch flour fermented with yeast). See also Plin. H. N. 18.119; Plut. Q. R. 109–1 = Mor. 289f–290d; Serv. Aen. 2.57; Festus 72L.}

The prohibition against yeast has parallels in the ancient Near East, where leavened dough was considered a profane substance.\footnote{Plut. Q. R. 111 = Mor. 290a.} Plutarch relates this proscription to the one banning raw meat, and explains both within the context of death pollution. Raw meat and fermented flour, Plutarch insists, are in a similar intermediary state, “for neither is it a living creature nor has it yet become a cooked food” (οὔτε γάρ ἐστι ζῷον οὔτ’ ὤψον ἡδη γέγονεν, Plut. Q. R. 110 = Mor. 290a). While raw meat was considered repulsive because it resembles an open wound (ἔλκώδης), yeast was actually regarded as an agent of corruption (φθορά) and

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putrefaction (σῆψις) that could spoil the flour if left unchecked. Of course cooked meat and leavened bread were not prohibited, since these were finished products ready for consumption.

Some of the prohibited items mentioned in the ancient sources are difficult to reconcile with the flamen’s known ritual responsibilities. How, for example, could he avoid handling or referring to raw meat when he presided over a sacrifice? Perhaps the flamen and flaminica were permitted to touch these forbidden objects only on certain festival days, when contact would have been necessary for the performance of their religious duties.

A third category suggests that the flamen and flaminica had to remain free from certain physical and social constraints. Gellius notes that it was nefas for the flamen to swear an oath and quotes a passage from the praetor’s edict that speaks to this prohibition:

Verba praetoris ex edicto perpetuo de flamine Diali et de sacerdote adscriptis: “Sacerdotem Vestalem et flaminem Dialem in omni mea iurisdictione iurare non coga” (Gell. N.A. 10.15.31).

I have written down the words of the praetor from the edicta perpetua about the flamen Dialis and the sacerdos. “I will not compel the flamen Dialis or the Vestal sacerdos to swear an oath on anything in my jurisdiction.”

Unlike other Romans, who swore an oath to tell the truth, the Vestals and the flamen Dialis were permitted to give evidence in court on good faith alone. This special legal status may be related to the religious functions assigned to these religious officials. Plutarch, for example, suggests that the binding nature of an oath may have been regarded as a threat to the flamen’s power and his ability to carry out his ritual obligations.

Modern scholars compare the prohibition to others that stipulate that the flamen could not be bound, either literally or figuratively, nor could he be associated with anything that symbolized bondage. He could not touch ivy or pass under an arbor of vines, have a knot on his clothing or wear a ring unless it was hollow and perforated. Only a free person

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78 Gell. N.A. 10.15.5: item iurare Dialem fas numquam est (also it is never lawful for the flamen Dialis to swear an oath). See also Livy 31.50.7; Cass. Dio 59.13.1; Festus 92, 226L.
79 For the significance of this privilege in the case of the Vestals, see chapter four.
80 Plut. Q.R. 44: ‘Διὰ τί τῷ ἱερεῖ τοῦ Διὸς ὡς ἔξεστιν ὁμόσαι;’ πότερον ὁτι βάσανός τις ἄλλωσιν ὁ ὥρκος ἐστί, δεῖ δ’ ἀβασάνιστον εἶναι καὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ ἱερέως; (Why may not the flamen Dialis take an oath? Is it because an oath is a kind of test to prove that men are freeborn, and neither the body nor the soul of the flamen must be subjected to any test?).
82 Gell. N.A. 10.15.13: propagines e vitibus altius praetentae non succedit (he must not pass under an arbor of vines); 10.15.9: nodum in apice neque in cinctu neque alia in parte nullum habet (he has no knot in his apex, girdle, or any other
was permitted to cut his hair. 83 If a person in bonds entered the domus flaminia, he had to be loosed and the bonds drawn up through the hole in the roof over the impluvium. 84 Similarly, if anyone who was being taken to be flogged fell at the flamen’s feet as a suppliant, it was considered a piaculum (crime) to flog the man on that day. 85 The flamen was also released from patria potestas upon entrance to the flamonium. Like the swearing of an oath, patria potestas would have subjected him to social and religious bonds, which were evidently incompatible with his position as flamen Dialis. 86 It seems that the flamen and flaminica could only be constrained by the caerimoniae associated with their flamonium.

Other prohibitions ensured that the flamen and flaminica Dialis could not absent themselves from the city and thus desert their religious duties. It was nefas for the flamen to be out of the city for a single night, though this regulation may have been modified by Augustus to allow an absence of two nights. 87 The flamen was also forbidden to mount a horse or see an army drawn up outside of the pomerium. 88 As Gellius points out, these restrictions in particular made it difficult for the flamen Dialis to pursue a traditional political career, since he could not lead an army on campaign. 89 Only two flamines Diales, L. Cornelius Merula (cos. 87) and Ser. Cornelius Lentulus Maluginensis (cos. suff. A.D. 10), are known to

83 Gell. N.A. 10.15.11: capillum Dialis, nisi qui liber homo est, non detondet (only a free man may cut the hair of the Dialis).
84 Gell. N.A. 10.15.8: victum, si aedes eius introierit, solvi necessum est et vincula per impluvium in tegulas subduci atque inde foras in viam demitti (if a person in fetters enters his house, he must be loosed, the bonds must be drawn up through the impluvium to the roof and from there let down into the street). See also Serv. Ann. 2.57.
85 Gell. N.A. 10.15.10: si quis ad verberandum ducatur, si ad pedes eius supplex procubuerit, eo die verberari piaculum est (if anyone who is being taken to be flogged falls at his feet as a suppliant, it is unlawful for the man to be flogged on that day).
86 Gai. Inst. 3.114: …ac ne ipsi quidem alter actio competit quam si sine capitis diminutione exerit de potestate parentis, veluti morte eius aut quod ipso flamen Dialis inauguratus est (nor will he be entitled to any right of action unless he has been released from patria potestas without the forfeiture of civil rights; as, for instance, by the death of his father, or because he himself has been inaugurated as the flamen Dialis). See also Tac. Ann. 4.16; Ulp. 10.5. A similar privilege was guaranteed to the Vestals as early as the Twelve Tables.
87 Livy 5.52; Tac. Ann. 3.58, 71.
88 Gell. N.A. 10.15.3-4: quo Dialem flaminem vebi religio est; item religio est classem procinctam extra pomerium, id est exercitum armatum, videre; idcirco rarenter flamen Dialis creatus consul est, cum bella consultibus mandabatur (It is unlawful for the flamen Dialis to ride upon a horse; it is also unlawful for him to see the “classes arrayed” outside the pomerium, that is, the army in battle array; hence the flamen Dialis is rarely made consul, since wars were entrusted to the consuls). See also Plin. H.N. 28.146; Plut. Q.R. = Mor. 40,274b-c; Festus 71, 295L. These prohibitions may have given rise to the tradition recorded by Livy (1.20) that Numa created the flamonium Diale to take over certain ritual functions once performed by the rex, the original military leader.
89 Although Plutarch (Q.R. 113) appears to say that the flamen Dialis was not permitted to hold political office, this was clearly not the case. The restrictions associated with the office made it difficult, if not impossible, to fulfill many of the duties of a magistrate, but the case of C. Valerius Flaccus, discussed below, demonstrates that election was not explicitly prohibited.
have held the consulship. For this reason, modern scholars have almost unanimously agreed that the *flamonia*, especially the *flamonium Diale*, were offices to be avoided.\textsuperscript{90} The impression has been that the holder of this burdensome office must have been impatient to be rid of it, a sentiment which led Ronald Syme to observe, “a resolute man could presumably get out of it, even if *inauguratio* had taken place, by contemplating a corpse, eating beans, or perpetrating some other enormity.”\textsuperscript{91}

There is, however, little evidence that candidates sought to avoid the *flamonium* or that *flamines Diales* were eager to abdicate their office once inaugurated. In fact, the Roman sources consistently describe the *flamines* as men of distinguished social status. While the flamine of Jupiter entailed numerous restrictions that must often have proved inconvenient, it also offered real social benefits and privileges that would not have been taken lightly by the image conscious Roman elite. Indeed, throughout the Republican period, *flamines Diales* were drawn from among the most prominent and respected patrician *gentes*, and their descendants often exhibited considerable pride in their achievements. Sulla, for example, mentioned in his autobiography that the first member of the *gens Cornelia* to bear the *cognomen* Sulla had been a *flamen Dialis*.\textsuperscript{92}

Furthermore, those *flamines* who were exceptionally determined to pursue political careers found a way to do so. C. Valerius Flaccus, who had been inaugurated *flamen Dialis* against his will in 209, was elected aedile in 199.\textsuperscript{93} As *flamen Dialis*, Flaccus was unable to take the oath of office. In order to resolve this difficulty, the tribunes agreed to allow his brother, the praetor-designate L. Valerius Flaccus, to swear for him.\textsuperscript{94} In 183, Flaccus was elected to the praetorship after an unsuccessful bid the year before.\textsuperscript{95} Livy implies that it was determined before the *provinciae* were allotted that the *flamen* would receive one of the two Roman jurisdictions so as not to violate the injunction against a *flamen Dialis* absenting himself from Rome for more than one night. Though Flaccus appears to have been more politically active than most *flamines Diales*, his career demonstrates that even the flamine of

\textsuperscript{90} See, for example, Klose 1910: 16, 20; Wissowa 1912: 71; Altheim 1938: 331; Lewis 1955: 74. Vanggaard (1988: 79-87) argues that the *flamonia* were not offices to be avoided.

\textsuperscript{91} Syme 1944: 94.

\textsuperscript{92} Gell. *N. A.* 1.12.16: *L. Sulla rerum gestarum libro secundo ita scriptit: “P. Cornelius, cui primum cognomen Sullae imposuit est, flamen Dialis captus”* (Lucius Sulla, in the second book of his *Autobiography*, wrote as follows: “Publius Cornelius, the first to receive the surname Sulla, was taken to be *flamen Dialis*”).

\textsuperscript{93} Livy 31.50.7.

\textsuperscript{94} For the prohibition against swearing an oath, see above.

\textsuperscript{95} Livy 39.45.4.
Jupiter did not preclude the occupant from holding public office, provided his duties did not require an extended absence from Rome. The *flamen*'s religious responsibilities were crucial to the safety and well being of the state, and the prohibitions outlined here appear to have provided a safeguard against the possibility that they should lapse.

**Dressing the Part**

Perhaps no Roman religious official was as closely associated with his ritual costume as the *flamen Dialis*. Varro notes that he was required to wear at all times a white *galerus*, a close-fitting cap made from the skin of a sacrificial victim (Fig. 52). Ancient scholars derived the title *flamen* from the woolen *filum*, a woolen band or fillet that secured the *apex*—the more technically exact term is *virgula oleaginis* (olive branch)—to the top of the *galerus*. Thus the Romans defined the title in relation to the *flamen*’s distinctive headgear. While the derivation of *flamen* from *filum* is undoubtedly a false one, it underscores the universal truth that costume is a powerful visual language. Clothing and other physical adornment constructs and communicates identity and positions the wearer within the larger social group. The *apex* was regarded as the *insigne* (emblem) of the *flamen*, an unmistakable mark of his status and function. It also served an important ritual function, since a *flamen* could not fulfill his sacred obligations without his headgear. In fact, at least one *flamen* was deprived of his office because his *apex* fell off while he was performing a sacrifice. A *flamen*, it seems, was simply not a *flamen* without his hat.

The *flamen Dialis* also wore the *toga praetexta*, which was distinguished from the *togae* of ordinary citizens by a broad purple stripe along border. This garment was associated with curule magistrates as well as a number of public religious officials, including the fifteen *flamines*. When sacrificing, the *flamines* also wore the *laena*, a woolen cloak twice the size of

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96 See also Tac. *Ann.* 3.71.
97 Varro *apud* Gell. *N.A.* 10.15.32.
98 Varro *Ling.* 5.84: *Flamines, quod in Latio capite velato erant semper ac caput cinctum habebant filo, f<i>lamines dicti* (The *flamines*, because in Latium they always kept their heads covered and had their head girt with a woolen band (*filum*), were called *filamines*). See also Dion. *Hal. Ant. Rom.* 2.64.2; Plut. *Num.* 7.5; Festus 87L; Serv. *Aen.* 8.664.
100 Serv. *Aen.* 1.305
101 Val. Max. 1.1.5.
102 Livy 27.8.4-10; Plut. *Q.R.* 113.
103 Sebesta 1994: 47.
a toga.\textsuperscript{104} The three \textit{flamines maiores} on the Ara Pacis are shown wearing the \textit{laena} draped over both shoulders (Fig. 52). We are told that the \textit{flaminica}, who was required to spin and weave, with her own hands, her own as well as her husband’s ritual garments, began work on the \textit{flamen}’s cloak immediately after the inauguration.\textsuperscript{105} She evidently used the \textit{secespita}, a type of sacrificial knife, which suggests that it was viewed in some sense as a ritual act. The fabric had to be made entirely of wool, which was imbued with an apotropaic and ritual significance.\textsuperscript{106} A \textit{flaminica} once committed a serious \textit{piaculum} by carelessly employing a linen thread as sewing material for her husband’s \textit{laena}.\textsuperscript{107}

The costume of the \textit{flaminica Dialis} was equally symbolic and therefore offers an excellent opportunity to analyze her position both as a religious official and an idealized \textit{matrona}. As a \textit{matrona}, the \textit{flaminica} must have worn the \textit{stola}. This long, slip-like garment with over-the-shoulder straps was worn over the \textit{tunica} and belted under the breast.\textsuperscript{108} Reserved exclusively for married women, the \textit{stola} was a mark of honor that differentiated a \textit{matrona} from other Roman women according to her social status, and indicated that she was a woman to whom respect should be shown.\textsuperscript{109} According to Gellius, the \textit{flaminica} wore a dyed garment (\textit{venenato}), which may suggest that the \textit{stola} worn by a \textit{flaminica} was distinguished from those of ordinary women by a special color, perhaps the same shade used to dye the \textit{flammeum}.\textsuperscript{110}

The most distinctive element of the \textit{flaminica}’s costume must have been the deep golden-yellow \textit{flammeum}.\textsuperscript{111} She shared this large, diaphanous veil only with the Roman bride, a point to which we will return. Ancient authors indicate that the \textit{flammeum} completely enveloped the wearer’s head (\textit{caput involverat flammeo}, Petr. \textit{Satyr.} 26.1).\textsuperscript{112} Based on artistic evidence, modern scholars suggest that the veil covered the woman’s hair and was pulled down to hide half her face, while the back and sides reached almost to her feet.

\textsuperscript{105} Serv. \textit{Aen.} 4. 262-3.
\textsuperscript{106} Sebesta 1994: 47.
\textsuperscript{107} Serv. \textit{Aen.} 4. 263; 12.120.
\textsuperscript{108} On the \textit{stola}, see, for example, Sebesta 1994; Croom 2002: 75-8; Olson 2008: 27-33.
\textsuperscript{109} Sebesta 1997: 535; Olson 2008: 27.
\textsuperscript{110} Gell. \textit{N.A.} 10.15.27. Gellius may be referring to the \textit{flammeum}, rather than the \textit{stola}.
\textsuperscript{111} For the \textit{flammeum}, see La Follette 1994; Staples 1998: 146-7; Croom 2002: 112; Olson 2008: 21-5; Hersch 2010: 94-105.
\textsuperscript{112} See also Lucr. 2.361-2; Mart. 12.42.3.
The *flammeum* was said to be “flame-colored” (*luteus*), but the exact shade remains the subject of debate.\(^\text{113}\) Pliny uses *luteus* to describe the color of an egg yolk, while Festus claims that the *flammeum* was the color of lightening.\(^\text{114}\) Modern scholars have also suggested that the etymology of *flammeum*, which is derived from *flamma* (flame), indicates that the color of the veil symbolized the flame of the hearth, which would be under the care of the bride in her new home.\(^\text{115}\) If this supposition is correct, we see once again a close connection between women and the hearth, where the household gods resided.

Visual evidence appears to confirm that the *flammeum* was a deep golden-yellow color.\(^\text{116}\) A wall painting from the first half of the first century A.D. from the Villa Imperiale at Pompeii shows a bride wearing a diaphanous yellow veil seated on a bridal couch (Fig. 53). Scholars have also identified elements of the bridal costume in the mid-first century B.C. fresco in the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii. The woman shown seated on an ivory couch to the left of the entrance wears a deep yellow mantle with a purple border (Fig. 54). The presence of various bridal elements, including the betrothal ring and the marriage contract, indicate that she is a bride and her yellow veil is the *flammeum*. Finally, in the so-called **Aldobrandini Wedding** from an Augustan house in Rome, Venus appears to be coaxing a young bride to put on the yellow veil lying on the bed beside her (Fig. 55).

Although the purple stripe on the veil of the bride in the fresco from the Villa of the Mysteries is not a feature of literary descriptions of the *flammeum*, praetextate garments were worn by a variety of religious figures at Rome.\(^\text{117}\) The purple border both visually identified the wearer as a religious official and served an important ritual purpose. Praetextate garments had to be made of wool, which was imbued with an apotropaic and ritual significance.\(^\text{118}\) Furthermore, the color purple was associated with blood, which symbolized

\(^{113}\) An anonymous scholiast commenting on one of Juvenal’s *Satires* describes the *flammeum* as “a kind of cloak with which women cover themselves on their wedding day; it must be kept bloody red in color, on account of the blushing of the bride” (*flammea genus amicti, quo se coopertiunt mulieres die nuptiarum: est enim sanguineum propter ruborem castitatem*, Schol. S. 6.225). Modern scholars have rightly rejected this testimony in favor of other ancient sources, which describe the *flammeum* as a golden-yellow or orange garment.

\(^{114}\) Plin. *H.N.* 10.148; Festus 82L.


\(^{116}\) La Follette 1994: 56, with further bibliography.

\(^{117}\) For the significance of praetextate garments, see chapter 2.

\(^{118}\) Sebesta 1994: 47.
life and was used in many ancient cultures to ward off evil forces.\textsuperscript{119} Thus it is not surprising that the \textit{flaminica} and the bride wore a praetextate veil.

The golden-yellow or bright orange color of the \textit{flammeum} was evidently quite rare and may have been confined to the costume of \textit{flaminicae} and brides. There were dyers at Rome known as the \textit{flammeari} who specialized in this particular hue.\textsuperscript{120} Several modern scholars have noted that the \textit{flammeari} employed the stamens of crocuses, a flower used to promote menstruation and fertility in the ancient Mediterranean world.\textsuperscript{121} The distinctive color of the \textit{flammeum} was therefore particularly appropriate for the \textit{flaminica}, who embodied the role of the faithful wife, for whom bearing children was a central occupation, as well as for the bride.

According to Festus, brides wore the \textit{flammeum} as a good omen, since the \textit{flamen Dialis} was not permitted to divorce his wife.\textsuperscript{122} As we have seen, brides also wore the \textit{seni crines}, the Vestals’ distinctive hairstyle, in order to evoke the \textit{castitas} (virginity) of these women.\textsuperscript{123} Likewise, by associating the bride with the \textit{flaminica}, who was a living paradigm of the faithful \textit{univira}, the \textit{flammeum} served as a guarantee that the bride would maintain unwavering fidelity to her new husband. Together, the \textit{seni crines} and the \textit{flammeum} symbolized the ideals of the status the bride was leaving behind and the one she was about to take up. The adaptation of the visual language of religious costume from a ritual to a private context is highly significant. It demonstrates that religious officials served an important symbolic function in Roman society quite apart from the fulfillment of specific sacred obligations. The Vestals and \textit{flaminicae} both reflected and reinforced a model of traditional Roman womanhood by adhering to the specific requirements of their religious offices. When a young bride shrouded herself in the \textit{flammeum}, the \textit{flaminica}'s signature attribute, she made a public and visual commitment to emulate the precedent set by this ideal \textit{univira}.

Gellius claims that the \textit{flaminica} wore a twig from a fruitful tree (\textit{arbor felix}) in her mantle (\textit{rica}, N.A. 10.15.27), by which he must mean the \textit{flammeum}.\textsuperscript{124} In Latin texts, the term

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Sebesta 1994: 47.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Festus 79L: \textit{flammeari, infectores flammei coloris} (the \textit{flammeari} are dyers who work in the color of the \textit{flammeum}). See also Pl. Aul. 510 (\textit{flammarii}).
\item \textsuperscript{121} Sebesta 1997: 540, n. 33; Olson 2008: 22.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Festus 79L.
\item \textsuperscript{123} See chapter 2.
\item \textsuperscript{124} For the \textit{rica}, which does not necessarily refer to a particular type of head-covering, see Olson 2008: 53-4.
\end{itemize}
*arbor felix* usually refers to a fruitful tree, as opposed to an *arbor infelix*, which did not produce any edible fruit. Servius elaborates and explains that the tree in question was the pomegranate:

> Arculum vero est virga ex malo Punica incurvata ... vinculo laneo albo, quam in sacrificiis certis regina in capite habebat; flaminica autem Dialis omni sacrificatiane uti debebat, *Aen.* 4.137).

The *arculum* is a pomegranate twig bent to form a wreath, ... which was and bound with a white woolen tie. The *regina [sacerorum]* used to wear it on her head when performing certain sacrifices, but the *flaminica Dialis* was obliged to use it for every sacrifice.

The *arculum* likely symbolized the ideal of fertility, exemplified by the pomegranate with its many seeds. Moreover, Gellius uses the botanical term *surculus*, which indicates that the twig was still green and living and therefore had within it the power of reproduction. Thus the wreath worn by the *flaminica Dialis* represented the fecundity expected of an ideal *matrona* and may even have inspired the wreath of flowers worn by brides on their wedding day. But it also served an important ritual function. According to Festus, the circular *arculum* was placed on the head in order to support a vase containing the water necessary for *sacra publica* (public rites). We may therefore infer that the *flaminica Dialis* was responsible for bringing the water that would be used in rites performed by the *flamen*.

The *flaminica Dialis* was also distinguished by a special hairstyle known as the *tutulus*. The *tutulus* was an Etruscan hairstyle popular in the late sixth and early fifth centuries and adopted by elite Roman women during this period. It appears to have been officially reserved for *flaminicae* and *matresfamilias* (mothers of families). The style is

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125 Boels 1973: 83.
126 See also Festus 101L.
129 See Olson 2008: 24. Boels (1973), who focuses exclusively on the *flaminica* as a fertility figure, suggests that the union of the *flamen* and *flaminica Dialis* served as a guarantee of the fertility and prosperity of the *populus Romanus*. Her notion of how this might work seems analogous to the Roman belief that the *pignora imperii* guaranteed the safety and continuity of the *res publica*.
130 Festus 15L: *arculum appellabant cirulum quem capiti imponebant ad sustinenda commodius vasa quam ad sacra pulica capite portabant* (They gave the name *arculum* to that circle which they placed on their heads in order to more comfortably support the vase that they were carrying to the *sacra publica*).
132 The status of the *matresfamilias* depended upon that of the *paterfamilias*, since, according to Festus, a woman could not be called a *matresfamilias* until her husband was called *paterfamilias* (festus 112L). Some Roman sources claim that only a wife *in manu* rightly held the title *matresfamilias*, including Cic. *Top.* 14: *genus est uxor; eius duae formae: una matrumfamilias, eae sunt quae in manum convenerunt; altera earum, quae tantum modo uxoribus habentur* (Wife is a genus and there are two species, one consisting of *matresfamilias*, that is, those who have entered *manus*, and the
thought to have been achieved by dividing the hair into sections, piling it up high on the
crown of the head, and binding it with woolen *vitae* (fillets). This resulted in a conical
shape, related by the Romans to a *meta* (boundary stone) and the *apex* of the *flamen*. The
resemblance was almost certainly intentional, for, like *metae*, the *tutulus* had a sacred,
protective quality. The *tutulus* appears to have died out in the fifth century B.C., but
survived in a ritual context as the hairstyle of the *flaminicae*.135

The *flaminica*’s distinctive costume and hairstyle set her apart from ordinary women
and ensured that she could be readily identified as the *saecrds* of Jupiter. Her appearance
must have been equally striking during periods when she was explicitly prohibited from
combing or adorning her hair and presumably from wearing the *flammeum* as well. This
*caerimonia*, which is mentioned briefly by Gellius, appears to have been rooted in the ritual
calendar and may be related to the fact that the days on which the *flaminica* left her hair
unkempt were also days on which marriage was prohibited or considered inauspicious.136

Ovid, for instance, warns young women to avoid marriage in March on the days when the
Salii moved (*movere*) and purified (*lustratio*) the holy shields of Mars (*anxlia*). During this
period, he is careful to point out, “the belted wife of the *apex*-wearing *flamen Dialis* must keep
her hair uncombed” (*bis etiam contiunx apicati cincta Dialis / lucibus impexas debet habere comas,
*Fast*. 3.393-8).

The *flaminica* also left her hair uncombed and unadorned during the rites of the *Argei*. This festival began with a procession to the twenty seven *Argei* shrines on 16 and 17
March and culminated on the *Ides* of May with a ceremony at the *Pons Sublicius*, during

133 Varro *Ling*. 7.44: *id tutulus appellatus ab eo quod matres familias crines convolutes ad verticem capitis quos habent vit<ta>*
relatos diebantur tutuli (this is called a *tutulus* from the fact that the twisted locks of hair which the *matresfamilias*
wear on the tops of their heads wrapped with a woolen band used to be called *tutuli*); Festus 484: *tutulum vocari
aiunt flaminiarum capitum ornamentum, quod fiat vitta purpurea innexa crinibus, et exstructum in altitudinem* (They say that
the hairstyle of the *flaminicae* is called the *tutulus*, which is created by fastening purple *vitae* to the hair and piling
it up high).

134 Varro explains that the hairstyle was called a *tutulus* either because it protected (*tuendi*) the hair or because the
highest place in the city, the citadel, was called the safest (*tutissimum, Ling*. 7.44).

135 Bonfante-Warren (1973, followed by Sebesta 1994: 49-50; La Follette 1994: 57-60) suggests that the *tutulus*
survived as the *sae crines*, but there is no evidence that these two hairstyles were ever identical. Fantham (2008:
167) and Hersch (2010: 78-9) maintain that the *sae crines* worn by Vestals and the bride and the *tutulus* worn by
*flaminicae* and *matresfamilias* were different hairstyles.

which the Vestals threw twenty seven rush dolls into the Tiber. According to Plutarch, the Romans avoided marriage during May as well. He offers several explanations for this circumstance, including one related to the nature of the Argei rite:

Διὰ τί τοῦ Μαΐου μηνὸς οὐκ ἄγονται γυναῖκας; ... ἕκαστῷ μηνὶ τούτῳ τὸν μέγιστον ποιούνται τῶν καθαρµῶν, νῦν μὲν εἴδωλα ῥιπτούντες ἀπὸ τῆς γεφύρας εἰς τὸν ποταµὸν πάλαι οἱ ἀνθρώποι; διὸ καὶ τὴν γλαµµικάν, ἱερὰν τὴς Ἡρᾶς εἶναι δοκοῦσαν, νενοµίσται σκυθρωπάζειν, μήτε λουοµένην τηνικάυτα μήτε κοσµουµένην (Q.R. 86 = Mor. 285a).

Why do men not marry during the month of May? ... Or is it because in this month they hold their most important ceremony of purification, in which they now throw images from the bridge into the river, but in days of old they used to throw human beings? Wherefore it is the custom that the flaminica, reputed to be consecrated to Juno, shall wear a stern face, and refrain from bathing and wearing ornaments at this time. Plutarch suggests that the flaminica appeared at the bridge ceremony unwashed and unadorned on account of the somber character of the rite, which had once involved and still evoked human sacrifice. Perhaps even more relevant, however, is his notice that the Argei festival was the most important purificatory rite in the ritual calendar. Thus the ceremony at the bridge was functionally similar to the lustration of the ancilia in March. The flaminica’s unkempt appearance must have been related to the nature of the rite, which was also incompatible with weddings.

A third example appears to confirm an association between the desire to avoid marriage during important purification rites and the appearance of the flaminica. The festival days surrounding the Vestalia, which culminated in a ritual purification of the aedes Vestae, were regarded as nefasti (days unfit for public business) and religiosi (sacred). In Ovid’s Fasti, the flaminica Dia des advises the poet not to marry his daughter during this period, which ran from 7 to 15 June:

donec ab Iliaca placidus purgamina Vesta
detulerit flavis in mare Thybris aquis,
non mihi detonso crinem depectere buxo,
non unguæ ferro subsecuisse licet,
non tetigisse virum, quamvis Iovis ille sacerdos,
quarnvis perpetua sit mihi lege datus.
tu quoque ne propera: melius tua filia nubet

137 Gell. N.A. 10.15.30: ... cum it ad Argoes, quod neque comit caput neque capillum depectit (When she [the flaminica Dia des] goes to the Argei, she neither combs her head nor dresses her hair). For the rite of the Argei, see chapter 3.
138 The suggestion that the flaminica Dia des was the sacerdos of Juno is likely incorrect (see above).
139 The calendars indicate that the days surrounding the Vestalia were nefasti (Fowler 1899: 145-6). According to Festus, the days were also considered religiosi (296L).
ignea cum pura Vesta nitebit humo” (6.227-34).

“Until the calm Tiber shall have carried down to the sea on its yellow current the filth (purgamina) from the temple of Ilian Vesta, it is not lawful for me to comb down my hair with a toothed comb, or cut my nails with iron, or touch my husband, though he is the sacris of Jupiter, and though he was given to me for life. You, too, be in no hurry; your daughter will better wed when Vesta’s fire shall shine on a clean floor.

This depiction of the flaminica as a repository of religious knowledge related to women’s lives is striking, to say the least, and certainly very plausible. In the lines preceding this passage, Ovid claims to have asked the flaminica to tell him what days were suitable for weddings and which should be avoided. She responds that the first part of June is an inauspicious time to wed, citing the fact that she is not permitted to comb her hair or cut her nails until the purification of Vesta’s temple is complete. These prohibitions are similar to those she observed in March and May. In this passage, however, the flaminica provides another highly significant piece of information: she was not permitted to touch her husband until the nefas period had ended.

This final prohibition brings into sharper focus the connection between purification festivals, the actions and appearance of the flaminica Dialis and the suspension of weddings. The flamen and flaminica were required to abstain from sexual relations during important purificatory rites, perhaps because they participated in these rituals and were expected to be ritually pure themselves. The desire to avoid marriage during the same period, however, may indicate that the prohibition was more widely applicable than Ovid’s flaminica suggests. In either case, the flaminica’s appearance on these days may be understood as an outward sign that she was observing the interdiction against sexual relations with her husband. Given the centrality of the marital relationship to the flaminate, the flaminica may have assumed what can best be described as an attitude of mourning when ritual abstinence was required. While the ancient sources do not specifically mention the flammeum, their focus on her uncombed and an unadorned hair, which would not have been visible under the veil, suggests that she appeared without her signature attribute. As a symbol of good fortune and fidelity in marriage, the flammeum would have been incongruous and ill-suited to periods when

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140 Hersch 2010: 283.
141 Ovid mentions that the flaminica handled certain purificatory materials at an unspecified purification rite, Fast. 2.27-8: ipsa ego flaminicam poscentem februa vidi / februa poscenti pinea virga data est (I myself have seen the flaminica asking for februa (materials for purification); at her request she was given a branch of pine).
weddings were prohibited. Her dress and appearance may also have served as a signal to other women, particularly when the city was small.

**Religious Activities**

According to Aulus Gellius, the *flamen Dialis* was engaged in ritual activity on a daily basis (*cotidie feriatus*, *N.A.* 10.15.16). Indeed, the regulations requiring the *flamen* to wear his *apex* at all times and to keep a box of sacrificial cakes near his bed suggest that he was ready for action at every moment. Certain of his daily responsibilities may have been performed at the hearth in the *domus flaminia* (house of the *flamen*). The hearth in every Roman house was a place of worship sacred to the household gods, but that of the *flamen* and *flaminica Dialis* appears to have held some significance in public cult. Gellius and Servius claim it was unlawful to remove fire from the house except for religious purposes, which almost certainly confirms that the flame was imbued with sacral significance.\(^{142}\) Furthermore, this strongly suggests that the flame was removed for use in public rites, perhaps all those over which the *flamen* or *flaminica* presided.\(^{143}\) Based on analogy with household ritual, we may speculate that the *flaminica* was responsible for tending the hearth and conveying the fire from the *domus* to the altar where it would be used.\(^{144}\)

In addition to celebrating rites on a daily basis, the *flamen Dialis* sacrificed a ram to Jupiter on the Ides of every month.\(^{145}\) He also played a central role in the celebration of several annual public festivals, including the twin Vinalia, the feast day of Fides and the Lupercalia.\(^{146}\) While the ancient sources focus primarily on the activities of the *flamen* when they note his presence at a specific festival, the *flaminica* must have accompanied him on most occasions and may often have played a public role. We can be certain, for instance, that both the *flamen* and *flaminica* attended the ceremony at the bridge during the Argei festival in early May. There were likely many occasions on which the couple served together in this way, both within the *domus flaminia* and also at official public rites. Roman authors

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\(^{142}\) Under normal circumstances, it would have been acceptable to give fire to a neighbor whose hearth had burned out.

\(^{143}\) Gell. *N.A.* 10.15.7: *igneum e flaminia, id est flaminis Dialis domo, nisi sacrum offerri ius non est* (It is against the law for fire to be taken from the *flaminia*, that is the home of the *flamen Dialis*, except for a sacred rite); Festus 94L: *igneum ec domo flaminia offerri non licebat, nisi divinæ Rei gratia* (It is not lawful for fire to be taken from the *domus flaminia* except for the sake of a divine matter).

\(^{144}\) See above.

\(^{145}\) Ov. *Fast.* 2.587-8; Macr. *Sat.* 1.15.16.

\(^{146}\) Varro *Ling.* 6.16 (Vinalia); Livy 1.21.4 (Fides); Ov. *Fast.* 2.282 (Lupercalia).
probably took the *flaminica*’s attendance for granted, which has made it difficult for us to appreciate the full range of her religious activities. What little evidence we do have suggests that the *flaminica* was an active and necessary participant in the *flammonium Diale*, rather than merely an appendage of her husband.

In addition to annual public rites, it seems very likely that the *flamen* and *flaminica Dialis* served together at marriages concluded by *confarreatio*. According to Servius, the *flamen* and the *pontifex maxinus* officiated at this rite, joining the bride and groom through an offering of grain and *mola salsa*. As the *sacerdos* of Jupiter, the recipient of the sacrifice, it is not surprising that the *flamen* was involved in this ritual, even if his presence was a later innovation. The *flaminica Dialis* almost certainly accompanied her husband to weddings of this type. We have already seen that she was regarded as paradigm of marital fidelity whose accoutrements were adopted by the Roman bride. At least one ancient source suggests that the *flammeum* was worn as a good omen, since the *flamen* was not permitted to divorce his wife. If the *flaminica*’s veil could bring good fortune to a bride on her wedding day, how much more so could the presence of the *flaminica* herself?

We may even, albeit tentatively, take one step further. The *flaminica* was by definition a *univira* and was therefore ideally suited to serve as the *pronuba* (attendant of the bride) at marriages concluded by *confarreatio*. The title itself suggests that the *pronuba* aided the bride, though she is most often associated in modern scholarship with the so-called *dextrarum iunctio*, the joining of the couple’s hands. She may also have prepared the wedding torches, decorated the bridal bed and offered advice to the young bride. Roman sources specify that the *pronuba* had to be a *univira*, but are silent on the matter of her relationship to the bride. There is, in other words, no evidence that the *flaminica* could not have served as the *pronuba* of an unrelated woman.

In addition to providing assistance to the *flamen*, the *flaminica Dialis* had her own ritual competence. She was permitted to use the *secespita*, a type of sacrificial knife also employed

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148 See above.
149 Serv. *Aen*. 4.29, quoted above.
150 For a recent discussion of the literary and artistic evidence for the Roman *pronuba*, see Hersch 2010: 190-212.
by the *flamines*, Vestals and *pontifices*.\(^{152}\) At a sacrifice, the presiding official ran the knife along the back of the victim, after which the *victimarius* (ritual slaughterer) did the actual killing and butchering. We know of at least two occasions on which the *flaminica* may have employed this instrument of sacrifice. According to Macrobius, the *flaminica* was required to perform an expiatory sacrifice whenever she heard thunder.\(^{153}\) She also sacrificed a ram to Jupiter in the *regia* on the *nundinae* (market days):

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\text{Anit enim nundinas Iovis ferias esse, siquidem flaminica omnibus nundinis in regia Iovi arietem soleat immolare (Macr. Sat. 1.16.30).}
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For he [the historian Granius Licinianus] says that *nundinae* are sacred to Jupiter, accordingly it is the custom for the *flaminica* to sacrifice a ram to that god in the *regia* on every market day.

Market days, which occurred every ninth day, provided chronological structure to the urban week in early Rome. By the late Republic, when the city markets were open every day, the nundinal market rhythm had become functionally obsolete. Nonetheless, the *nundinae* retained their religious character. Like the Kalends, Nones and Ides, these days were marked by regular religious rites and classified as *dies fasti* (festival days) on the public calendars.\(^{154}\) Given the public nature of the *nundinae* and the indisputably public location where the *flaminica* performed this sacrifice, it is difficult to claim that her role on this day was private and marginal.

The above examples confirm that at least two of the *flaminicae*’s individual responsibilities involved sacrifice, an action that scholars have traditionally regarded as an exclusively male category of religious activity.\(^{155}\) In order to sustain this argument, some have suggested that the *flaminica* did not possess her own sacrificial capacity, but rather acted as a surrogate for her husband.\(^{156}\) Recently, however, Celia Schultz and Rebecca Flemming

\(^{152}\) Serv. Aen. 4.262: *secespita autem est cultor oblongus, ferrens, manubrio eburneo, rotundo, solido, vincto ad capulum argento auroque, fixo clavis aeneis, quo flamines, flaminicae, virgines pontificesque ad sacrificia utuntur eaque iam sacra est* (The *secespita* is an oblong knife made of iron with a rounded ivory handle, fastened to the hilt with silver and gold and fixed with copper nails. The *flamines*, *flaminicae*, Vestals and *pontifices* use it for sacrifices and it is itself a sacred thing). The plural “*flaminicad*” may indicate that the wives of other *flamines* used the *secespita* as well. See also Festus 472L.; Siebert 1999: 75-9.

\(^{153}\) Macr. Sat. 1.16.8: *flaminica quotiens tonitrua audisset, feriata erat donec placasset deos* (Whenever the *flaminica* heard thunder she observed a period of religious retirement until she had appeased the gods).

\(^{154}\) Following the *lex Hortensia* of 287, *comitia* were not permitted on *nundinae*, though *plebisica* (resolutions passed by the *concilium plebis*) were regarded as valid (Rüpke 1995: 274-83). Like the days immediately following the Kalends, Nones and Ides, the days after *nundinae* were considered *dies atri* (black days). Travel, weddings, major festivals and *comitia* were avoided.


\(^{156}\) Scheid 1992: 384.
have demonstrated that there is no reason to deny female sacrificial capacity.\textsuperscript{157} In fact, all of the ancient evidence points to the opposite conclusion, that women were capable of acting as sacrificing representatives of the Roman community. Though the ability to perform an individual rite was often dependent upon gender, particularly in the case of sex-segregated rites, the Romans did not categorically exclude women from the sacrificial act. In light of this conclusion, there is little reason to deny that the \textit{flaminica} could offer sacrifices in her own right, not just as a surrogate or substitute for the \textit{flamen}, whose responsibility such activities properly were. The \textit{flaminica} was, as Festus reminds us, the wife (\textit{uxor}) of the \textit{flamen} and the \textit{sacerdos} of Jupiter.\textsuperscript{158} In other words, Roman religion not only allowed women to participate in public cult in an official capacity, it required it on a regular basis.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the \textit{flaminica Dialis} was a religious official in her own right with the same capacity as her husband to represent the \textit{populus Romanus}. The \textit{flamonium Diale} was a joint office in which both \textit{flamen} and \textit{flaminica} had distinct and essential functions. Nonetheless, the role of each partner was not entirely equal. As we have seen, the \textit{flamonium} was structured according to a particular definition of marriage. The \textit{flamen} and \textit{flaminica Dialis} were married by the rite of \textit{confarreatio}, which ensured that the \textit{flaminica} was \textit{in manu}, that is, under the control of her husband for legal and religious purposes. The flamineate, in other words, preserved and reinforced the conventional gender hierarchy by subordinating the \textit{flaminica} to the \textit{flamen}.

For this reason, the \textit{flaminica Dialis} readily exemplified the virtues associated with the ideal \textit{matrona}. Her costume, particularly the bright yellow \textit{flammeum}, symbolized wifely modesty, marital fidelity and the promise of fertility. Furthermore, certain of her sacred obligations were paralleled in the domestic sphere by the duties fulfilled by the \textit{materfamilias}. Like the mother of the household, the \textit{flaminica} likely provided fire from the hearth in the \textit{domus flaminia} and other items necessary for religious rites performed by the \textit{flamen}. The gender-coded complementarity of these tasks underscores the marked difference between men’s and women’s social status. At the same time, it demonstrates an implicit recognition

\textsuperscript{157} Schultz 2006: 131-7; Flemming 2007. For the sacrificial capacity of Greek women, see Connelly 2007: 179-90.
\textsuperscript{158} Festus 82L, quoted above.
that the participation of women was essential to maintaining proper relations between the community and the gods. The *flaminica*’s role in Roman religion was more complicated than that of “wife of the *flamen***.” While she offered support and assistance to her husband on many occasions, she was also capable of independent ritual action. Joint religious offices required the cooperation of husband and wife in order to function properly.
Chapter Six
Married Couples in Public Religion

In this chapter, I explore the proposition that married couples serving together had a larger role in the Roman religious system than is often discussed. As we have seen, the flaminica Dialis was both the wife of the flamen and the saecros of Jupiter. Her participation in the flamonium Diale was essential. The flaminica performed a variety of tasks in cooperation with her husband, but she also presided over religious rites, including sacrifices, on her own. The flamonium Diale was not the only religious office that required the joint service of a married couple. The rex and regina sacrorum and the flamines and flaminicae maiores and minores served city-wide cults and represented the Roman people as a whole. Other ancient sources reveal that the formal structure of a joint office filled by a married couple was operative at more than one level of social organization within the city, including the thirty curiae. Just as cooperation between husband and wife was an integral part religious practice in the Roman household, joint service appears to have been a central tenet of public religion as well. Official religious serve at Rome was a shared experience.

The Flamines and Flaminicae Maiores

The three flamines maiores appear to have had a special relationship to one another. They (and perhaps their wives as well) were members of the extended pontifical college, which also included the pontifices, the Vestals and the rex and regina sacrorum. Unlike the flamines minores, the three flamines maiores were required to be patricians and had to be married by confarreatio, the most ancient and religiously solemn form of Roman marriage. This grouping may indicate that the three deities they represented, Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus, were an archaic triad later replaced by the Capitoline triad of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. Unfortunately, however, we know too little about early Roman religion to be certain.

Although many scholars have denied the existence of additional flaminicae, the occurrence of the designation flaminica Dialis in several Latin sources suggests that there was a need to distinguish between more than one female religious official who bore the same
general title. A pontifical text quoted by Macrobius confirms that this view is correct. The passage describes a banquet given in 69 in honor of the inauguration of L. Cornelius Lentulus Niger as flamen Martialis. The guest list included a number of distinguished magistrates and religious officials as well as four Vestals, the new flamen’s mother-in-law and his wife Publicia, who is designated as flaminica. The source of this quotation, Q. Caecilius Metellus Pius (cos. 80), can safely be regarded as a trustworthy witness to the veracity of Publicia’s title. Metellus served as chief of the pontifical college for over thirty years, a position that required a thorough knowledge of religious law and custom. The text therefore offers definitive proof that the wife of the flamen Martialis was called the flaminica Martialis. Like the flaminate of Jupiter, the flaminate of Mars was a two-person office filled by a married couple.

The religious activities of the flamen and flaminica Martialis are not well known. The flamen participated in the cult of Fides alongside the other flamines maiors and was responsible for certain caerimoniae Martis. Possession of an official religious title indicates that the flaminica Martialis had cultic responsibilities as well. Although none are explicitly attested in the ancient sources, this is not surprising. The Roman tradition focuses almost exclusively on the flamen and flaminica Dialis and their activities and barely mentions the ritual obligations of the flamen Martialis, let alone his wife. If her position was at all analogous to that of the flaminica Dialis, we should likely assume that she accompanied her husband and assisted him with his religious duties. It is also probable that she conducted rites in her own capacity as sacerdos of Mars. Servius mentions that the flaminicae had the right to carry the secespita, a special ritual knife generally reserved for members of the pontifical college, which suggests that the flaminica Martialis also presided over sacrifices.

Although the wife of the flamen Quirinalis is not explicitly named as the flaminica Quirinalis in the ancient sources, it seems likely that she was involved in the flaminate as well. The flamen and flaminica Quirinalis were primarily concerned with the cult of Quirinus. This

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1 See, for example, Tac. Ann. 4.16; Gell. N. A. 10.15.26.
2 Macr. Sat. 3.13.10-1.
3 Val. Max. 1.1.2.
4 Rüpke 2008: 861, No. 2853. Wissowa (1912: 506, n. 5), on the other hand, argued the flaminica Martialis did not have any cultic responsibilities.
5 For the religious activities of the flaminica Dialis, see chapter 5.
6 Serv. Aen. 4.262: secespita autem est culter oblongus, ferrus, manubrio eburneo, rotundo, solido, vincto ad capulum argento auroque, fixo clavis aeneis, quo flamines, flaminicae, virgines pontificesque ad sacrificia utuntur eaque iam sacra est (The secespita is an oblong knife made of iron with a rounded ivory handle, fastened to the hilt with silver and gold and fixed with copper nails. The flamines, flaminicae, Vestals and pontifices use it for sacrifices and it is itself a sacred thing).
god’s original sphere of activity appears similar to that of Mars. It included agricultural and military concerns, though the focus of his attention was on the preparation and declaration of war rather than its execution. Unfortunately, however, many of the details of his early nature have been obscured by the identification of Quirinus with the deified Romulus. During the historical period, Quirinus was closely associated with the Quirites and the curiae, concepts that appear to have defined the early civic community in opposition to the army.

The Quirinalia, the primary festival of Quirinus, fell on 17 February. While little is known about the rites involved, it seems likely that the flamen and flaminica Quirinalis played a prominent role in the festivities. The flamen Quirinalis also presided at the Robigalia, a festival to avert mildew (roigo), on 25 April in the grove of Robigus at the fifth milestone on the via Claudia. According to Tertullian, the flamen Quirinalis and the Vestals sacrificed at the underground altar of Consus during the Consualia in late August. Finally, we hear that the flamen Quirinalis and the pontifices offered a sacrifice to the dead (parentatio) at the grave of Acca Larentia on 23 December.

It is not clear whether the flamen and flaminica Martialis and the flamen and flaminica Quirnalis were subject to the same taboos that restricted the activities of the flamen and flaminica Dialis. Some appear to have applied at least initially, including the prohibition against leaving Rome, which would have entailed the desertion of their ritual duties (sacris discedere, Tac. Ann. 358). In 242, the flamen Martialis A. Postumius Albinus, who was then serving as consul, attempted to depart from the city on campaign, but was prevented from doing so by the pontifex maximus L. Caecilius Metellus (cos. 251, 247). Similarly, in 131 the flamen Martialis L. Valerius Flaccus came into conflict with his consular colleague the pontifex maximus P. Licinius Crassus Dives Mucianus concerning the distribution of provinces. At

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7 Smith 2006: 201.
8 See below.
9 InscrIt 13.2. Ovid (Fast. 4.901-942), however, says that he witnessed the festival on his return from Nomentum, which suggests that the rites were celebrated on the via Nomentana.
10 et nunc ara Consu illi in circu demersa est ad primas metas sub terra cum inscriptione eiusmodic CONSUS CONSILIO MARS DUELLO LARES COILLO POTENTES sacrificant apud eam nonis Iuliiis sacerdotes publici, XII. Kalend. Septembres flamen Quirinalis et virgines (Tert. De spect. 5.7). For the underground altar, see also Tac. Ann. 12.24; Serv. Aen. 8.636. The inscription mentioned by Tertullian is likely late and probably did not come from the altar (Fowler 1899: 207; Scullard 1981: 163).
11 Gell. 7.7.7; Plut. Rom. 4.3; Macr. Sat. 1.10.15. According to one tradition, Acca Larentia was the wife of Faustulus and the foster mother of Romulus and Remus. Given the close association between Quirinus and Romulus beginning in the third century, it seems possible that the flamen Quirinalis became associated with the ritual only after this identification had been made.
12 Livy Per. 19; Val. Max. 1.1.2; Rüpke 2008: 855, No. 2817.
some point, however, the prohibition was lifted. In A.D. 22, the flamen Dialis Ser. Cornelius Lentulus Maluginensis argued that he ought to have the same right to govern a province as the flamines Martialis and Quirinalis.\footnote{13 Tac. Ann. 3.58.} The emperor Tiberius denied his request, which underscores the impression that the flaminate of Jupiter was viewed as the most essential of the three offices.

Though far less is known about the flamen and flaminica Martialis and the flamen and flaminica Quirinalis, it is important to understand these flamonia as joint offices filled by married couples. As we have seen, the strength of the flamonium Diale was its reliance on the cooperative efforts of the flamen and the flaminica. A similar situation likely existed in the remaining flamonia maiora. These sacerdotia were joint offices in which both the flamen and the flaminica had distinct and essential functions. Although the flamen and flaminica were not equal – marriage by confarreatio established the flamen’s manus over his wife – the contributions of both partners were necessary in order for the office to function properly.

The Flamines and Flaminicae Minores

In addition to the three flamines maiores, there were twelve flamines minores at Rome. Unfortunately, however, only the flamines Carmentalis, Cerialis, Falacer, Floralis, Fur(r)inalis, Palatualis, Pomonalis, Portunalis, Volcanalis andVolturinalis can be identified with certainty.\footnote{14 Given the diversity of deities represented in the extant list, it is difficult to speculate about the identity of the gods served by the two unattested flamines. Based on a late Antonine epitaph from Numidian Cuicul, which records a sacerdos Neptunalis (ILS 9489), Rüpke (2008: 523, No. 572) has suggested that a flamen Neptunalis was one of the twelve minores. Although there is no other record of a flamen of Neptune and the inscription mentions a sacerdos rather than a flamen, Rüpke argues that during the principate, the title sacerdos replaced that of flamen for officials outside of the imperial cult. Elsewhere, Rüpke (2007: 225) suggests that the remaining two cognomina were Virbialis and Lucularis.} It is generally assumed that the gods served by the flamines and flaminicae constituted an early version of the Roman pantheon.\footnote{15 Marco Simón 1996: 45-6; Lipka 2009: 57.} By the late Republic, however, several of the deities associated with the flamines minores had become so obscure that antiquarian writers were no longer sure of their exact natures or spheres of influence. Varro notes that in his day, even the name of the goddess Fur(r)ina was barely known:

Furinalia <a> Furrina, quod ei deae feriae publicae dies is; cuius deae honos apud antiquos. Nam et ei sacra instituta annua et flamen attributus: nunc vix nomen notum paucis (Varro Ling. 6.19).
The Furrinalia is from Furrina, for this day is a public holiday for this goddess. Honor was paid to her among the ancients, who instituted an annual sacrifice for her and assigned to her a flamen, but now her name is barely known and even that to only a few.

That the flamines and festivals associated with these deities were maintained throughout the Republican period and well into the principate is evidence of the deeply traditional nature of Roman religious institutions. It also suggests, however, that the religious systems of the archaic and historical periods differed significantly from one another and underscores how religious practices evolved in response to the changing nature of Roman society. Deities whose areas of competence were evidently of central importance in early Rome faded into obscurity or were gradually replaced, for reasons completely unknown to us, by gods whose cults served similar functions. All of this makes it difficult to assemble a coherent picture of the flamonia as a group. While it seems likely that many, if not most of the cults served by the flamines were very ancient, others clearly were not. All the layers are jumbled together and it is impossible to disentangle early and late elements with absolute certainty.

For instance, though Ennius claims that Numa established the flamen Floralis, there is some evidence that it was first instituted much later, perhaps in response to the growth of the cult of Flora following the foundation of the aedes and ludi Florae in 241. A coin minted in 57 indicates that an ancestor of the otherwise unknown monetalis C. Servilius was the first flamen Floralis (Fig. 56). The obverse of the coin includes a lituus, a head of Flora and the legend FLORAL PRIMVS, which has been resolved by Michael Crawford as (flamen) Floralis primus. Rüpke has identified the ancestor as M. Servilius Pulex Geminus (cos. 202), who was co-opted as an augur in 211. If Rüpke’s identification is correct, it has important implications for the study of the flaminate. While it is often assumed that all of the flamonia were instituted at a very early date, it seems evident that at least one of these offices was...

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16 Forsythe 2005: 137.
17 This seems to have been the case, for example, with Carmenta, whose cult is discussed below.
18 Ennius apud Varro Ling. 7.45.
19 RRC 423/1.
20 Crawford 1974: 447. Crawford argues against Floralia primus fecit, first suggested by Mommsen (RM 645, n. 538). Since the Floralia were first celebrated in 241 by L. and M. Publicius Malleolus, FLORAL PRIMVS has been taken to refer to the first annual celebration in 173 and an aedile C. Servilius C. f. hypothesized for the purpose. Crawford maintains, however, that FLORAL PRIMVS is “a very bizarre abbreviation for Floralia annua primus fecit.” A coin of C. Memmius C. f. from the following year establishes very clearly that an ancestor celebrated the first ludi Cereales in 211: MEMMIS AED(ilis) CERIALIA PREIMUS FECIT (RRC 427/1). Crawford compares FLORAL with QUIRIN as the abbreviation for (flamen) Quirinalis on a coin of N. Fabius Pictor in 126 (RRC 268).
21 Rüpke 2008: 892, No. 3069.
created in the later third century. This could indicate that the process of establishing the canonical group of fifteen flamines familiar to us from later antiquarian sources was more fluid than has generally been suspected.

While the flamines maiores were always patricians, the lesser flamonia appear to have been open to plebeian candidates throughout the historical period. Though some scholars have argued that the flamines minores were originally drawn exclusively from among the patricians and only later from the plebeians as well, this change would have to have occurred at a very early date. The only known flamen minor from the Republican period is the plebeian M. Popillius Laenas, who served as flamen Carmentalis during the mid fourth century, well before the lex Ogulnia first opened certain fiercely contested religious offices to the plebeians in 300. Moreover, there is no indication in the ancient sources that access to the lesser flamonia had ever been an important issue to plebeian elites or that the offices were included in the provisions of the lex Ogulnia. The fact that Laenas, a four time consul and vir triumphalis, was also the flamen Carmentalis indicates that members of the plebeian elite were utilizing the lesser flamonia as a means to augment their social status and visibility within the community at a time when options for religious service were more limited than they would become after 300. Patrician control over major public religious offices was evidently not as monolithic as the historical tradition suggests. Plebeians were serving as flamines minores by the mid fourth century at the latest and likely had been doing so for many years.

The fragmentary state of our knowledge about the flamines minores precludes a definitive answer to the question of whether their wives were flaminicae as well, though it seems very likely that they were. The nature of the flaminate required the full participation of both the flamen and his wife. As we have seen, the cooperative nature of the office is its most distinguishing characteristic and we should probably assume that all Republican officials bearing the title flamen were accompanied by a flaminica. While the predominantly plebeian flamines minores were not required to be married by confarreatio, the special nature of their marriages must have been cultivated in a manner similar to those of the flamines maiores.

22 Fritz Graf (2004), for example, writes of Flora, “[h]er cult in Rome is old as she has her own flamen Floralis.” This familiar argument seems less secure in light of the evidence presented by Crawford and Rüpke.
24 The consensus has been that the wives of the flamines minores were not flaminicae (see, for example, Wissowa 1912: 506, n. 5; Boels 1973: 77; Vanggaard 1988: 30-1).
While there may have been specific criteria for selection to the *flamonia minora*, the ancient sources are silent on the matter. We are similarly uninformed about how a new *flamen* and *flaminica minor* were chosen, though it seems likely that a similar process to the one used in the case of the *flamines maiores* was employed for the *minores* as well. Most scholars believe, however, that the *flamines minores* were not inaugurated. The only ancient text that speaks to the inauguration of any *flamen*, the *Noctes Atticae* of Aulus Gellius, simply mentions that the *comitia calata* witnessed the inauguration of the *flamines* and the *rex sacrorum* (“calata comitia esse, quae pro conlegio pontificum babentur aut regis aut flaminum inaugurandorum causa, 15.27). Since the text, which ultimately derives from Labeo, does not specifically state that only *flamines maiores* were inaugurated in the *comitia calata*, it cannot be state with certainty that the *minores* were not installed in this way as well.

It seems quite clear that the *flamines* and *flaminicae minores* were not subject to all of the same *caerimoniae* that regulated the behavior of the *flamen* and *flaminica Dialis*. The only Republican *flamen minor* known to us is the consul and *vir triumphalis* M. Popilius Laenas, who was active in the first half of the fourth century. Laenas’ career certainly demonstrates that the *flamines minores* were able to pursue ordinary political careers and leave the city on campaign, an opportunity not available to the *flamen Dialis* and perhaps the other *flamines maiores* as well. As *aedilis*, Laenas is supposed to have given Rome’s first *ludi scaenici* in an effort to placate the gods during a plague. In 359, the year of his first consulship, the *flamen* interrupted a public sacrifice over which he was presiding in order to halt a plebeian revolt:

> Licet aliquid etiam de M. Popilli ingenio suspicari, qui cum consul esset eodemque tempore sacrificium publicum cum laena faceret, quod erat flamen Carmentalis, plebei contra patres concitatione et seditione nuntiata, ut erat laena amictus ita venit in contionem seditionemque cum auctoritate tum oratone sedavit (Cic. *Brut.* 56).

One may also infer something about the oratorical talent of M. Popilius. While he was consul and was at the same time engaged in performing a public sacrifice, wearing the *laena*, because he was the *flamen Carmentalis*, word was brought to him of riot and conflict by the plebeians against the patricians. And so clad in his *laena*, just as he was, he hurried to the *contio*, and both by his authority and by his oratory he calmed the tumult.

It is unclear what *sacrificium publicum* Laenas was forced to disrupt, but he must have been acting in his capacity as *flamen Carmentalis*, since, as we have seen, the *laena* was used only by

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27 Festus 436L. Livy 7.2.3 dates the institution of the first *ludi scaenici* to 364.
the flamines.\textsuperscript{28} Laenas held the consulship five times, earning a triumph in 350 for a victory over the Gauls.\textsuperscript{29} His remarkable success demonstrates that the flamonium Carmentalis was not incompatible with a traditional political and military career and further supports the notion that the office, though reserved for plebeians, was an honor sought by members of the political elite.

The \textit{Rex and Regina Sacrorum}

There was, of course, another high-profile Republican religious office that required the service of a married couple. The \textit{rex} and \textit{regina sacrorum}, who were also members of the extended \textit{collegium pontificum}, shared a two-person office whose structure seems to have been very similar to that of the flaminate. The Romans believed that the first \textit{rex sacrorum} had been appointed to take over the cultic responsibilities of the king following the expulsion of the Tarquins at the end of the sixth century. The wife of the Republican \textit{rex sacrorum}, the \textit{regina sacrorum}, was supposedly the religious surrogate of the former queen. Just as the royal couple had undertaken religious rites jointly on behalf of the early Roman community, the new \textit{rex} and \textit{regina sacrorum} served public cult together in a two-person religious office.

The \textit{rex sacrorum} was prohibited from holding political office and from obtaining membership in the senate.\textsuperscript{30} This explicit restriction, which was unique to the \textit{rex sacrorum}, also suggests that the office was the product of a division of the religious and political powers once held by the Roman king. While many modern scholars agree that there is likely to have been an historical relationship between the kingship and the Republican \textit{rex sacrorum}, it is impossible to determine how much continuity or change there was from the regal period to the early Republic, primarily because we do not know what the religious responsibilities of the king were.\textsuperscript{31}

According to Livy, the \textit{rex sacrorum} was placed under the authority of the \textit{pontifex maximus} “lest he should become king in anything more than name, and so threaten that liberty which was their first care” (\textit{ne additus nonini bonos aliquid libertati, cuius tunc prima erat}...)

\textsuperscript{28} Though it has sometimes been surmised that the \textit{cognomen} Laenas was derived from the \textit{laena}, perhaps following this memorable episode, it appears to be Etruscan in origin and may be an ethnicon (Elvers 2005).
\textsuperscript{29} Livy 7.12.1-4, 17.1, 18.10, 23.1-24.9, 25.1.
\textsuperscript{30} Livy 40.42.8.
\textsuperscript{31} Other historians suggest that the office of the \textit{rex sacrorum} was established prior to the beginning of the Republic (see, for example, Cornell 1995: 232-6; Bendlin 2008; Smith 2006: 260).
cura, officeret, 2.2.1). In the historical period, the pontifex maximus exercised jurisdiction over all other religious officials, including the rex sacrorum, and could impose fines or punish misconduct. The pontifex maximus was also responsible for selecting the rex sacrorum from a list of three candidates nominated by the collegium pontificum, and there is some evidence to suggest that he could compel unwilling nominees to take up the office.

The office of the rex sacrorum was officially restricted to members of the patriciate throughout the Republican period. There was, however, at least one plebeian rex during the Republican period. M. Marcius was likely inaugurated in the middle of the third century by the first plebeian pontifex maximus, and it seems likely that the cognomen Rex adopted by some Marcii beginning in the early second century was designed to advertise their ancestor’s tenure in office. The rex sacrorum was also required to be born of a marriage solemnized by confarreatio and had to be married by that rite as well. These two prerequisites are identical to those applied to the three flamines maiores and reflect a similar concern with marriage. Marriage by confarreatio created manus, which ensured that the regina sacrorum was closely bound to her husband and a member of his religious community.

The ritual obligations of the rex and regina sacrorum are not fully known. They likely participated in the New Year’s rites on 1 March, when the previous year’s decoration of laurel branches were removed from the aedes Vestae, the curiae, and the houses of the flamines and the house of the rex and regina sacrorum and replaced with fresh garlands that symbolized the newness of the year. The couple lived in a public house near the regia and the area sacra Vestae (Fig. 57). Given the attention their home received on 1 March, it may have held some religious significance. We also hear that the rex sacrificed a ram in the regia during the dies

32 See also Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 4.74.4.
34 See, for example, Livy 40.42.8-11. Festus (198-200L), however, provides a different ordo sacerdotum in which a “rex” comes first, followed by the three flamines maiores, with the pontifex maximus in fifth place. According to Festus, the order of precedence determined how these religious officials were arranged at table, presumably when celebrating sacrificial or pontifical cenae (see also Gell. N.A. 10.15.21; Serv. Aen. 2.2). It has been generally accepted that the rex in question is the rex sacrorum. The entry, however, claims that the rex ranked first in the sacerdotal hierarchy because he was the “most powerful” (potentissimus), a puzzling comment in light of the rex sacrorum’s seemingly marginal role in the historical period. The ordo recorded here likely predates the Republican period and reflects a time when the real king was the head of Roman religion. Following the institution of the Republic, the king’s surrogate, the rex sacrorum, maintained his position at the top of the ceremonial hierarchy, while the pontifex maximus assumed formal control.
35 Cic. Dom. 38; Livy 6.41.9.
36 Livy 27.6.16, 36.5; Rüpke 2008: 787-8, No. 2368.
37 For the significance of confarreatio, see chapter 5.
38 Ov. Fast. 3.135-44; Macrobr. Sat. 1.12.6. See also chapter 3.
*Agonales* on 9 January.\(^{39}\) According to Ovid, the rite was a piacular sacrifice to Janus.\(^{40}\) During the *regifugium* on 24 February, the *rex* sacrificed in the *comitium* before fleeing the *forum* in what several ancient sources claimed was a commemoration of the expulsion of the Tarquins from Rome.\(^{41}\) The *rex sacrorum* also participated in the rites of the Consualia on 15 December, but the details of his involvement are unclear.\(^{42}\)

His most important religious responsibilities were related to the calendar, which suggests that he held considerable religious power in early Rome, since all public rites were originally *feriae conceptivae* (moveable feasts).\(^{43}\) On each of the *kalendae*, the *rex* presided over a meeting of the *comitia calata* in the *curia calabra* on the Capitoline Hill. During the *comitia*, he performed a sacrifice with the assistance of a *pontifex minor*, who then announced the date of the monthly *nonae* based on the observation of the new moon.\(^{44}\) On the *nonae*, the *rex sacrorum* announced the *feriae* for that month.\(^{45}\) Though Cn. Flavius first published the *fasti* in 304, these rites continued to be observed throughout the Republican period.\(^{46}\) Rituals are also recorded for 24 March and 24 May with the calendar symbol *Q(uando) R(ex) C(omitiavit) F(as)*.\(^{47}\) While the details are unclear, it seems that the *rex* performed a sacrifice in the *comitium* and announced the end of a *nefas* period.\(^{48}\) The rite may originally have been performed monthly and should be related to the *rex sacrorum*’s other calendar related responsibilities.

According to Macrobius, the *regina sacrorum* offered a sacrifice to Juno in the *regia* on the *kalendae*:

> Romae quoque Kalendis omnibus, praeter quod pontifex minor in curia Calabra rem divinam Iunoni facit, etiam regina sacrorum, id est regis uxor, porcam vel agnam in regia Iunoni immolat (*Sat.* 1.15.19).

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39 Varro *Ling.* 6.12; Festus 91L; *InscrIt* 13.2.393.
40 Ov. *Fast.* 1.317-34. For this reason, some modern scholars argue that the *rex sacrorum* was the *sacerdos* of Janus, a conjecture that is not well supported by the ancient evidence (see, for example, Wissowa 1912: 23; Holland 1961: 133, 265; Szemler 1978: 343; Porte 2007).
41 Ov. *Fast.* 2.685-852; Plut. *Q.R.* 63; and Aus. *Ed.* 23.13 (p. 102 Green). The *regifugium* was more likely a rite of renewal, signifying the ritual closure of the old year in preparation for the new year’s rites on 1 March (Rüpke 1995: 304-7; Bendlin 2008).
42 *InscrIt* 13.2.136.
43 For the Roman calendar, see Michels 1967; Rüpke 1995; Feeney 2008.
44 *InscrIt* 13.2.111; Serv. *Aen.* 8.654.
46 Macr. *Sat.* 1.15.9-12.
47 *InscrIt* 13.2.430, 461.
At Rome too, on every Kalends not only does the pontifex minor sacrifice to Juno in the curia Calabra, but the regina sacrorum – that is, the wife of the rex [sacrorum] – offers a sow or a ewe to Juno in the regia.

This ritual was undoubtedly designed to coincide with the rites performed by the rex on the same day. Once again, we see that female religious officials did sacrifice on public feast days in public religious buildings. Servius also describes a special headdress worn by the regina sacrorum on “certain” (certi) ritual occasions:


The arculum is a pomegranate twig bent to form a wreath, ... which was and bound with a white woolen tie. The regina [sacrorum?] used to wear it on her head when performing certain sacrifices, but the flaminica Dialis was obliged to use it for every sacrifice.

According to Festus, the circular arculum was placed on the head in order to support a vase containing the water necessary for sacra publica (public rites). Unlike the flaminica Dialis, who wore the arculum at every sacrifice, the regina only wore this pomegranate wreath on specific occasions, which indicates that she presided over, or at the very least attended, multiple religious rites throughout the course of the year. The regina sacrorum participated fully in the office she shared with her husband, presiding over rites in her own capacity as a religious official.

Married Couples in the Roman Curiae

According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Romulus established religious rites in the curiae under the direction of sixty religious officials, two for each curia. In the following passage, the historian notes that the wives of these officials shared the office with their husbands:

Ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ διὰ γυναικῶν ἔδει τινὰ ἱερὰ συντελεῖσθαι καὶ διὰ παιδῶν ἀμφιθαλῶν ἔτερα, ἵνα καὶ ταύτα γένηται κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον, τὰς τε γυναῖκας ἔταξεν τῶν ἱερέων τοῖς ἑαυτῶν ἀνδράσι συνιερᾶσθαι, καὶ εἴ τι μὴ θέμις ἦν ὑπ’ ἄνδρων ὀργιάζεσθαι κατὰ νόμον τὸν ἐπιχώριον, ταύτας ἐπιτελεῖν καὶ παῖδας αὐτῶν τὰ καθήκοντα λειτουργεῖν (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.22.1).

And because some rites were to be performed by women, others by children whose fathers

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49 For the obligation of the flaminica Dialis to sacrifice in the regia on the nundinae (market days), see chapter 5.
50 Festus 15L: arculum appellabant circulum quem capiti imponebant ad sustinendum commodius vasa quae ad sacra publica capite portabant (They gave the name arculum to that circle which they placed on their heads in order to more comfortably support the vase that they were carrying to the sacra publica).
51 Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.21.2. Dionysius cites Varro and his own experience as sources for his extended discussion of curial religion (2.21.3). For the number of the curial officials, see below.
and mothers were living, to the end that these also might be administered in the best manner, he [Romulus] ordered that the wives of the religious officials should be religious officials along with their husbands; and that in the case of any rites which men were forbidden by the law of the country to celebrate, their wives should perform them and their children should assist as their duties required.

The composition of the cultic staff assigned to the curiae bears a striking resemblance to that of the offices discussed in the previous two chapters. Husband, wife and children all participated in the religious office, each performing a role designated by their position within the family. Like the flaminate, the curionate can only be understood fully when the contributions of each member are taken into account. Unfortunately, however, the wives of the curial officials have been almost universally overlooked in modern scholarship. I argue that the curionate should be regarded as a joint office that required the service of a married couple. Although there is very little direct information in the ancient sources about the wives and their responsibilities, it is possible to construct a reasonably full context for their service by reconsidering more generally evidence for religious activity in the curiae.

The Roman Curiae

First, a brief discussion of the curiate organization and its history is necessary in order to situate the curionate within the larger framework of religious experience at Rome. Historians of Roman religion tend to focus their attention either on the major public festivals and religious officials or alternatively on private votive practices. This approach often neglects a vibrant and complex middle layer in the religious life of the city, including cult activities in the curiae. The populus Romanus celebrated many of its festivals as a whole, but it also carried out rituals in smaller units. Festus differentiates these rites in the following passage:

Publica sacra, quae publico sumptu pro populo fiunt, quaeque pro montibus, pagis, curis, sacellis (284L).

Public rituals are those that are conducted on behalf of the populus at public expense, and those that are conducted on behalf of hills (montes), country districts (pagi), curiae, [and] shrines (sacella).

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53 The number of festivals celebrated by divisions of the populus is, however, small in relation to the entire festival calendar. They include the Compitalia, the Sementivae, the Fordicidia, the Fornacalia, the Septimontium, and possibly the Argei.
Rites and festivals belonging to this middle layer of Roman religion were more decentralized than those of the large-scale state cults and allowed for greater participation in a variety of smaller settings. Ritual activity in the *curiae*, and other subdivisions such as the *montes* and *pagi*, therefore represent an important facet of public religion in the city.

The origins and initial organizational principles of the *curiae* are essentially irrecoverable. The Romans attributed their creation to Romulus, who reportedly divided the population of his fledgling state into three tribes, and each tribe into ten *curiae*.54 Regardless of the precise date of origin, the *curiae* seem to have been deliberately organized for administrative and political purposes.55 Membership was not, however, restricted to patricians or certain *gentes*, as has sometimes been argued, but rather included the entire citizen body, the *Quirites*.56 Association with a *curia* was at least notionally mandatory for all Romans.

One of the functions of the early *curiae* may have been related to military recruitment, though the centuriate organization supplanted the curiate one in military matters at an early date.57 The thirty *curiae* also constituted the *comitia curiata*, traditionally considered the oldest of the three Roman voting assemblies, which originally had a role in appointing the king.58

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54 Cic. *Rep.* 2.14; Livy *1.13.6*; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.7; Plut. Rom. 14; *Dig.* 1.2.2.2 (Pomponius). The dominant tradition held that Romulus named the thirty *curiae* after prominent Sabine women. This folk etymology may stem from the fact that one of the *curiae* was called Rapta (Palmer 1970: 76). Rapta is one of only seven of the thirty *curiae* that existed during the Republican period and are now known by name. The others are Foriensis, Veliensis, Velitia, Acculeia, Fauca, and Titia. An eighth, Tifata, is sometimes proposed but its authenticity is doubtful (Palmer 1970: 77-8; Smith 2006:188). Palmer (1970: 80-175) and Carandini (1997: 300-4, 550-8) have attempted to identify the names of the unattested *curiae*. Both work from the premise that the Argei shrines are somehow connected to the *curiae*. For criticism of these attempts, see Drummond 1972; Smith 2006: 356-62. A passage in Paulus claims that at some unspecified date, five additional *curiae* were added to the original thirty (*Festus* 42L), but there is no other evidence for the existence of thirty-five *curiae*. Smith suggests a possible conflation of the *curiae* and the thirty-five tribes that existed after 241, although he admits that this reconstruction is “extremely problematic” (Smith 2006: 191).

55 It is generally accepted that *curia* derives from *co-viria*, an ‘association of men’ (Palmer 1970: 67; Smith 2006: 198, n. 42; against this etymology, see Poucet 1985: 308-9; Deroy 1973: 201-4), which suggests that the *curiae* were units of people, not of territories like the *vici* or *regiones*.

56 Niebuhr (1847-51: I. 306-37), Mommsen (1887: III 89-94) and Carandini (1997) have argued that the *curiae* were composed of *gentes*. Christopher Smith, however, argues, “there is no reason to suppose that the *curiae* were ever anything more than collections of families of Roman citizens, and based on a fundamental principle of heredity…” (2006: 211-2). Cornell also argues for membership by birth but does not see the *curiae* as gentilical bodies (1995: 114-8). For the association between the *curiae* and the *Quirites*, see Smith 2006: 198-202.

57 Mitchell 1990 (read with Smith 2006: 208-10) argues that the *curiae* had a military function.

The comitia curiata presumably also exercised any other elective and legislative powers held by the people during the early regal period. The curiate assembly eventually lost most of its powers to the comitia centuriata and the comitia tributa, though it continued to pass the vital lex curiata de imperio, the law that confirmed the imperium of senior magistrates and appears to have granted them their auspicia. The lex curiata therefore involved the curiae intimately in the oversight of the auspices, one of the most critical processes in the Roman political system. The curiae could also be summoned by the pontifices to witness the inauguration of the three flamines maiores and the rex sacrorum. Finally, the comitia curiata convened to grant approval to adoptions and wills, although this method of testation had become obsolete by the late Republic.

It seems likely that the comitia curiata was becoming a marginalized political body by the late third century. Perhaps as early as 218, each curia was represented at the assembly by a single lictor in place of the entire body of members. Although the comitia curiata had a mostly formal function by the late Republic, it does not necessarily follow that the curiatic organization was meaningless. Individual curiae maintained an identity, and one focus of this identity was their common cult activities. Dionysius of Halicarnassus claims to have witnessed the celebration of communal feasts on festival days and gives the impression that religious activity in the curiae continued undiminished in his own day.

Indeed, Dionysius assigns great importance to the curiae and their religious officials. The historian devoted three entire chapters in his Antiquitates Romanae to a description of their organization and activities. In addition to his own firsthand experience, Dionysius cites the Antiquitates of Varro as the source for his detailed discussion, though other late Republican sources likely lurk in the background as well. It is clear that Dionysius found the curiae fascinating in a way that his predecessors did not. Much in his account should likely be attributed to his own autopsy and what Christopher Smith calls his “imaginative vision” of how ancient Roman institutions worked, “which was more than the sum of any

60 For the lex curiata, see Smith 2006: 217-23, with further bibliography.
61 Gell. N. A. 15.27.
62 Caesar convened the comitia curiata in 59 to transfer the patrician P. Clodius Pulcher to the plebs and in 44 to confirm his adoption of his grandnephew C. Octavius (Taylor 1966: 4).
63 Cic. Leg. agr. 2.26-31. The practice is securely attested for the year 63.
64 Festus confirms the existence of rites specific to the curiae (curionia sacra, quae in curiis fiant, 541).
65 For a thorough study of Dionysius, see Gabba 1991. For a discussion of Dionysius as a source for the curiae, see especially Smith 2006: 192-8; 347-55.
That is to say, Dionysius seems to have stitched together different pieces of a complex and at times contradictory tradition to present a remarkably coherent historical narrative. Dionysius’ account of the origins and development of the *curiae* does not necessarily bear a close resemblance to historical reality. On the other hand, he is our best witness to the contemporary relevance of the institution. Dionysius arrived at Rome from Halicarnassus in about 30 and remained there at least until the first installment of his history was published in about 7. Thus Dionysius wrote his account of the *curiae* before Augustus began his major urban reform in 7, and his observations reflect the situation in the city during the late Republic and early principate.

Dionysius also engages in a fair amount comparative history. His belief that the Roman *curiae* were very much like the Greek *phratriai* may have led him to overemphasizes similarities between the two institutions at the expense of uniquely Roman features. It is also possible that Dionysius misunderstood much of what he observed. His narrative must be read with a certain degree of skepticism. I think we can be confident, however, that the Roman *curiae* were served by married couples. Dionysius does not compare this aspect of the curial system to the *phratriai*, though he does note that the *tutulatae*, the young female assistants of the *curiones* and their wives had counterparts in Greek cult. Furthermore, what little evidence we have for the nature of religious service in the Greek *phratriai* suggests that these offices were filled by men alone. The married couples who served the *curiae* together

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68 As Smith (2006: 197-8) points out, Dionysius’ late Republican sources had already been imagining a history for the *curiae* that was not necessary closer to the truth: “If we could explode the stray bits and pieces of information out of the Dionysian narrative into their original contexts, we would find there too imaginative reconstruction, tendentious comparative history, dubious etymological speculation and spurious invention to justify contemporary evidence. In crucial areas, the truth was not out there; the truth had to be made up.”
69 Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 1.7.2: ἐγὼ καταπλεύσας εἰς Ἰταλίαν ἁμα τῷ καταλυθῆναι τὸν ἐμφύλιον πόλεμον ὑπὸ τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ Καίσαρος ἔδοξε καὶ ὑδόρηκτης καὶ ἐκατοστής δολοπάδος μεσούσης, καὶ τὸν ἐξ καὶ τὸν ἐξ ἐκείνου χρόνον ἐτὸν δύο καὶ ἐκεῖσκα μέχρι τοῦ παρόντος γενόμενον ἐν Ῥώμῃ διατρίβας, διάλεκτόν τε τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν ἐκμαθὼν καὶ γραμμάτων <τῶν> ἐπιχωρίων λαβὼν ἐπιστήμην, ἐν παντὶ τούτῳ <τῷ> χρόνῳ τὰ συντείνοντα πρὸς τὴν ὑπόθεσιν ταύτην διετέλουν πραγματευόμενος (I arrived in Italy at the very time that Augustus Caesar put an end to the civil war, in the middle of the one hundred and eighty-seventh Olympiad. And having from that time to this present day, a period of twenty-two years, lived at Rome, learned the language of the Romans and acquainted myself with their writings, I have devoted myself during all that time to matters bearing upon my subject). On the publication of the Antiquitates in two parts, see 7.70.2.
70 For the urban reforms of Augustus, see Suet. Aug. 30; Cass. Dio 55.8.6-7; Lott 2004.
71 For religion and religious officials in the *phratriai*, see Lambert 1993: 225-36.
belong to a distinctively Roman tradition, one observed by Dionysius during his time in the city.

Religious Officials of the Curiae

According to Dionysius, the curiones were among the most ancient religious officials in Roman public cult:

ἐν γούν ἄλλῃ πόλει νεοκτίστῳ τοσούτους ιερεῖς τε καὶ θεραπευτὰς θεῶν εὐθὺς ἀποδειχθέντας οὐδεὶς ἂν εἴπειν ἔχοι. χωρὶς γὰρ τῶν ἔχόντων τὰς συγγενικὰς ἱερωσύνας οἱ τὰ κοινὰ περὶ τῆς πόλεως ιερὰ συντελοῦντες κατὰ φυλάς τε καὶ φράτρας ἔξηκοντα κατεστάθησαν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐκείνου ἀρχῆς (Ant. Rom. 2.21.1-2).

At any rate, no one could name any other newly founded city in which so many religious officials and ministers of the gods were appointed from the beginning. For, apart from those who held family offices, sixty were appointed in his [Romulus'] reign to perform by tribes and curiae (phratriai) the public sacrifices on behalf of the commonwealth.

The attribution of the curionate to Romulus indicates that the Romans believed the institution was very ancient. Most modern scholars agree that the curiae and their religious officials represent an early layer of Roman institutional history. The number of couples, two for each curia, has generated some confusion, particularly since Dionysius seems to contradict himself in a subsequent passage detailing the religious reforms instituted by Numa:

περιλαβὼν δὲ ἅπασαν τὴν περὶ τὰ θεία νομοθεσίαν γραφαῖς διείλεν εἰς ὀκτὼ μοίρας, ὥσας τῶν ιερῶν ἦσαν αἱ συμμορίαι. Ἀπέδωκε δὲ μίαν ἢιερουργιῶν διάταξιν τοῖς τριάκοντα κουρίωσιν, οὗς ἔφην τὰ κοινὰ θύειν ὑπὲρ τῶν φρατριῶν ιερά (Ant. Rom. 2.63.4).

Numa, having reduced his whole system of religious laws to writing, divided them into eight parts, that being the number of the different classes of religious ceremonies. The first division of religious rites he assigned to the thirty curiones, who, as I have stated, perform the public sacrifices for the curiae.\(^\text{72}\)

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\(^\text{72}\) The second through eighth classes of religious ceremonies were assigned to the flamines, commanders of the celeres, augures, Vestal Virgins, Salii, fatales and pontifices respectively (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.64-73). Since the celeres are often associated with the curiae in the ancient sources (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.7, 13; Festus 48L; Serv. Aen. 9.368), it has been suggested that the pair of curial officials mentioned in chapter twenty-one represented a flamen and a magister, and that in addition to his religious responsibilities the magister commanded the celeres (Kübler 1901a: 1816-7, 1901b: 1836-8; Smith 2006: 354). But Dionysius notes that Numa placed the curiones and the celeres in charge of different categories of religious rites. Moreover, he states explicitly that the religious officials were not engaged in military service during their tenure in office (στρατειῶν μὲν ἀπολελυμένους διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν, Ant. Rom. 2.21.3). Both of these observations make identification with the commanders of the celeres unlikely. Some have suggested that one of the officials mentioned by Dionysius was a sacerdos who held the title curio and the other a lictor (Mommsen 1887: I 390; Scheid and Granino Cecere 1999: 92-3), but lictores were not sacerdotes and it seems unnecessary to hypothesize such a mistake on the historian's part.
Dionysius was likely working with inconsistent material. It seems best assume that there were two couples in each curia, the number provided by Dionysius in his more detailed discussion of religion in the curiae, a discussion based on the Antiquitates of Varro and his own experience.

Although Dionysius does not distinguish between the two offices in any way, the variety of titles associated with sacerdotes of the curiae might suggest that they filled slightly different roles. Festus indicates that at least one of the two officials bore the title flamen (curiales flamines curiarum sacerdotes, 56L). Most literary and epigraphic sources, however, refer to the officials as curiones and to the office as the sacerdotium curionatus (Festus 42L). A magister curiae promises to distribute money to his curiales in Plautus, but it is unclear whether this official had a military, religious or civic function. A close parallel might be the vici magistri, who supervised the neighborhood cult of the Lares compitales and also had a role in the distribution of the grain dole. The vici magistri, however, were elected to a one year term, which could indicate that the magister curiae was also a temporary official and therefore should not be identified with either of the two curial sacerdotes, who both served for life. Thus we are left with two titles, flamen and curio, which may belong to two different offices in each curia, or, as Jörg Rüpke has suggested, may have been essentially interchangeable. Given the nature of the ancient evidence, it is impossible to reach a definitive conclusion. Since curio is far more common in the ancient and modern sources, it is the designation I have adopted in this chapter. Although it seems likely that the wives of the curiones also bore an official religious title, we do not know what that title might have been.

73 Although Scheid (Scheid and Granino Cecere 1999: 91, n. 51) discounts the possibility, the curial flamines may have been distinguished from one another by cognomina derived from the name of the curia which they represented or, as Palmer (1970: 118) suggests, the name of the curia’s special deity.

74 Plaut. Aul. 107-8: nam noster nostrae qui est magister curiae / dividere argenti decit nummos in viros (for our magister curiae has said that silver coins are being distributed...), 179-80: ... nam neque quisquam curialium / venit neque magister quem dividere argentum oportuit (... for no-one of the curiales came, nor the magister who ought to have divided the silver). Palmer (1970: 67) argues that there was no magister curiae and suggests that Plautus is merely translating the Attic démarchos. Smith (2006: 216, n. 111), however, is more willing to accept the authenticity of the institution. “One wonders,” he writes, “whether the curiae had begun to be transformed into local associations like the vici, and whether the magistri offered patronage to the poorer members of their ward” (2006: 217).

75 Rüpke 2008: 11.

76 Palmer 1970: 80, 102, n. 2.
Becoming a Curial Couple

According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, curiones were elected by the individual curia they served. It seems likely that each curia selected a curio from among their respective curiales. The criteria for selection to this office are revealing. Only men over the age of fifty in possession of considerable wealth and without any physical blemishes were eligible. Dionysius discusses these qualifications as well as the benefits of holding the curionate in the following passage:

ἀλλ᾽ ἐξ ἑκάστης φράτρας ἐνομοθέτησεν ἀποδείκνυσθαι δύο τοὺς ὑπὲρ πεντήκοντα ἔτη γεγονότας γένει τὰς τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἀρετῆς διαφόρους καὶ χρημάτων περιουσίαν ἔχοντας ἀρκοῦσαν καὶ μηδὲν ἡλικίας τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα τοὐτὸς δὲ σώκ εἰς ώρισμένον τινὰ χρόνον τὰς τιμὰς ἔχειν, ἀλλὰ διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου, στρατειῶν μὲν ἀπολελυμένους διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν, τῶν δὲ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν όχληρων διὰ τὸν νόμον (Ant. Rom. 2.21.3).

But he [Romulus] made a law that each curia should choose two men over fifty years of age, of distinguished birth and exceptional merit, of competent fortune, and without any bodily defects; and he ordered that these should enjoy their honors, not for any fixed period, but for life, freed from military service by their age and from civil burdens by the law.

Dionysius predictably focuses on the selection criteria applied to the curiones, though some, such as the requirement that the officials be free from bodily defects, may have pertained to their wives as well. Certain of the other conditions provide indirect information about the female members of the curionate, particularly those related to the social and financial status of the couple.

According to Dionysius, each curia was expected to select two men “of distinguished birth and exceptional merit.” What precisely does the historian mean by this rather vague assertion? We can say with certainty that “distinguished birth” does not signify patrician status. Although it is unclear whether the office was originally reserved for members of the patriciate, we have secure evidence that plebeians were serving as curiones by the end of the third century B.C. at the latest. C. Mamilius Atellus (pr. 207), the first plebeian curio maximus, was elected to that post in 209 and must have been a curio for several years before that date. It does appear, however, that the curiones were typically members of the political

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77 Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.21.3.
78 For a discussion of the same requirement with respect to the Vestals, see above.
79 The curionate is not mentioned in any ancient discussion of the struggle for plebeian access to the major religious offices, but, given the demonstrable antiquity of the curiate institution, it would not be surprising if the plebeians were originally excluded.
80 See below.
and social elite. Livy includes the *curio maximus* Ser. Sulpicius (cos. 500) among the “illustrious men” (*elari viri*, 3.7.7) who perished in a plague in 463. Mamilius’ predecessor, M. Aemilius Papus (d. 210), was a member of the prominent Aemilian *gens* and the brother of a consul, while both Mamilius and his successor, C. Scribonius Curio (pr. 193), were elected to the aedileship and the praetorship. During the principate, members of the curionate seem to have been drawn exclusively from the senatorial and equestrian elite and included several former consuls. Elite marriage patterns would suggest that the wives of the *curiones* were drawn from the same social circles as their husbands. The curionate may have offered a viable alternative to successful elites who wished to obtain a religious office but had failed to gain entrance to any of the four major religious colleges.

Dionysius also specifies that the *curiones* had to be over fifty years of age. The existence of a minimum age for entrance to the curionate is unusual among Roman religious offices. The Vestal order had a minimum age requirement, and presumably other offices requiring the service of children did as well. Typically, however, religious positions reserved for adults did not specify age as a prerequisite. The practical effects of the requirement can be more readily deduced than the reasons for its institution. By age fifty most men had reached the pinnacle of their magisterial or military careers and were settling into a new role in society defined by their experience and wisdom. The curionate can thus be regarded as the capstone of a relatively successful career and a venue for continued public activity beyond the office holding years. At the same time, however, since the risk of dying increased dramatically after age fifty, the minimum age requirement may often have resulted in a relatively brief tenure in office.

Rüpke has recently expressed doubt about the authenticity of the requirement and suggested that it may only have come into effect during the Augustan period, if ever.

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81 For M. Aemilius Papus, see Rüpke 2008: 517, No. 520. For C. Scribonius Curio, see below.
82 Scheid (Scheid and Granino Cecere 1999: 83-4) discusses the social composition of the curionate during the imperial period. Based on epigraphic evidence, he has concluded that eleven of nineteen known *curiones* from this period were *equites* and eight were members of the senatorial order. Several, however, clearly have provincial backgrounds, which suggests that the office may have lost some of its prestige over the course of the principate.
83 Studies suggest that during the Republic, the age of office holding was the thirties and forties (for a discussion of the evidence, see Harlow and Laurence 2002: 104-116).
85 Rüpke 2008: 782, n. 5. The epitaph of a two year old *curio* from the early second century A.D. indicates that a minimum age requirement was not enforced during this period (*CIL* 6.2174 = *ILS* 5009), but this alone does not prove that the condition never existed. Other restrictions observed during the Republican period,
cites the case of C. Mamilius Atellus, who served as *curio maximus* from 209 to 174.\(^{86}\) Given the date of his election to that post, it would follow that Mamilius must have been born before 259, and, if he had already been serving as a *curio*, probably much earlier. This would mean that he lived to be at least eighty-five. “While not entirely out of the question,” Rüpke writes, “this is improbable, and reinforces doubts, already awakened by internal contradictions, as to the correctness of the traditional figure.”\(^{87}\)

The details of Mamilius’ magisterial career also indicate that he was younger than fifty when he entered the curionate. He was elected plebeian *aedile* in the year following his election as *curio maximus* and served as *praetor* in Sicily in 207, a *cursus* which seems unlikely for a man in his fifties.\(^{88}\) Nonetheless, it seems unwarranted to completely discount Dionysius’ claim for a minimum age requirement on the basis of one potentially anomalous example.\(^{89}\) The biographical details of the other known *curiones* from the Republic and principate of Augustus reveal that they assumed the office late in their respective careers. C. Scribonius Curio, for example, succeeded Mamilius as *curio maximus* twenty years after his *praetorship* in 193.\(^{90}\) Furthermore, we know that there was patrician opposition to Mamilius’ candidacy in 209.\(^{91}\) Livy claims that the resistance stemmed from his plebeian status, but perhaps his unusually young age was also a point of contention. On the whole, it seems advisable to accept the minimum age requirement provided by Dionysius.

Since Roman brides tended to be ten or more years younger than their husbands, we can estimate that the wives of the *curiones* would typically have been in their late thirties or early forties when they took up their position.\(^{92}\) Though many of these women were likely

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\(^{86}\) Livy 27.8.1-3, 41.21.8, see further below.

\(^{87}\) Rüpke 2008: 782, n. 5.

\(^{88}\) Münzer (RE *Mamilius 5*), Broughton (1951: 1 289, 291, 295) and Rüpke (2008: 782, No. 2334) identify the *curio maximus* with the C. Mamilius who was plebeian aedile in 208 and *praetor* in Sicily in 207. Palmer (1970: 146, n. 2) and Feig Vishnia (1996: 229, n. 182) dispute the identification.

\(^{89}\) The only plebeian *rex sacrorum* known to us, M. Marcius (Rüpke 2008: 787, No. 2368), served from the mid third century to 210, but it would be foolhardy to claim on this basis that the office was not restricted to patricians.

\(^{90}\) T. Statilius Taurus, one of Octavian’s closest aides, was elected *curio maximus* following his second consulship in 26 (*CIL* 10.409 = *ILS* 893a, with Rüpke 2008: 903, No. 3142). C. Calvisius Sabinus likely took up the post of *curio maximus* following his consulship in 4 and governorship of Hispania in the late Augustan period (Rüpke 2008: 595, No. 1066).

\(^{91}\) Livy 27.8.1-3.

\(^{92}\) On the question of age at first marriage, see chapter 1. Since the *curiones* and their wives were members of the political and cultural elite at Rome (see above), we can perhaps suggest that many of the *curiones* and their wives had married in their early twenties and teens, respectively. Finally, remarriage would obviously affect the age
reaching the end of their childbearing years, it is equally possible that they had a child young enough to serve as a *camillus* or *camilla* when they entered the curionate. As their children matured, however, they would have been forced to employ a second provision mentioned by Dionysius:

> τοῖς δὲ ἀπαισιν ἐκ τῶν ἄλλων οἴκων τοὺς χαριστάτους καταλεγέντας ἐξ ἕκαστης φράτρας, κόρον καὶ κόρην, τὸν μὲν ἰδίῳ ἦβης ὑπηρετεῖν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἱεροῖς, τὴν δὲ κόρην ὅσον ἄν ἡ ἁγνὴ γάμων (Ant. Rom. 2.22.1).

*Curies* who had no children should choose out of the other families of each *curia* the most beautiful boy and girl, the boy to assist in the rites till the age of manhood, and the girl so long as she remained unmarried.

Couples who found themselves in this situation must have included not only *orbi* (childless couples), but also those whose children no longer met the requirements for service as *camilli* or *camillae*. Thus the experience of religious service would have varied from couple to couple and even changed over the course of an individual career. Furthermore, since wives tended to be far younger than their husbands, many female religious officials in the Roman *curiae* must have been forced to retire from their public positions upon the death of their husbands.

**Legal and Social Privileges**

Dionysius clearly regarded the *sacerdotium curionatus* as a valuable honor (τιμή) that was enjoyed for life. Other ancient evidence appears to confirm his assessment. In addition to prestige and social visibility, the position offered its occupants a variety of concrete privileges, including “freedom from civic duties” (ἀπολελυμένους … τῶν δὲ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν ὰχληρῶν διὰ τὸν νόμον, Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.21.3). Scholars have generally

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93 Dionysius says that the *camilli* served until manhood (by which he likely means the assumption of the *toga virilis* at age sixteen) and the *camillae* until they married (Ant. Rom. 2.22.1). Although Palmer argued that “a man at 50 years of age is not likely to have qualifying children” (1970: 80), the age of his wife, who would likely have been in her mid to late thirties or early forties, is far more relevant to the question. While most women married in their teens, they would not have achieved full fecundity until their early twenties (Parkin 1992: 124). The model life tables simulated by Saller (1994: 68-9) and census data from Roman Egypt (Bagnall and Frier 1994: 136-7) show that the average age at maternity in the ancient world was in the mid twenties. The age of menopause varies widely, typically beginning around the age of forty (Parkin 1992: 123). Scholars (see, for example Parkin 1992: 111-19; Bagnall and Frier 1994: 138-44; Saller 1994: 42, n. 71) estimate that Roman women bore an average of five children over the course of their childbearing years, though only two or three typically survived infancy, which indicates that some of the wives of the *curiones* may have had children who were young enough to serve as ritual assistants.

94 Dion. Hal. 2.21.3.
taken this statement as evidence that the *curiones* were exempt (or even excluded) from holding political office.\(^{95}\) As we have seen, however, most *curiones* were already beyond the age of office holding when they entered the curionate, which might suggest that we should interpret “freedom from civic duties” more broadly. The adjective “ὀχληρῶν,” which conveys a sense of burdensome responsibilities, may translate the Latin term *officium*, a duty associated with public office, or it may refer to other financial obligations to the state.\(^{96}\)

Were the *curiones* exempt from paying taxes? Symmachus reveals that the Vestals at least were not liable under the principate, but it does not seem that all religious officials enjoyed tax-exempt status in every period.\(^{97}\) Following the Second Punic War, the *pontifices* and *augures* were compelled to pay a tax that they had avoided during the war.\(^{98}\) Under the circumstances it is difficult to determine what exactly Dionysius has in mind.

An entry in the lexicon of Festus suggests that *curiones* may actually have been compensated for their service:

*curionium aes dicebatur, quod dabatur curioni ob sacerdotium curionatus* (42L).

The pay of the *curio* is what was given to the *curio* because of the *sacerdotium curionatus*.

Since curial rites were conducted *pro populo*, each *curia* received funds from the public treasury (ἐκ τοῦ δημοσίου, Dion. *Ant. Rom.* 2.23.1) to cover their expenses. The *curionium aes*, however, seems to have been paid directly to the *curiones* on account of their *sacerdotium*. It remains unclear when and why remuneration was adopted. While the Vestals received a *stipendium* from the state to cover their living expenses, it seems that the Romans did not typically pay their male religious officials, who could reasonably be expected to provide for themselves without assistance from the state. Indeed, the notion that a Roman citizen should be compensated for public service seems rather out of place in Republican Rome, which may suggest that the *curionium aes* was instituted at a later date.\(^{99}\)

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\(^{95}\) See, for example, Palmer 1970: 80, 82, 146, n. 2; Feig Vishnia 1996: 229, n. 182.

\(^{96}\) Dionysius uses the same word in book 4 of the *Antiquitates Romanae* when discussing the institution of the centuriate system by Tullius Hostilius. Tullius, he says, levied troops from the centuries and imposed taxes in proportion to their wealth. The poorest citizens, however, were “exempt from all burdens” (ἅψεῖσθαι πάντων ὀχληρῶν, 4.19.2).

\(^{97}\) Symmachus *Relat.* 3.11.

\(^{98}\) Livy 33.42.

\(^{99}\) The *curionium aes* is unlikely to have been instituted after the principate of Augustus when Verrius Flaccus published his *De verborum significatu*, the work epitomized by Festus.
It appears likely that the *curiones* were attended by *lictores curiati* when they performed their religious activities.\textsuperscript{100} According to Aulus Gellius, the thirty lictors were responsible for summoning the members of their respective *curia* to the *comitia curiata*, though by the late Republic, they alone attended the assembly and passed the *lex de imperio* on behalf of the absent *curiales*.\textsuperscript{101} There were two types of *lictores* in ancient Rome.\textsuperscript{102} The first group accompanied high-ranking Roman magistrates, making way for them in public and serving as a physical and symbolic representation of their *imperium*, while the second attended certain religious officials on festival days. *Lictores* in the second category carried only two *fasces* and were therefore readily distinguishable from their civil counterparts.\textsuperscript{103} Since there were no magistrates with *imperium* in the *curiae*, we may safely assume that the *lictores curiati* attended the *curiones*. Epigraphic evidence from the principate also suggests that the *lictores curiati* assisted with religious rites in the *curiae*.\textsuperscript{104} An epitaph from the early imperial period that commemorates the freedman M. Sutorius M. l. Pamphilus, for example, includes the title “*lictor curiatus a sacris publicis populi Romani Quiritium*” (*CIL* 6.1892). The *lictores* of a religious official, like those of a magistrate, served both a practical and symbolic purpose. They ensured physical separation from pollution by clearing a path for the official and visibly differentiated him from his fellow citizens. That the *curiones* received the services of a *lictor* indicates that they were by no means insignificant religious officials.

**The Curio Maximus**

According to Festus, the *curiae* and the *curiones* were under the control of a chief *curio*, the *curio maxims* (*maximus curio, cuius auctoritate curiae, omnesque curiones reguntur; 113L*). The

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{100} Mommsen 1887: I 390.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Gell. N.A. 15.27.1: *In libro Laelii Felicis ad Q. Mucium primo scriptum est Labeonem scribere calata comitia esse, quae pro conlegio pontificum habentur aut regis aut flaminum inaugurandorum causa. Eorum autem alia esse curiata, alia centuriata; curiata per lictorem curiatum calari id est convocari, centuriata per cornicinem* (In the first book of the work of Laelius Felix addressed to Q. Mucius it is said that Labeo wrote that the *comitia calata* (**convoked assembly**) was held on behalf of the college of *pontiffs* for the purpose of inaugurating the *rex sacrorum* or the *flamines*. Of these assemblies some were *curiata* (**of the *curiae***); others *centuriata* (**of the centuries**); the former were called together by the *lictor curiatus*, the latter by the hornblower); Cic. *Leg. agr.* 2.31: *sint igitur decemviri neque veris comitiis, hoc est populi suffragis, neque illis ad speciem atque ad usurpationem vetustatis per XXX lictores auspiciorum causa adumbrates constituti* (So then let there be *decemviri* appointed neither by the genuine *comitia*, that is, by the votes of the people, nor by that *comitia*, which in form and to keep up the ancient practice is imperfectly represented by the thirty lictors, for the purpose of taking the auspices).
\item \textsuperscript{102} On the lictors see, for example, Mommsen 1887: I 355-6, 374-93; Purcell 1983; Brennan 2000: *passim*; Gizewski 2005.
\item \textsuperscript{103} See chapter 4.
\item \textsuperscript{104} See Scheid and Granino Cecere 1999: 92-3, 140-2. *Lictores curiati* visible in the epigraphic record were generally imperial freedmen or members of the equestrian order.
\end{itemize}
existence of a chief curio suggests that the curiones may have constituted a college with the curio maximus at its head. Aside from his supervisory function, we know very little about the duties of the curio maximus. Each year before the Fornacalia, which was one of the feriae conceptivae (moveable feasts), he posted an announcement in the Forum indicating the day on which each of the curiae would celebrate the festival. Perhaps he also presided over the festivities on the so-called “stultorum feriae” (“Feast of Fools”) when those who did not know to which curia they belonged celebrated the rites of the Fornacalia.

While the curionate was likely open to plebeians at a very early date, the curio maximus was customarily a patrician until 209, when, as Livy tells us, a plebeian was finally elected to this position: inter maiorum rerum curas comitia maximi curionis, cum in locum M. Aemili sacerdos crearetur, vetus excitaverunt certamen, patricis negantibus C. Mamili Atelli, qui unus ex plebe petebat, habendam rationem esse quia nemo ante eum nisi ex patribus id sacerdotium habuisset. tribuni appellati ad senatum rem reiecerunt: senatus populi potestatem fecti: ita primus ex plebe creatus maximus curio C. Mamilius Atellus (Livy 27.8.1-3).

In the midst of their attention to more important matters, when they were choosing a sacerdos to succeed Marcus Aemilius, the election of a curio maximus stirred up an old contest. The patricians declared that no regard should be paid to C. Mamilius Atellus, the one plebeian who was a candidate, since no one except a patrician had previously held that sacerdotium. The tribunes were appealed to and referred the matter back to the senate; the senate gave the people power to decide; so C. Mamilius Atellus was the first curio maximus elected from the plebeians.

Since the matter was referred to the senate and then the assembly, rather than the pontifical college, we may assume that there was no religious or legal reason for excluding a plebeian from the office and that the patricians objected on the basis of precedent alone. Mamilius held the position until 174, when he perished in a plague and was replaced without objection by the plebeian C. Scribonius Curio. The controversy surrounding Mamilius’ election

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105 See Kübler 1901b. Estienne (2004), however, prefers not to see the curiones as an official college.
106 The curio maximus may originally have had magisterial functions, though no trace of these remained in the historical period (Momigliano 1963: 110; Palmer 1970: 32-3; 206-10; Smith 2006: 216).
107 Ov. Fast. 2.527-30: curio legitimis nunc Fornacalia verbis / maximus indicet nec stata sacra facit, / inque foro, multa circum pendente tabella, / signatur certa curia quaeque nota (At the present day the curio maximus proclaims in a set form of words the time for holding the Fornacalia, and he celebrat the rites at no fixed date. Many tablets hang around the Forum on which each curia has its own particular mark).
109 We do not know where the election of the curio maximus took place. Momigliano (1963: 110) suggested the comitia tributa, which elected the pontifex maximus and, under the lex Domitia, members of the four major religious colleges, but the comitia curiata should perhaps be considered seriously as an appropriate venue.
111 Livy 41.21.9.
demonstrates that tension over access to the curionate remained nearly a century after the *lex Ogulnia* had opened almost all other offices to the plebeians. The office was evidently a desirable distinction and one that patricians sought to preserve for themselves. Mamilius’ successor Scribonius celebrated his ascension to the office by adopting the title *curio* as his cognomen. Having served as *aedile* in 196 and *praetor* in 193, Scribonius evidently regarded his election to the curionate as the culmination of his public career and an honor worthy of commemoration. The *curiae* remained a vibrant and important focus of religious activity throughout the Republican period and it is therefore not surprising that the office of *curio maximus* was a prestigious and desirable position.

**Religious Activities**

The *curiones* and their wives supervised a variety of religious rites that took place in the *curiae*. According to Dionysius, the wives performed “any rites which men were forbidden by the law of the country to celebrate” (εἵ τι μὴ θέμις ἢν όπ’ ἀνδρῶν ὄργιάζεσθαι κατὰ νόμον τὸν ἐπιχώριον, ταύτας ἐπιτελεῖν, *Ant. Rom.* 2.22.1). Just as the *flaminicae* and the *regina sacrorum* presided over certain religious rites, including sacrifices, which their husbands could not perform, so too did the wives of the *curiones*. Unfortunately, however, Dionysius does not specify what curial rites fell into this category. Did the wives of the *curiones* administer festivals celebrated only by the female members of the *curiae*? The verb employed by Dionysius, ὄργιάζω, can signify the celebration of mystery rites, a type of ritual generally associated with women and female religious officials. But ὄργιαζω can also be used in a more general sense, and may cover a variety of rites assigned to male and female officials. Although we can speak only in general terms, it is important to note that the wives of the *curiones* participated in the curionate alongside their husbands and performed certain rites that were designated specifically for them.

In key passage in the *Antiquitates*, Dionysius describes activities he claims to have seen taking place on festival days:

συνέθυόν τε τοῖς ἵππεσιν οἱ φρατριεῖς τὰς ἀπομερισθείσας αὐτοῖς θυσίας καὶ συνειστῶντο κατὰ τὰς ἐστίας ἐπὶ τῆς φρατρικῆς ἔστιας; ἐστιατόριον γὰρ ἴνα κατεσκευασμένον ἐκάστη φράτρα καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ καθωσίωτό τις, ὡσπερ ἐν τοῖς Ἑλληνικοῖς πρυτανείοις, ἐστία κοινὴ τῶν φρατριών··· καὶ οὐ μόνον τῆς περὶ ταύτα σοφίας χάριν ἄξιος ἐπαινεῖσθαι ὁ ἀνήρ, ἅλλα καὶ τῆς εὐτελείας τῶν θυσίων, ὃν αἱ

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112 See, however, Feig Vishnia, who refers to the office as “anachronistic and somewhat bizarre” (1996: 105).
113 LSJ s.v. ὄργα.
The members of each *curia* performed their appointed sacrifices together with their own religious officials, and on holy days they feasted together at their common table. For a banqueting-hall had been built for each *curia*, and in it there was consecrated, just as in the Greek *prytaneion*, a common table for all the members of the *curia*. These banqueting-halls had the same name as the *curiae* themselves, and are called so to our day… And not alone for his wisdom in these matters does Romulus deserve praise, but also for the frugality of the sacrifices that he appointed for the honoring of the gods, the greatest part of which, if not all, remained to my day, being still performed in the ancient manner. At any rate, I myself have seen in the sacred edifices repasts set before the gods upon ancient wooden tables, in baskets and small earthen plates, consisting of barley bread, cakes and far, with the first-offerings of some fruits, and other things of like nature, simple, cheap, and devoid of all vulgar display.

There are several noteworthy features of this discussion. One is the emphasis on the communal nature of worship in the *curiae*. The *curiones* and their wives were the religious representatives of a specific community that witnessed sacrifices and feasted together as a group.

Dionysius also notes that each *curia* possessed a building that served as the center for the community’s religious activities and which was also called a *curia*. Although *curia* may derive from *co-viria*, “association of men,” it can also designate a place where men meet. Varro defines *curia* in this sense in the following passage:

Curiae duorum generum: nam et ubi curarent sacerdotes res divinas, ut curiae veteres, et ubi senatus humanas, ut Curia Hostilia, quod primus aedificavit Hostilius rex (*Ling. 5.155*).

The *curiae* are of two kinds: for there are those where the *sacerdotes* were to attend to affairs of the gods, like the old *curiae*, and those where the senate should attend to affairs of men, like the Curia Hostilia, so called because King Hostilius was the first to build it.

According to tradition, the *curiae* had outgrown their original meeting places even during the reign of Romulus, who erected new buildings. Curial rites were meant to be inclusive, thus a space that could accommodate and encourage broad participation was needed. Festus, however, reveals that seven could not be deconsecrated:

Novae curiae proximae compitum Fabricium aedificatae sunt, quod parum amplae erant veteres a Romulo factae, ubi is populum et sacra in partes triginta distribuerat, ut in is ea sacra curarent, quae cum ex veteribus in novas evocarentur, quattor curiarum per religiones

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114 For this etymology, see above.
evocari non potuerunt. itaque Foriensis, Raptae, Veliensis, Velitiae res divinae fiunt in veteribus curis (180, 182L).

The new curiae were built near the Compitum Fabricum, because the old ones made by Romulus, when he divided the people and their rites into thirty parts, were too small; so there those rites were conducted which, when they were evoked from the old into the new, four of the curiae through religious reasons could not be evoked. And so the sacred business of the Foriensis, Rapta, Veliensis and Velitia are conducted in the old curiae.¹¹⁵

Geographic specificity was a cornerstone of Roman religion, and once a place had been consecrated for religious purposes, divine permission was required to return that space to secular use.¹¹⁶ Although the issue is not at all clear, it seems that by the late Republic some curiae were still using their original buildings, while others had moved to new structures.¹¹⁷

Dionysius suggests that each of the curial buildings had a hearth that was sacred to Vesta.¹¹⁸ After discussing the rape of Rhea Silvia by Mars, Dionysius claims that Romulus chose not to adopt the Alban cult of Vesta, but rather established her cult in each of the curiae:

diá ταῦτα μὲν δὴ κοινὸν ίερὸν οὗ κατεσκεθάσατο τῆς Ἑστίας οὐδὲ ἱερείας ἑταξεν αὐτῇ παρῆνος, ἐν ἐκάστῃ δὲ τῶν τρίακοντα φρατριῶν ἱδρουόμενος ἑστίαν, ἐφ᾽ ἣς ἔθυνον οἱ φρατρεῖς, θυπηψάλοις αὐτῶν ἐποίησε τοὺς τῶν κουριῶν ἡγεμόνας τὰ παρ᾽ Ἑλληνισμὸν ἐθή μιμήσαμεν, ἃ πάρα ταῖς ἀρχαῖοι τάς πόλεων ἐτί γίγνεται. τὰ γέ τοι καλούμενα πρυτανεία παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ <Ἑστίας> ἑστίν ιερά, καὶ θεραπεύεται πρὸς τῶν ἐχόντων τὸ μέγιστον ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι κράτος. Νόμας δὲ τὴν ἄρχην παραλαβῶν τὰς μὲν ἰδίας οὐκ ἐκίνησε τῶν φρατριῶν ἑστίας, κοινὴν δὲ κατεστήσατο πάντων μίαν ἐν τῷ μεταξὶ τοῦ τε Καπιτολίου καὶ τοῦ Παλατίου χωρίο… (2.65.4-66.1).

For this reason Romulus did not build a common temple of Vesta nor did he appoint virgins to be her sacerdotes; but having erected a hearth in each of the thirty curiae on which the members sacrificed, he appointed the chiefs of the curiae to be sacerdotes of those hearths, imitating the customs of the Greeks that are still observed in the most ancient cities. At any rate, what are called prytaneia among them are temples of Hestia and are served by the chief magistrates of the cities. Numa, when he took over the rule, did not disturb the individual hearths of the curiae but erected one common to them all in the space between the Capitoline and Palatine…¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ This story is very similar to the one told about the god Terminus, who refused to grant the augurs permission to move his Capitoline shrine in order to make way for the new temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 3.69.3-6; Livy 1.55.3-4).
¹¹⁶ For Roman religion as a ‘religion of place,’ see especially Beard, North and Price 1998. For the Roman view, see especially Livy 5.51-5, the speech of Camillus against moving the city to the site of Veii after the Gallic sack. For inauguration, see Linderski 1986.
¹¹⁷ For the difficult issue of the curiae veteres, see Smith 2006: 202-5.
¹¹⁸ Smith (2006: 207-8; 352-5) sees a strong link between Vesta and the curiae.
¹¹⁹ Although Smith (2006: 354) suggests that Dionysius is referring to the Curiae Veteres, it seems more likely that he means the temple of Vesta in the Forum, which is traditionally associated the Numa (Cic., Rep. 2.64.14; Plut., Num. 9.5).
According to this version, Numa, who is credited by ancient sources with the introduction of the Vestals, centralized worship of the Vesta cult, which had previously been shared by the *curiae*. Dionysius also equates the Romulean *curia* with the Greek *prytaneion*, the symbolic heart of the *polis* community. The *prytaneion* housed the city’s public dining room and communal hearth, and was thus the focus of the cult of Hestia, Vesta’s Greek counterpart. Dionysius is the only author to mention this connection between the curial hearths and Vesta, and it possible that his reconstruction rests on nothing more than a straightforward equation between roughly similar Greek and Roman customs.\(^{120}\) There is, however, evidence that the household hearth and its flame were also sacred to Vesta. In light of this fact it is not difficult to imagine that the communal hearths in the *curiae* were the sites of cult to the goddess as well.

### Gods and Genii of the Curiae

According to Dionysius, each *curia* also had its own individual gods and *genii*:

\[
\text{ταύτα περὶ τῶν ὑρσικευόντων τοὺς θεοὺς καταστησάμενος διήρει πάλιν, ὡς ἔφην, κατ’ ἐπιτηδειότητα ταῖς φράτραις τὰ ἱερά, θεοὺς ἀποδεικνύος ἐκάστοις καὶ δαίμονας, οὓς ἐμελλόν ἄει σέβειν, καὶ τὰς εἰς τὰ ἱερὰ δαπάνας ἔταξεν, ὡς ἔχρην αὐτοῖς ἐκ τοῦ δήμου δίδοσθαι (Ant. Rom. 2.23.1-2).}
\]

After he had made these regulations concerning the ministers of the gods, he again, as I have stated, assigned the sacrifices in an appropriate manner to the various *curiae*, appointing for each of them gods and *genii* whom they were always to worship, and determined the expenditures for the sacrifices, which were to be paid to them out of the public treasury.

This description of religion in the *curiae* raises several important issues. First of all, it is evident that while curial rituals were celebrated by individual communities of *curiales*, they were still classified as public rites and funded by the state.\(^{121}\) Dionysius also claims that each group worshipped certain gods and *genii* which were not common to all *curiae*. Just as each family celebrated the cult of its own *genius familiaris*, each *curia* had a *genius* unique to its own community of members. Although we are largely ignorant about the deities worshipped by individual *curiae*, Varro implies that the Curia Acculeia had a special relationship with the goddess Angeronia:\(^{122}\)

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\(^{120}\) In an earlier passage, Dionysius says that he believes that Romulus adopted the institution of common banqueting halls (the curial buildings) from the Lacedaemonians (*Ant. Rom.* 2.23.3).

\(^{121}\) See also Festus 284L.

\(^{122}\) Palmer 1070: 106-9; Estienne 2004: 110.
Angeronalia ab Angerona, cui sacrificium fit in curia Acculeia et cuius feriae publicae is dies (Ling. 6.23).

The Angeronalia is named after Angerona to whom sacrifice is made in the curia Acculeia and whose public feast is that day.

Varro claims that the sacrifice to Angerona took place in curia Acculeia, which could mean in the curial building of the Curia Acculeia, among the curiales of the Curia Acculeia, or both. The Angeronalia is likely just one of many festivals celebrated by individual communities of curiales.

The cult of Juno, however, was common to all the curiae. According to Dionysius, Titus Tatius dedicated tables (τραπέζας, Ant. Rom. 2.50.3) to Juno Curitis in each of the curiae which remained in use in his own day. Festus notes that a sacrifice to Juno Curitis was made on these tables, which he calls “curiales mensae” (56L). It seems likely that the sacrificial tables were kept in the curial buildings and that the sacrifice was performed by the curiones or their wives. Festus derives the name of Juno Curitis from the belief that she carried a spear (Curitim Iunonem appellabant, quia eandem ferre hastam putabant, 43L). Elsewhere we learn that curis was the Sabine word for basta, and that Romulus was called Quirinus because he carried such a spear, and from this name the Romans took the designation Quirites. The connection between the curiae, Quirinus and the Quirites, which appears to be further substantiated by the concurrent festivals of the Quirinalia and the stultorum feriae, is significant. In spite of these martial connotations, it appears that during the historical period, this official title for the Roman people described the civic community, as opposed to

123 Palmer 1970: 108. See also Macr. Sat. 1.10.7: duodecimo vero feriae sunt divae Angeroniae, cui pontificis in sacello Volupiae sacrum faciunt (On the twenty first [of December] is the feast of Diva Angerona to whom the pontifices sacrifice in the shrine of Volupia). Varro (Ling. 5.164) locates the sacellum Volupiae on the Nova Via near the Porta Romana. Angeronalia and Divalia are likely two names for the same festival. It remains unclear what role, if any, the curiones had in this ritual.

124 Festus 56L: curiales mensae in quibus immolabantur Iunoni quae curis appellata est (The curial tables are those on which sacrifice is made to Juno, who is titled Curis). Juno Curitis was also worshipped in the curiae at Tibur (Serv. Aen. 1.17).

125 Festus 43L: curis est Sabine basta. unde Romulus Quirinus, quia eam ferrebat, est dictus; et Romani a Quirino Quirites dixerunt. quidam eum dictum putant a Caribus, quae fuit urbs opulentissima Sabinorum (A curis is a Sabine spear. Romulus was called Quirinus because he carried such a spear, and the Romans are called Quirites from the name Quirinus. Some believe that the name comes from Cures, which was the wealthiest city of the Sabines). The derivation from Cures is also found in Varro Ling. 5.51; Livy 1.13.5; Ov. Fast. 2.475; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.48; Columella Rust. praef. 19; Festus 304L; Serv. Aen. 7.710. An etymological relationship between Quirites and curiae has been proposed by modern scholars (see, for example, Palmer 1970: 157), but such a connection is not made by the ancient sources.
the *populus Romanus*, which referred to the army. The close association between the *curiae* and the *Quirites* therefore suggests that the curiate organization included the entire citizen body and represented the community as a whole.

The First of March

In addition to the rites discussed above, the *curiae* participated in three annual public festivals. Each curial building received fresh laurel garlands during the New Year’s celebration on 1 March. This was an honor otherwise reserved for the *aedes Vestae*, the house of the *rex* and *regina sacrorum* and the houses of the *flamines*, all of which were buildings associated with some of the most ancient religious institutions of Rome. On this day the Vestals also extinguished the previous year’s fire on the hearth of the *aedes Vestae* and kindled it anew. John Scheid has suggested that the flame on the hearth of each home was rekindled from this fresh flame. Given the connection between the *curiae* and Vesta seen above, it seems at least possible that the curial hearths received a new flame as well.

The Fordicidia

The second major festival common to all *curiae* was the Fordicidia on 15 April. From Ovid we learn that the *pontifices* sacrificed a pregnant cow (*forda*) to Tellus, and that a parallel sacrifice was carried out in each of the thirty *curiae* of Rome. Although Ovid does not specify who supervised the sacrifices in the *curiae*, we should probably imagine that it was

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126 Smith 2006: 200-1. The etymology of *populus* is unclear, but it may be related to *populari* (“to ravage”) and refer to the people under arms. Smith suggests that *Quirites* was originally a civic and military term which took on an increasingly civilian connotation when the centuriate army replaced the curiate one. The etymological connection to spear may confirm an ancient military role for the members of the *curiae*.

127 See above.

128 Ov. Fast. 3.135-140: *laurea, flaminibus quate toto perstitti anno, / tollitur, et frondes sunt in honore nova. / ianua tum Regis posita viris arbore Phoebi: / ante tuas fit idem, curia prisa, fores. / Vesta quoque ut folio niteat velata recenti, cedi tab Iliasis laurea cana fociis* (The laurel branch of the *flamines*, after remaining in its place the whole year, is removed, and fresh leaves are put in the place of honor. Then the door of the *rex* is green with the tree of Phoebus, which is set at it, and at your doors, ancient *curia*, the same thing is done); Macr. Sat. 1.12.6: *eodem quoque ingrediente mense tam in regia curiisque atque flaminum domibus laureae vetere novis lauris mutabuntur* (At the same time also, new laurel wreaths replaced the old in the *regia* and in the *curiae* and in the houses of the *flamines*).

129 See above.

130 Scheid 2005c.

131 The ancient sources for the Fordicidia are Varro *Ling.* 6.15; Ov. Fast. 4.629-72; Festus 74 and 91L.

132 Ov. Fast. 4.629-40, quoted above. See also Varro *Ling.* 6.15: *Fordicia a fordis bubus; bos forda quae fert in ventre; quod eo die publice immolantur boves praequentes in curiis complures, a fordis caedendis Fordicia dicit* (The Fordicidia was named from cows (*fordae*): a *forda* is one that is carrying an unborn calf; because on this day several pregnant cows are officially and publicly sacrificed in the *curiae*, the festival was called the Fordicidia from the pregnant cows which were to be slaughtered).
The ministri then removed the calves and burned the entrails of the mother cows on the curial hearths. When the individual sacrifices were complete, the calves were conveyed to the aedes Vestae where the virgo maxima burned their remains in the ignis. Perhaps this task was assigned to the wives of the curiones. The ashes, together with beanstalks and blood from the tail of the October Horse, constituted the februa, or ‘cleansing agents,’ which the Vestals distributed to the people at the Parilia on 21 April. The efficacy of this purificatory substance was presumably based on the fact that it contained contributions from each of the Roman curiae. Thus it seems that Roman religion was structured in part around the notion that the whole was strengthened and preserved through the replication of rites in each division of the populus. The ritual actions taken by the religious officials of one curia had ramifications for the entire citizen body, since each association contributed part of their sacrifice to a substance that would be used by all Romans.

The Fornacalia

The second major curial festival, the Fornacalia, fell in mid February and was celebrated in honor of the oven-goddess Fornax. It does not seem that the pontifices or the Vestals participated in this festival, as they did at the Fordicidia, but rather that it was celebrated exclusively at the level of the curia. As we have seen, the date of the festival was announced each year by the curio maximus. Those who either did not know or had forgotten to which curia they belonged were obliged to celebrate the rites on 17 February, the so-called "stultorum feriae." The stultorum feriae provides unique insight into the construction of religious identity in ancient Rome. Those who could not associate themselves with a curia were classified as stulti and excluded from the communal festivities held on the Fornacalia. On the other hand, the stultorum feriae also implies that membership in a curia was notionally mandatory, even if one could not identify his proper curia. This may explain why the feast

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134 Ov. Fast. 4.731-4.
135 The februa used at the Parilia were also composed of the sacrificial by-products of two different festivals—the October Horse and the Fordicidia—and thus demonstrate how rites performed over the course of the year were integrated with one another.
136 The sources for the Fornacalia are Festus 73, 82, 298 L; Ov. Fast. 2.519-32, 6.313-4; Pliny N.H. 18.8; Plut. Q.R. 89; Varro Ling. 6.13.
137 Ov. Fast. 2.531-2.
fell on the same day as the Quirinalia, the festival of Quirinus, a deity who seems to have been particularly associated with the *curiae.*

What little information we have suggests that the festival involved the roasting of *far.* According to Pliny, the Romans believed that *far* was not acceptable as a religious offering unless it had been roasted. Thus it seems that the Fornacalia was a ritual reenactment of the transformation of raw grain into a form useful either for consumption or religious purposes. Ovid suggests as much in the following passage:

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farra tamen veteres iaciebant, farra metebant,
primitias Cereri farra resecta dabant,141
usibus admoniti flammis torrenda dederunt
multaque peccato damna tulere suo.
nam modo verrebant nigras pro farre favillas,
nunc ipsas ignes corripuere casas;
facta dea est Fornax;142 laeti Fornace coloni
orant, ut fruges temperet illa suas (Fast. 2.519-26).
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Yet *far* the ancients sowed, and *far* they reaped; of the cut *far* they offered the first-fruits to Ceres. Taught by experience they toasted the *far* on the fire, and many losses they incurred through their own fault. For at one time they would sweep up black ashes instead of *far,* and at another time the fire caught the huts themselves. So they made the oven into a goddess of the name Fornax; delighted with her, the farmers prayed that she would temper the heat to the grain committed to her charge.

In this passage, Ovid imagines the earliest Romans roasting their grain on the open hearth. Ashes were gathered up instead of grain, and sometimes the houses themselves caught fire. When these ancient Romans discovered the oven, however, their troubles ceased. For Ovid, the Fornacalia commemorates this great technological advance. Indeed, food and the processes surrounding its preparation was an important tool of analysis and was central to

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139 Pliny N.H. 18.8: *is et Fornacalia instituit farris torrendi ferias...* (He [Numa] established the Fornacalia, the holiday when *far* is roasted); Festus 73L: *Fornacalia saecum erant, cum far in fornaculis torrebant* (The Fornacalia were the rites when *far* was roasted in ovens). See also Festus 82L. For the ritual significance of *far,* see also chapter 3.
140 Pliny N.H. 18.8. The Romans offered first fruits to Ceres (see Festus 423L). An offering of *far* also began every burnt sacrifice (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.25.2).
141 This line has caused some consternation among scholars of Roman religion who argue, quite reasonably, that February is too late for the offering of first fruits (see, for example, Fowler 1899: 304). There is no need, however, to assume that the offering to Ceres took place at the same time as the festival in honor of Fornax (Frazer 1929: 431). Ovid certainly does not say this; he mentions Ceres only to explain why roasting grain was necessary.
142 The only other ancient author who mentions Fornax is Lactantius (*Div. Instit.* 1.20).
the story of moral progress and decline familiar to us from a variety of other contexts and it is not surprising that this narrative found its way into religious aetiology as well.\(^{143}\)

According to Paulus Diaconus, the rites of the Fornacalia took place in bakeries (\textit{pistrinae}), which suggests that the Fornacalia was originally a baker’s festival celebrated by professional bakers in their commercial \textit{pistrinae}.\(^{144}\) According to Pliny, however, there were no commercial bakeries in Rome before the Third Macedonian War:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
\textit{pistores Romae non fuere ad Persicum usque bellum annis ab urbe condita super DLXXX. ipsi panem faciebant Quirites, mulierumque id opus maxime erat, sicut etiam nunc in plurimis gentium. artoptas iam Plautus appellat in fabula quam Aululariam inscriptsit, magna ob id concertatione erudi torem an is versus poetae sit illius, certumque fit Atei Capitonis sententia cocos tum panem lautoribus coquere solitos, pistoresque tantum eos qui far pisebant nominatos; nec cocos vero habebant in servitiis, eosque ex macello conducebant (\textit{N.H.} 18.107-8).
\end{center}
\end{quote}

There were no bakers at Rome down to the war with King Perseus, over 580 years after the foundation of the city. The citizens used to make bread themselves, and this was especially the task of the women, as it is even now in most nations. Plautus already speaks of bakers, using the Greek word, in his play named \textit{Aulularia}, which has caused great debate among the learned as to the authenticity of the line, and it is proved by the expression occurring in Ateius Capito that it was in his day usual for bread to be baked for more luxurious people by cooks, and only those who ground (\textit{pisebant}) far were called ‘grinders’ (\textit{pistores}); nor used people to have cooks on their regular staff of servants, but they hired them from the provision market.

Treating his statement as fact, some scholars have argued that roasting at the Fornacalia must have taken place on the hearth in the curial dining-halls, as did the rites of the Fordicidia. This cannot be the case, however, since the festival honors the \textit{fornax}, not the hearth, and Ovid explicitly distinguishes between the processes of roasting grain on an open flame and in an oven.\(^{145}\) Furthermore, as Nicholas Purcell has convincingly demonstrated, Pliny is engaged in the construction of a primitive Roman identity, one uncorrupted by the

\(^{143}\) See, for example, Gowers 1992; Purcell 2003.

\(^{144}\) Festus 82L: \textit{Fornacalia fiers institutae sunt farris torrendi gratia, quod ad fornacem, quae in pistrinis erat, sacrificium fieri solet.}

\(^{145}\) Fowler (1899: 302-6) believed that the roasting took place on the hearth of each individual home, but it is unlikely that this was the case. Although the word \textit{fornax} is not very common in extant Latin literature, its usage suggests that is was a general word for any large oven. Cato, for example, uses \textit{fornax} to describe an oven used for burning limestone (\textit{Cato Agr.} 38.1). For other references, see the \textit{OLD} s.v. “\textit{fornax}”). It can also refer to ovens used for heating water in the baths, for smelting metal, and for firing clay. In other words, nothing suggests that the \textit{fornax} was used exclusively for roasting grain, although it certainly could have been employed for that purpose. Thus it seems likely that \textit{fornax} was interchangeable with the word \textit{furnus}, the more common Latin word for a large oven. Despite this lack of semantic specificity, the emphasis on roasting \textit{far} suggests that the Fornacalia was primarily associated with large bread ovens rather than commercial furnaces or kilns. Although large Roman villas occasionally supported small ovens, most Romans did not have purpose-built ovens in their homes, relying instead on the \textit{testum} and the local bakery (Frayn 1978: 30).
serious moral decline of the second century B.C. The morally superior early Romans had made their own bread. In order to support this illusion, the inconveniently early attestation of the word “baker” was etymologized away: it really meant “grain pounder.” The attempted whitewash is completed by the assertion that in the past, even wealthy Romans did not have full time cooks. Though the Fornacalia is likely an ancient festival given its association with the curiae, there is not enough evidence to determine that there were no commercial bakeries in early Rome. It may be also be the case that the bakeries mentioned by Paulus were special sacral or communally shared bakeries that were maintained by each curia. Communal bread ovens are a well-attested feature of life in many traditional societies. Although this practice is not specifically attested in the ancient sources, it is not difficult to imagine that such communally shared resources might have existed in early Rome.

**Flamines of the Seven Hills**

An inscription from the late Republic suggests that during this period at least, there were also flamines affiliated with the hills of Rome:

M • a • g • ET • FLAMIN
MONTAN • MONTIS •
OPPI
DE • PEQVNIA • MONT
MONTIS • OPPI
SACELLVM
CLAVDEND
ET • COAEQVAND
ET ARBORES
SERVNDAS
COERAVERVNT (*CIL* I² 1003 = VI 32455).

The magistri and flamines montanorum of the Mons Oppius have overseen the enclosing and leveling of a sacellum and the planting of trees with the funds of the residents of the Mons Oppius.

This inscription demonstrates that in addition to the vici, curiae, and pagi, there was a cluster of communities in Rome associated with the city’s famed hills. These communities were

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146 Purcell 2003.
148 There may have been some overlap between these communities. Palmer (1970: 122-32), for example, notes that Varro claimed the curiae were named after pagi, which Dionysius (*Ant. Rom.* 2.47.4) equated with the Greek πάγος (“hill”). As Smith (2006: 360) has pointed out, however, we simply do not know whether all of the hills
served by officials who were evidently able to undertake certain religious initiatives using money collected from their fellow montani. The magistri and flamines of the Mons Oppius, for example, supervised the restoration of a sacellum and planted trees, perhaps as part of a grove within the shrine. It is not clear to whom the sacellum was sacred, but it seems likely that each of the montes, like the vici, pagi and curiae, had a special deity or genius whose cult would have required physical space for the performance of rituals. The inscription erected by the magistri and flamines of the Mons Oppius suggests that these officials supervised the maintenance of such sacred sites within their communities.

We know very little about the communities of montani and their religious activities, though Varro confirms that they celebrated at least one festival, the Septimontium:

Dies Septimontium nominatus ab his septem montibus, in quis sita urbs est; feriae non populi, sed montanorum modo, ut Paganalibus, qui sunt alcuibus pagi (Ling. 6.24).

Septimontium Day was named from these seven hills, on which the city is set; it is a festival not of the people generally, but only of those who live on the hills, as only those who are of some pagus have a holiday at the Paganalia.

Ancient authors associated the Septimontium, held on 11 December, with the inclusion of the seven hills within the city walls. According to Festus, however, the hills that celebrated the Septimontium were the Palatinus, Velia, Fagutal, Cermalus, Caelius, Oppius and Cispius, not the canonical seven found in later texts. The details of the festival are very obscure and no reliable description survives from the Republican period. Festus, quoting Antistius Labeo, mentions a sacrifice to the goddess Palatua on the Palatine and another on the Velia, and we should probably imagine that sacrifices were made on each of the hills. Since, as Varro notes, participation in the Septimontium was restricted to the montani, it seems likely that they were represented in the curiae, as the Mons Velia was in the Curia Veliensis, or even whether the curiae were geographic entities.

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149 According to Dionysius (4.15.4), the officials of the pagi collected a fee from each man and woman in their district in order to cover the expense of a yearly sacrifice to the community’s guardian deity.

150 Based on his equation of the Argei festival with the curiae and the curiae with the montes, Palmer (1970: 127) posits that the sacellum of the residents of the Mons Oppius was one of the Argei shrines.

151 Festus 459, 474L; Plut. Q.R. 69. For the date of the Septimontium, see Fowler 1899: 265-6.

152 Festus 341L: Septi montium appellabant diem festum quod in septem locis faciebant sacrificium: Palatio, Velia, Fagutali, Subura, Cermalus, Caelio, Oppio et Cispio (They used to call “Septimontium” the festival day on which they offered a sacrifice in seven places: the Palatinus, Velia, Fagutal, Subura, Cermalus, Caelius, Oppius and Cispius). One of these eight names must be removed, and the Subura seems the obvious choice since it is not a mons.

153 Festus 476L; Scullard 1981: 203. There may also have been a communal meal following the ceremony, though Domitian’s celebration of the Septimontium with a lavish epulum is certainly anomalous (Suet. Dom. 4.5; Scullard 1981: 203).
that the rites were overseen by religious officials affiliated with a particular hill, perhaps the *flamines* mentioned in the above inscription.\(^{154}\)

While it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty whether the wives of the *flamines* were associated with their husbands in their office, it seems likely to me that they were. As we have seen, the Roman flaminate was only truly complete when both the *flamen* and *flaminica* served together. Although the details are admittedly vague, the inscription from the Mons Oppius presents us with the interesting possibility that the two-person flaminate was a feature of religious life on the hills of Rome as well.

**Conclusion**

The evidence presented in this chapter has important implications for the study of religious service at Rome. It suggests that the total number of married couples serving in joint offices far exceeded the number who could claim membership in the *collegium pontificum*. In addition to the *rex* and *regina sacrorum* and the fifteen *flamines* and *flaminicae* who served at the level of city wide cult and performed rites *pro populo*, married couples also represented individual units of the divided citizen body and probably even communities associated with specific geographic locations within the city. Roman religion is not known for its theological or institutional coherence, but the two-person religious office filled by a married couple does appear to offer one example of consistency across overlapping religious communities. The model was obviously quite attractive. Indeed, since married couples could also be found serving the gods together in almost every *domus* in the city, many Romans may have viewed joint religious offices as the completely natural state of affairs. The number of officials of this type – I argue that there were at least forty-six couples in the city of Rome – rivals the number of *pontifices*, *augures* and *decemviri*. Men and women shared the responsibility of serving public cult in an official capacity. Some offices were filled by men alone, others by women, but numerous public *sacerdotia* in the city of Rome were filled by married couples.

\(^{154}\) It has also been suggested that the sacrifice to Palatua was performed by her own *flamen Palatualis* (see Fowler 1899: 267; Scullard 1981: 204).
Chapter Seven
Minor Officials and Support Personnel

The tombstone of Hateria C*** records her service as a sacerdos of Dis Pater, the lord of the Underworld (Fig. 58). The monument, which dates to the imperial period, shows the woman with her head covered, holding a small object in her left hand with her right hand outstretched. Though the stone is damaged, it seems clear that Hateria was originally depicted sacrificing, perhaps over a small altar. Hateria’s tombstone constitutes the only epigraphic evidence for the sacerdotium of Dis Pater, whose existence is otherwise completely unknown. Were it not for the chance survival of her funerary monument, we would be entirely unaware that Dis Pater was served by a female sacerdos whose sacred obligations may have included sacrifice. Many of the religious offices considered in this chapter are only marginally better attested than the one held by Hateria. Nonetheless, as a group, they further complicate traditional accounts of Roman “priesthood” and confirm that women were actively involved in official religious service at nearly every level.

As noted in the introduction, not all religious activities and offices were open to all Romans. Gender, sexual and marital status were crucial factors in determining eligibility for certain religious offices, including the Vestal order and the various flaminia. Social status—whether one could claim patrician lineage, for example, or whether one was or had been a slave—also played a role in defining what opportunities for religious service were available to an individual. According to the Roman tradition, many public religious offices were originally open only to patricians. Even after plebeians gained access to the major religious collegia at the end of the fourth century B.C., these colleges remained elite institutions.

Indeed, the religious offices under consideration in the previous chapters were filled almost exclusively by members the social and political elite. While it was expected, for example, that the flamines and flaminicae minores would be plebeians, it seems that these officials were generally members of the plebeian aristocracy.

1 CIL 6.2243, with Rüpke 2008: 712, No. 1865. The tombstone has not survived, but was recorded by the anonymous draftsman of the so-called Codex Pighianus in the middle of the sixteenth century.
2 Livy, for example, notes that the plebeians who agitated for the enactment of the lex Ogulnia were “not the lowest of the plebs … but its leaders” (non infimam plebem … sed ipsa capita plebis, 10.6.4), an observation that may be fairly accurate.
Members of the social and political elite certainly monopolized the most prestigious offices, but official religious service was not limited to these Romans. This chapter will broaden the elite focus of the preceding chapters by examining offices filled by women from nearly every stratum of Roman society. Certain offices in the cult of Bona Dea, for example, appear to have been open to freedwomen and slaves, while the *sacerdos Ceres*, who presided over the Greek rites of Ceres on the Aventine, was traditionally a Greek woman born in Southern Italy. These women allow us to see not only how the Romans dealt with the issue of gender at the level of official religious service, but also how women of various social statuses and even different ethnic and civic backgrounds could be incorporated into the public religious system.

The women examined in this chapter have generally been among the most invisible Roman religious officials, a circumstance due in part to the nature of the sources. Several appear only briefly in the literary record, such as the *sacerdotes* of Liber, elderly women mentioned by Varro who wore wreaths of ivy and offered honey cakes (*liba*) for a small fee at the Liberalia. ³ Nothing else is known about the activities of these *sacerdotes*, or even whether they were actually employed by the state cult of Liber. Ovid, our only other source, does not clarify this issue, though he does attempt to account for their gender:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{femina cur praesit, non est rationis operta:} \\
\text{femineos thyrso concitat ille choros.} \\
\text{cur anus hoc faciat, quaeris? vinosior aetas} \\
\text{haec erat et gravidae munera vitis amat.} \\
\text{cur hedera cincta est? hedera est gratissima Baccho;} \\
\text{hoc quoque cur ita sit, discere nulla mora est (Fast. 3.763-8).}
\end{align*}
\]

The reason why a woman presides isn’t obscure: Bacchus stirs crowds of women with his *thyrus*. Why an old woman, you ask? That age drinks more and loves the gifts of the teeming vine. Why is she wreathed with ivy? Ivy is dearest to Bacchus, and why that’s so doesn’t take long to tell…

Ovid’s explanation for the gender of the *sacerdotes* resorts to common stereotypes regarding women, especially older women, and the consumption of wine. Ironically, neither Varro nor Ovid claims that the *sacerdotes* poured libations at the Liberalia. Instead, both authors say that they sacrificed honey cakes, an appropriate offering for the god who first discovered

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³ Varro Ling. 6.14: *Liberalia dicta, quod per totum oppidum eo die sedent [ut] sacerdotes Liberi annus hedera coronatae cum libis et focalo pro emptore sacrificantes* (It is called the Liberalia because on that day old women wearing ivy wreaths on their heads sit in all parts of the town, as *sacerdotes* of Liber, with cakes and a brazier, on which they offer the cakes on behalf of any purchaser).
honey. The poet is right, however, to highlight the close association between Liber/Bacchus and female religious officials, a point to which we will return.

We also hear of the enigmatic saliae virgines (Salian virgins), who may have been the female counterparts of the male salii. According to Festus, they wore martial garb and the apex of a salius and sacrificed in the regia alongside a pontifex. The salii were required to be patricians and, at the time of their cooption to the sodalitas (brotherhood), had to be patrimi et matrimi, that is, have both parents living. Membership was theoretically for life, though it was customary to leave upon election to a higher magistracy or adlection into another religious college. Festus, however, claims on the authority of the Republican antiquarian Cincius that the saliae virgines were hired (conducticiae, 439L). For this reason, modern scholars have generally presumed that they were not patricians, but rather girls from lower social statuses. It is possible, however, that by describing the saliae as conducticiae, Cincius simply means to say that they served on a temporary basis, in contrast to the more permanent sodalitates of male salii. Indeed, it seems more likely that the saliae, who sacrificed in the regia, one of the most important religious buildings in the city, were the daughters of elite Roman families. Their role in public religion, however temporary, was significant enough to merit the supervision of a pontifex.

The martial costume worn by the saliae suggests that their sacrifice was somehow connected to the rites performed by the salii at the beginning of and after the end of the campaigning season. Though several scholars have argued that the rite was an initiation ritual including both young men and women, this interpretation is uncertain. It is difficult to see how a ritual involving such a small group of Romans could have functioned as an initiation rite. Some scholars have downplayed the martial dimension of the activities performed by the saliae, a tendency that may stem from certain preconceived notions about the role of women and girls in Roman religion. As we have seen, however, women were not confined to rites of a private, domestic nature, nor were they prohibited from sacrificing on

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4 Ov. Fast. 3,743.
5 Festus 439L: Salias virgines Cincius ait esse conducticias, quae ad Salios adhibeantur cum apicibus paludatas; quas Aelius Stilo scribit sacrificum facere in Regia cum pontifice paludatas cum apicibus in modum Salorum (Cincius said that the saliae virgines were hired women, dressed in military costume with apices, who are summoned to the salii. Aelius Stilo has written that the saliae virgines performed a sacrifice in the regia with a pontifex, dressed in military costume with apices, in the manner of the salii).
6 Cic. Dom. 38.
behalf of the Roman people. The success of the campaigning season concerned women as well as men, and it is not surprising that the rituals surrounding this important activity involved female religious officials. The saliae offer further confirmation that women were involved in nearly every aspect of public religion at Rome.

Other female religious specialists are known only through epigraphic or visual sources. This is particularly true for categories of officials other than sacerdotes, such as magistrae (magistrates) and ministrae (ministers). Tombstones from Bovianum and Teate Marrucinorum commemorate sacerdotes of Venus, while the funerary inscriptions of three sacerdotes Cereris et Veneris from Casinum and the area around Sulmo suggest that these two goddesses generally shared a sacerdos in this region. An early third century A.D. dedication set up at Beneventum by a sacerdos of Magna Mater and a woman identified as his consacerdos indicates that some cults may have employed heterogeneous religious officials.

Other inscriptions from the imperial period also record sacerdotes of Minerva, Juno Populona, Isis, the cult of the Lares compitales and various deified empresses. Given the fragmentary state of the evidence, it is difficult to describe these women and the cults they served in any detail. Nonetheless, each reference, however elusive, confirms that Roman Italy was populated by far more female religious officials than has been recognized.

The remainder of this chapter will focus primarily on female religious officials associated with the state cults of Ceres, Fortuna Muliebris and Bona Dea. Although the sacerdotes of Bacchus were not entrusted with any sacra publica, they are included in this chapter as well, since the state took an active role in the regulation of their status and activities following the so-called Bacchanalian “Conspiracy” in 186. Indeed, the senate’s letter to the allies in Bruttium, demonstrates that female sacerdotes were accepted and expected in appropriate contexts. Finally, a discussion of women who served as support personnel will supplement the sacerdotal material. Without these figures, whose responsibilities included a wide variety of essential tasks, the religious system surely would

8 For a fuller discussion of this evidence, see Richlin 1997; Schultz 2006: 69-74.
12 Moreover, it seems very likely that there were other female religious officials whose titles and functions have not been preserved in the literary or epigraphic record.
have ground to a halt. All these women help to contextualize the Vestals and *flaminicae*, whose status and activities we have examined in the previous chapters.

**The Sacerdos Cereris**

The Italian goddess Ceres, who was connected with grain as well as with the realm of the dead, was worshipped in Rome on the Aventine Hill. In addition to the *flamen* and *flaminica Cerialis*, Ceres was served by a female religious official who held the title *sacerdos Cereris*. Our fullest evidence for this public official is found in Cicero’s *Pro Balbo*, where the orator explains that the she was traditionally a Greek woman from Southern Italy:

> sacra Cereris, iudices, summa maiores nostri religione confici caerimoniaque voluerunt; quae cum essent adsumpta de Graecia, et per Graecas curata sunt semper sacerdotes et Graeca omnino nominata. sed cum illam quae Graecum illud sacrum monstraret et faceret ex Graecia deligerent, tamen sacra pro civibus civem facere voluerunt, ut deos immortalis scientia peregrina et externa, mente domestica et civili precaretur. Has sacerdotes video fere aut Neapolitanas aut Veliensis fuisse, foederatarum sine dubio civitatum (Balb. 55).

Our ancestors, judges, ordained that the sacred rites of Ceres should be performed with the very strictest religious reverence and the greatest solemnity; which, as they had been originally derived from the Greeks, had always been conducted by Greek *sacerdotes*, and were called Greek rites. But when they were selecting a *sacerdos* from Greece to teach us that Greek sacred ceremony, and to perform it, still they thought it right that it should be a citizen who was sacrificing for citizens, in order that she might pray to the immortal gods with a foreign and external knowledge, but with the frame of mind of a native and a citizen. I see that these *sacerdotes* generally were either from Naples or Velia, without a doubt [women] of federated cities.

The *Graeca sacra* in question were likely rites in honor of Ceres and her daughter Proserpina. According to Festus, the festival was celebrated by the *matronae* “on account of the finding of Proserpina” (*quae ob inventionem Proserpinae matronae celebant*, 86L), which suggests that it was related to the Thesmophoric cult of Demeter. The Thesmophoria is the most widely attested Greek festival, one that was celebrated in almost every region of the Greek world. Since the rites were designed to benefit the entire community, rather than the women alone, they traditionally took place in a public space. They included torch lit nocturnal ceremonies that reenacted Demeter’s search for her daughter Persephone, who had been abducted by Dis, god of the Underworld. The rites concluded with the reunion of mother and daughter and the promise of a return of fertility to the earth. The Thesmophoria was surely

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13 See also Val. Max. 1.1.1.
14 Festus 86L.
concerned with human and agricultural fertility, though recent scholarship has also emphasized the element of the definition of traditional gender roles implicit in a festival attended by women alone.\footnote{See especially, Winkler 1990; Versnel 1993; Nixon 1995.}

In Rome, the rites were celebrated in August and were known simply as the \textit{sacrum anniversarium Cereris} (the annual rites of Ceres).\footnote{For the Roman cult of Ceres and Proserpina and the \textit{sacrum anniversarium Cereris}, see Spaeth 1996: 107-13.} Although modern scholars have argued that the cult of Ceres and Proserpina was established in Rome sometime in the mid to late third century B.C., it was likely introduced much earlier.\footnote{Le Bonniec (1958: 390-5) suggests 226. Spaeth (1996: 11-5) also favors the mid to late third century B.C. It is possible, however, that the cult is much older, perhaps as old as the foundation of the Aventine cult itself (Flower 2002a: 87, n. 29).} The first literary evidence for the cult of Ceres and Proserpina is from the time of the Hannibalic War, though the context suggests that the rite had been in place for quite some time. According to Livy and Valerius Maximus, the senate was forced to place a limit on mourning following the catastrophic defeat at Cannae on August 2, 216, since “it is forbidden to those in mourning to take part in [the rites of Ceres], and there was not a single matron who was not a mourner during those days” \((\textit{nee lugentibus id facere est fas nec ulla in illa tempestate matrona expers luctus fuerat}, \text{Livy 22.56.4}).\footnote{The traditional mourning period for women was ten months (Ov. \textit{Fast.} 1.35, 3.134; Plut. \textit{Num.} 12.2; Cass. Dio 56.43.1). Livy (22.56.4-5) claims that the annual rites of Ceres (\textit{sacrum anniversarium Cereris}) actually lapsed \textit{(intermissum)} in 216; only then did the senate limit the period of mourning to thirty days so that no other public rite \textit{(sacra publica)} might be neglected. According to Valerius Maximus (1.1.15), however, the senate decreed that the \textit{matronae} should not remain in mourning more than thirty days “so that the rites of Ceres could be celebrated by them” \((\textit{uti ab iis sacra Cereris peragi possent}).\ On the whole, it seems more likely that Valerius is correct. In the aftermath of Cannae, the senate acted swiftly to prevent the disruption of any \textit{sacra publica}. Failure to do so could only have brought further disaster upon the Romans.} The senate’s decision to limit the mourning period, an important social and religious practice, shows that they valued the ritual contributions made by women to the safety and well being of the Roman state. Furthermore, it indicates that the festival was already regarded as a crucial part of state religion and must have been well established by the late third century B.C. Unfortunately, however, the evidence does not allow us to establish even a general idea of when the Thesmophoria was introduced at Rome. Nonetheless, given the widespread popularity of the Thesmophoric cult throughout the Greek world as early as the eighth century B.C., it is not unreasonable to expect that the Romans adopted the festival at an early date.

When the Romans decided to institute a Greek-style Thesmophoria, they also imported a Greek woman from Southern Italy to oversee the rites. Campania was a region...
particularly devoted to the worship of Demeter and Persephone, whose primary cult center was located at Cumae. According to Cicero, the sacerdos Cereris was responsible for teaching (monstraret) and performing (saceret) the rites with foreign knowledge (peregrina scientia). While we cannot be certain about the nature or significance of this scientia, it is clear that the sacerdos’ status as a Campanian Greek was crucial to her ability to perform the rites associated with her office. The Romans co-opted the Greek festival of Ceres and Proserpina with great care. They appointed a professional, a Greek woman from Campania, who would not misunderstand or mishandle the sacra. Valerius Maximus also emphasizes that the Romans employed a “skilled ministrant” (perita antistes, 1.1.1) to administer the Greek rites of Ceres, a decision he compares to the Roman commitment to the Etrusca disciplina. These Etruscan texts governed the practice of divination and were consulted by the Etruscan haruspices, who advised the senate on important religious matters. This comparison suggests that the sacerdos Cereris exercised a certain amount of autonomy within the cult of Ceres and Proserpina, since she alone had the requisite skills and knowledge to fulfill her sacred obligations.

In 96, the praetor urbanus C. Valerius Flaccus proposed legislation to grant Roman citizenship to Calliphana of Velia, who had recently been appointed sacerdos Cereris. The procedure he followed was likely standard, and would have been carried out whenever a new sacerdos was introduced from Southern Italy. According to Cicero, who later praised the measure, it was argued that a religious official who offered sacrifices on behalf of citizens (pro civibus) should be a citizen herself. Calliphana was able to pray to the gods with Greek knowledge and the native mind of a citizen (mente domestica et civili). The sacerdos Cereris was a Greek woman well versed in the rites of Ceres and Proserpina. She was made a Roman citizen, however, so that the rituals she performed would benefit the Roman state.

The sacerdos Cereris was a public religious official who performed sacra publica at public expense and on behalf of the Roman people (pro populo). As we have just seen, Cicero asserts that the she carried out rites on behalf of the citizens of Rome. An undated inscription from Rome further corroborates her official status: sacerdos Cereris publica populo Romano Quiritibus (public sacerdos of Ceres for the Roman people, the Quirites, CIL 1, p.

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20 Peterson 1919: 1.64; Spaeth 1996: 104.
21 Cic. Balb. 55; Val. Max. 1.1.1b; Rüpke 2008: 591, No. 1042.
Though John Scheid recognizes that the *sacerdos Cereris* was a public religious official, he argues that her status had no broader implications for the role of women in official religious service since the cult was a naturalized one and did not represent “an evolution in Roman religious convictions.” Scheid is correct to note that Roman religious convictions did not “evolve” following the introduction of the *sacerdos Cereris* to Rome. Prior to her arrival, numerous women were already serving public cult in an official capacity. Indeed, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, official religious service at Rome was remarkably gender inclusive. The *sacerdotium Cereris* was distinctive not because its occupant was a woman, but because she was a Greek woman.

While the ancient sources are unanimous in their opinion that the *sacerdos Cereris* was Greek born, the evidence is more ambiguous regarding her marital status. At Athens, the female religious official in charge of the Thesmophoria was a married woman, as was the *hieira* of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis. Modern scholars, however, have generally followed Tertullian in arguing that the attendants of Ceres in the Roman world remained celibate throughout their period of service. In a catalogue of pagan religious officials and cults especially devoted to chastity, the early Christian theologian claims that the *sacerdotes* of Ceres, with their husbands’ consent, dissolved their marriages and lived as celibate widows (*Cereris sacerdotes viventibus etiam viris et consentientibus amica separatione viduantur, De monog. 17.4*).

Tertullian, however, was a native of Carthage, and his knowledge of specific cultic regulations was likely shaped by this North African context. Indeed, he specifies in the *De exhortatione castitatis* that the practice of amicable divorce was observed by the ministrants of African Ceres:

> novimus … feminas vero Cereri Africanae, cui etiam sponte abdicato matrimonio assenescent, aversantes exinde contactum masculorum usque ad oscula filiorum (Tert. *Cast. 13.2*).

We have heard … of women, moreover, (dedicated) to the African Ceres, in whose honor they even spontaneously abdicate matrimony, and so live to old age, shunning thenceforward all contact with males, even so much as the kisses of their sons.

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23 See also *CIL* 6.2181 (Rome), 9.4200 (Amiernum?), 10.812, 1074 (Pompeii), 1812, 1829 (Puteoli), 4793, 4794 (Teanum Sidicinum).
24 Scheid 1993: 57. Scheid, as we have seen, believes that women had a very limited role in public religion, one that did not include official religious service.
26 See, for example, Wissowa 1912: 301; Le Bonnicc 1958: 411-2; Peruzzi 1995: 10; Spaeth 1996: 115.
As Celia Schultz has noted, the cult of Ceres in Africa differed from the goddess’ Hellenized cult in Italy in several respects, and there is little reason to assume that the requirement discussed by Tertullian, if he has accurately represented the practice, applied to the *sacerdotes Ceres* in Rome as well.\(^27\)

The epigraphic evidence related to the marital status of *sacerdotes Ceres* in Italy is, unfortunately, ambiguous. Nearly all inscriptions from the Republican period are tombstones that mention only the name of the *sacerdos* and her title, thus providing no explicit information about her marital status.\(^28\) The only exception to this pattern is the epitaph of Caesia, daughter of Novius Caesius, who was commemorated by her *nepos*, Quintus Caesius, son of Quintus.\(^29\) While *nepos* can mean both “nephew” and “grandson,” the similarity of Quintus’ name to Caesia’s suggests that he is her brother’s son.\(^30\) Since Roman testamentary practices typically held the heir responsible for the expense of erecting a funerary monument, we may speculate that Caesia had no direct descendants of her own and therefore left her estate to her nephew.\(^31\) While the sample of Republican inscriptions is admittedly small, the complete absence of commemorations made by husbands or children is somewhat unusual and may indicate that *sacerdotes Ceres* were generally unmarried.

Inscriptions of imperial or uncertain date from Roman Italy do record *sacerdotes Ceres* who may have been married during their time in office.\(^32\) Tamudia Severa, a *sacerdos publica* of Ceres in Amiternum, was commemorated along with her husband by their children, M. Caesius Magnus and Caesia Severa.\(^33\) Alleia Decimilla, a *sacerdos publica Ceres* in Pompeii, erected a monument in honor of her husband and their son.\(^34\) Though Alleia Decimilla was certainly a widow during at least part of her tenure of office, we cannot rule out the possibility that she became a *sacerdos* of Ceres before her husband’s death. These

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\(^27\) Schultz 2006: 76. Tertullian’s claim is not quite as preposterous as it sounds. In the Greek world, religious offices that required perpetual celibacy were typically held by postmenopausal women who had been widowed. Though Tertullian may be mistaken in his belief that African *sacerdotes Ceres* divorced their husbands in order to take up their posts, the notion that some religious offices required the service of a celibate widow is correct. For the role of older women in Greek religion, see Bremmer 1987; Connelly 2007: 43-4.

\(^28\) See, for example, *CIL* 1.1532 = 10.5073 = *ILS* 3344 (from Casinum): *Munniai C.f. / sacred(oti) C(ereris)*. Schultz (2006: 76) is particularly pessimistic about the value of the epigraphic evidence.

\(^29\) *CIL* 1.3110 = 10.6103 (now at Gaeta).

\(^30\) Schultz (2006: 76) also concludes that Q. Caesius is Caesia’s nephew.

\(^31\) For the responsibilities of heirs regarding funerary monuments, see Champlin 1991: 169-80.

\(^32\) *CIL* 9.4200 (Amiternum?), 10.1036 = *ILS* 6365 (Pompeii), 10.6109 (Formiae), with Schultz 2006: 77-8.

\(^33\) *CIL* 9.4200.

\(^34\) *CIL* 10.1036 = *ILS* 6365.
inscriptions suggest that some *sacerdotes Cereris* may have been married, though the situation in the city of Rome during the Republican period may have been quite different.

Unfortunately, a definitive answer to the question of whether or not the *sacerdos Cereris* at Rome was married is impossible based on the available evidence. If absolute celibacy were a condition of service, the *sacerdoses Cereris* would have occupied a unique position within the Roman religious system. Among adult religious officials, only the Vestal Virgins were required to remain unmarried. In general, Roman *matronae* had a fuller role in public religion than did *virgines*. Indeed, attendance at the Thesmophoria was restricted to married women. Though it was not impossible for an unmarried religious official to preside over rites reserved for married women – the Vestals sacrificed at the December rites of Bona Dea – this does not seem to have been the standard practice. In either case, we can be certain that the *sacerdotes Cereris* was a public religious official who employed her specialized knowledge to perform religious rites on behalf of her fellow citizens.

*Sacerdotes of Bona Dea*

*Bona Dea*

The Romans seem to have regarded the title Bona Dea (Good Goddess) as a descriptive epithet, rather than the proper name of the female deity who bore it.\(^{35}\) According to tradition, this deliberate obfuscation had a religious explanation. Cicero, for example, claims that Bona Dea is a goddess “whose name it is not lawful for men to know” (*cuius ne nomen quidem viros scire fas est*, Har. Resp. 17.37).\(^{36}\) Lactantius, who cites Varro as his source, links the prohibition to the extraordinary *pudicitia* of the goddess: \(^{37}\)

\[\text{eandem Varro scribit tantae pudicitiae fuisse, ut nemo illam quoad vixerit praeter suum virum mas viderit nec nomen eius audierit, idcirco illi mulieres in operto sacrificant et Bonam Deam nominant (Div. Inst. 1.22.10).}\]

\(^{35}\) Brouwer 1989: 232. Compare, for example, the title “Magna Mater,” which is not a proper name but a definition.

\(^{36}\) See also Serv. *Aen.* 8.314: *quam quidam, quod nomine dici prohibitus fuerat, Bona Deam appellatum voluit* (some assert that she was called Bona Dea since it was forbidden to call her by her name).

\(^{37}\) See also Macrob. Sat. 1.12.27: *bac apud Graecos ἡ θεὸς γυναικεῖα quam Varro Fauni filiam tradit, adeo pudicam ut extra γυναῖκωνιτιν numquam sit egressa, nec nomen eius in publico fuerit audita, nec virum numquam viderit vel a viro visa sit, propter quod nec vir templum eius ingreditor* (In Greece she is called the Women’s Goddess, of whom Varro tells us that she was the daughter of Fauna, and so modest that she never left the women’s quarters, that her name was never heard in public, and that she never saw a man nor was seen by a man, for which reason in fact no man enters her temple).
Varro writes that the same goddess also displayed such great modesty that no man, except her own husband, ever saw her during her lifetime or ever heard her name. For this reason, women offer sacrifice to her in secret and call her Bona Dea.

Varro’s aetiology belongs to a collection of myths that developed over time in order to account for the secretive and gender exclusive nature of Bona Dea’s most important rites. The December rites of Bona Dea were strictly off-limits to men, including the male magistrate at whose house they were celebrated. Several ancient sources suggest that men were also excluded from her Aventine temple and the rites celebrated there on 1 May. In light of this evidence, it is not surprising that there was also a prohibition against revealing the goddess’ proper name.

In spite of this taboo, Roman antiquarians freely speculated about the name and identity of Bona Dea, often associating or even equating her with female deities with whom she seemed to share an attribute or sphere of influence. Needless to say, this conjecture is mostly fanciful, but it does shed indirect light on those aspects of her cult that ancient authors were most anxious to explain. Bona Dea appears to have been regarded primarily as a goddess concerned with human and agricultural fertility and was associated by some with the earth goddess Terra. Cornelius Labeo tells us that on the Kalends of May, a temple was dedicated to Maia as Terra under the name of Bona Dea, and that Terra and Bona Dea were in fact identical:

affirmant quidam, quibus Cornelius Labeo consentit, hanc Mais, cui mense Maiore divina celebratur, Terram esse … auctor est Cornelius Labeo huic Maiae, id est terrae, aedem Kalendis Maiis dedicatam sub nomine Bonae Deae: et eandem esse Bonam Deam et terram ex ipso ritu occultiore sacrorum doceri posse confirmat (Macr. Sat. 1.12.20).

Some authors, with whom Cornelius Labeo agrees, assert that the Maia to whom sacrifice is offered in the month of May is Terra … Cornelius Labeo states that to this Maia, that is, Terra, under the name of Bona Dea a temple was dedicated on the Kalends of May, and this author affirms that the identity of Bona Dea with Terra can be inferred from the more secret rite of sacrifices.

38 For the December rites of Bona Dea, see chapter 3.
39 See below.
40 Cornelius Labeo authored several works on Roman religion during the third century A.D. Since the passage quoted above belongs to an extended discussion concerning the division of the Roman year, it seems likely that the material cited by Macrobius derives from Labeo’s Fasti, a treatise on the Roman ritual calendar.
41 See also Macrobi. Sat. 1.12.21-2: hanc eandem Bonam Faunamque et Opem et Fatuam pontificum libris indigitari: Bona, quod omnium nobis ad victum bonorum causa est; Faunam, quod omni usui animantium favet; Opem, quod ipius auxilio vita constat; Fatuam a fando, quod, ut supra diximus, infantibus partu editi non prius voeae edunt quam attigerint terram (He [Cornelius Labeo] adds that in the books of the pontifices this same goddess [Terra] is invoked as Bona, Fauna, Ops and Fatua: Bona because she is for us the source of all that is good for the maintenance of life; Fauna because she graciously takes care of all the needs of living creatures; Ops because it is on her help that
The coincidence of Maia’s feast with the dies natalis (birth day) of the aedes Bonae Deae on the Aventine, both of which fell on 1 May, likely provided the initial impetus for the identification of these goddesses. Nonetheless, what little we know about the December rites of Bona Dea indicates that she was in fact concerned with human and agricultural fertility. Thus there is no compelling reason to reject a close association between Bona Dea and the earth.

*Damia and the Damiatrix*

Perhaps the most intriguing proper name proposed by the ancient sources is preserved in Festus, according to whom Bona Dea was named Damia and her sacerdos was called the damiatrix:

Damium sacrificium quod fiebat in operto in honore Deae Bonae; dictum a contrarietate quod minime esset δαμόσιον, id est publicum. Dea quoque ipsa Damia et sacerdos eius damiatrix appellabatur (60L).

The damium was a sacrifice that took place in secrecy in honor of Bona Dea; it was thus named because of its opposite meaning, as it was least of all public. Also the goddess herself was called Damia and her sacerdos the damiatrix.

Placidus also defines “damium” as a sacrifice offered in secret to Bona Dea by Roman mulieres (women). Damia was a Greek goddess worshipped throughout Southern Italy, including at Tarentum, where she had a festival called the Dameia. Some scholars have hypothesized that the cult of Damia was imported to Rome following the capture of Tarentum in 272 and merged with the already flourishing cult of Bona Dea.

Unfortunately, neither Festus nor Placidus specify the day on which the damium was offered to Bona Dea. The December rites have been suggested, but we have already seen that the Vestals performed the sacrifice at this festival. The damium is not recorded on any
of the official calendars, which could indicate that it was not part of a public festival. All we can say with certainty is that the *damiatrix* offered a sacrifice of some kind to Bona Dea, in secret and in the company of Roman women. Whether or not the *damiatrix* had other sacred obligations within the cult of Bona Dea is unclear. Perhaps the title was held in conjunction with the better-attested “sacred.” In any case, the *damiatrix* was just one of many female religious officials associated with the goddess and her Aventine temple.

*Bona Dea Subsaxana*

The principal sanctuary of Bona Dea was located on the Aventine below the *saxum* (rock) where Remus was supposed to have established his augural station during the contest with Romulus.\(^{46}\) The *dies natalis* of the temple was celebrated on 1 May, though the foundation is difficult to date.\(^{47}\) At least one modern scholar has suggested that the *aedes* was standing by the fifth century B.C.\(^{48}\) Ovid is the only ancient source to mention a foundation story and his evidence is unfortunately problematic:

… interea Diva canenda Bona est.  
Est moles nativa, loco res nomina fecit:  
appellant Saxum, pars bona montis ea est.  
Huic Remus institerat frustra, quo tempore fratri  
prima Palatinae signa dedistis aves.  
Templis patres illic oculos exosa viriles  leniter adclini constituere iugo  
dedicat haec veteris Crassorum nominis heres,  
virgineo nullum corpore passa virum:  
Livia restituit, ne non imitata maritum  
esset et ex omni parte secuta suum (Ov. *Fast.* 5.148-58).\(^{49}\)

Meanwhile the Good Goddess must be celebrated. There is a mass of native rock, after which the place is named. They call it the *saxum* (rock), and it forms a good part of the hill. On this spot Remus had stood in vain at the time when you, birds of the Palatine, gave the first omens to his brother. There, on the gently sloping hillside the senate founded the temple which detests the eyes of males. A descendant of the ancient name of the Crassi dedicated this, who with her virgin body had submitted to no man. Livia restored it so that she might imitate her husband and follow him in everything.

\(^{48}\) Merlin 1906: 171-7. Richardson (1992: 60) seems to agree that the *aedes* was very ancient but does not suggest a date.  
\(^{49}\) Some editors read “*Clausorum*” in line 155, which would make the dedicatory a Claudia, but this is a late interpolation in the MSS (see Alton, *et. al.* 1973: 150).
According to Ovid, the *aedes* was founded by the senate and dedicated by a Vestal. The Vestal in question can be none other than Licinia, the daughter of C. Licinius Crassus, who in 123 dedicated an altar (*ara*), a shrine (*aedicula*) and a couch (*pulvinar*) beneath the rock (*sub saxo*). Thus Ovid would have us believe that there was no temple of Bona Dea on the Aventine until the late second century B.C. There are, however, several obstacles to endorsing his point of view. Cicero’s *De domo sua*, our best source for the events of 123, reveals that Licinia had not obtained the permission of the Roman people to make her dedication. The senate referred the question of its validity to the *collegium pontificum*, which declared the dedication invalid. Cicero claims that the senate then ordered the urban praetor to oversee its destruction.

The objective of the *De domo sua* is to persuade the *pontifices* to invalidate Clodius’ consecration of a shrine to Libertas on Cicero’s property on the Palatine. The orator carefully chose his example in order to demonstrate that a shrine, even one that had already been dedicated, could be removed if the *pontifices* declared that it had not been properly consecrated. Without a similar ruling in his own case, the orator could not hope to rebuild his demolished house. Though Cicero is certainly motivated by self-interest in this speech, it was to his advantage to cite an example that supported his right to tear down Clodius’ shrine to Libertas. In other words, I think we can be fairly confident that Licinia’s dedication was dismantled and removed from the sanctuary of Bona Dea.

Some modern scholars, however, have suggested that Licinia’s shrine to Bona Dea was not destroyed. In their view, Bona Dea’s temple *sub saxo* was never a public temple (*aedes publica*), but rather an embellishment of Licinia’s original *ara*, *aedicula* and *pulvinar* with

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50 Cic. Dom. 136: *…cum Licinia, virgo Vestalis, summo loco nata, sanctissimo sacerdotio praedita, T. Flaminino Q. Metello consulibus aram et aediculam et pulvinar sub Saxo dedicasset…* (...when Licinia, a Vestal Virgin of noble birth, distinguished by the most sacred of sacerdotia, dedicated an altar, an oratory, and a sacred couch under the rock...). For a discussion of the political implications of this episode, see chapter 4.


52 Cic. Dom. 127.

53 Licinia had evidently violated the *lex Papiria*, which required prior authorization by the *plebs* for the dedication of any shrine, land or altar (Cic. Dom. 127; Ziolkowski 1992: 220-34; Orlin 1997: 166-71). Herbert-Brown (1994: 138-45, followed by Johnson 1997: 409) suggests that Licinia’s dedication was declared invalid following her conviction on a charge of *incestum* and subsequent execution in 113. Cicero (*Dom. 136*), however, makes it very clear that the shrine was removed because Licinia had not received the proper authority to make the dedication.

the status of a “sacrum privatum” (private dedication). Adam Ziolkowski, for example, notes that in the *De domo sua*, Cicero focuses most of his attention on the destruction of the inscription. While Ziolkowski may be correct in his belief that the *aedicula* itself was allowed to stand, it is clear that the altar was removed, the inscription erased, and the dedication stripped of any sacred status. It seems unlikely that an empty *aedicula* rendered profane by a decision of the *collegium pontificum* could be the same *aedes* of Bona Dea mentioned by our ancient sources.

It is far more likely that there was already an *aedes publica* of Bona Dea standing on the Aventine in 123. Cicero calls the site where Licinia’s dedication was made a public place (*locus publicus*, Dom. 136) and a sacred space (*loco augusto*, Dom. 137). This language, combined with the interest taken by the senate and the pontifices in the dedication itself, suggest that we are dealing with a sanctuary belonging to the official state religion.

Ovid has either confused or deliberately conflated the original foundation of the temple with Licinia’s failed dedication. The latter possibility seems especially attractive in light of the poet’s disingenuous comment regarding the Vestal’s chastity: *virgineo nullum corpore passa virum* (who with her virgin body had submitted to no man, *Fast.* 5.156). In 114, Licinia was accused of having multiple lovers and was convicted along with two other Vestals at one of the most notorious *incestum* trials in the order’s history. Associating Livia and the *aedes* with a fallen Vestal would certainly have undercut the force of her decision to patronize the cult of a goddess whose reputed *pudicitia* seemingly reinforced Augustus’ moral ideology.

No physical remains of the *aedes* have been discovered, though numerous literary sources confirm that the temple was located on the Aventine. In a poem explaining the origins of the Ara Maxima, Propertius describes a grove and an enclosed sanctuary:

*Dixerat, et sicco torquet sitis ora palato*

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55 In support of this position, Ziolkowski (1992: 20) claims that, “worship of Bona Dea was exclusively feminine.” It has already been noted that gender exclusivity in no way disqualifies a rite, let alone an entire cult, from public status. While the December rites of Bona Dea were open to women only, they were conducted *pro populo* (see above). Furthermore, it has been shown above that worship of Bona Dea was not restricted to women.

56 Brouwer 1989: 400.

57 Perhaps we should also consider the possibility that the senate constructed a temple to Bona Dea on the site where Licinia had made her original dedication and allowed the Vestal to participate in the official *dedicatio* of the new *aedes*.


59 The physical remains of Bona Dea sanctuaries located outside of Rome corroborate Propertius’ description of a walled enclosure on the Aventine. The precinct of Bona Dea outside the Porta Marina at Ostia, for example, was wholly enclosed by a wall with one entrance on the eastern side (Brouwer 1989: 407-12).
terraque non ullas feta ministrat aquas.
Sed procul inclusas audit ridere puellas.
Lucus ab umbroso fecerat orbe nemus,
feminea loca clausa deae fontisque piandos,
impune et nullis sacra retecta viris.
Devia puniceae velabat limina vittae,
putris odorato luxer at igne casa,
populus et longis ornabat frondibus aedem
multaque cantantis umbra tegebat avis (4.9.21-30).

Thus he [Hercules] spoke: thirst torments his mouth, dry is his palate, but the earth’s plenty
does not offer him any water. Yet at some distance, within an enclosure, he hears girls
laugh. A grove of sacred trees stood in a shady circle round a clearing, the enclosed
sanctuary of the Women’s Goddess, and a venerable fount and rites whose disclosure to any
man will not go unpunished. Purple ribbons decorated the entrance to the hidden shrine,
from the tumbledown structure a fire had blazed up fragrant with incense, a poplar with long
and leafy branches was an ornament to the temple, and its plentiful shade was a shelter for
the singing birds.

Hercules, who is desperately thirsty following his struggle with the monster Cacus, knocks
on the door (foris) of the sanctuary and asks to be allowed to drink from the stream within.
Though an elderly (anus) sacerdos advises the hero not to defile the sanctuary and its altar,
Hercules breaks down the door, quenches his thirst and, in retaliation for the women’s
refusal to admit him into the sanctuary, founds a cult in his own honor from which women
will be permanently excluded. The proximity of the Ara Maxima to the Bona Dea altar, each
restricted to single sex worship, evidently gave rise to an interrelated aetiology. It is striking,
however, that the Romans believed the Bona Dea altar to be more ancient, and described the
origins of the Ara Maxima in relation to this women only rite. The male only rites at the Ara
Maxima were conceptualized as a reaction to the rites of Bona Dea at her nearby altar, rather
than as a natural state of affairs.

Hercules almost certainly interrupts the women celebrating the dies natalis of the
Aventine temple on 1 May. According to Macrobius, who cites Labeo as his source, a
pregnant sow was sacrificed and certain “more secret” (occultiore) rites were performed. As
Propertius clearly demonstrates, both the worshippers and the religious official in charge of
the festival were women. Brouwer has argued that the rite could not have been a sacra publica
since there is evidence for libertine sacerdotes of Bona Dea, including a freedwoman of Livia.

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60 Macrobi. Sat. 1.12.20-1.
61 CIL 6.2240: Philemati Aug(usta) liberta / sacerdos à Bona / Dea mater Maenali (Philematio, freedwoman of
Augusta, sacerdos of Bona Dea, mother of Maenalus), with Brouwer 1989: 371-2. The epitaph was found in the
tomb of Livia’s freedmen on the Via Appia.
His observation is important, but not necessarily conclusive with respect to the official character of the festival on 1 May. In fact, the dies natalis does appear on the official state calendars as a public festival, which can only mean that the rite was a sacra publica conducted pro populo by a sacerdos publica. In light of this evidence, it seems probable that there were multiple sacerdotes associated with Bona Dea and her Aventine temple. Perhaps a role for Livia’s freedwoman can be found in an aspect of Bona Dea’s cult that receives less notice in literary texts but was evidently of great importance.

_Bona Dea as a Healing Goddess_

Although the ancient sources are unanimous in their opinion that the sanctuary of Bona Dea was off limits to men, epigraphic evidence clearly demonstrates that Bona Dea was worshipped as a healing goddess by both men and women of various social statuses. She is associated with Hygieia, the Greek healing goddess, in an inscription on the base of a now lost statuette from Rome, which reads “Bonae Deae / Hygiae” (to Bona Dea Hygia, *CIL* 6.72 = *ILS* 3514). In an inscription from the Republican period, she is addressed as Bona Dea Oclata (= Oculata), perhaps in reference to her capacity as a healer of eye diseases. The goddess is thanked elsewhere for restoring vision to a dedicant who had been given up by physicians, but recovered by taking medicines supplied by a ministra of Bona Dea:

Felix publicus / Asinianus pontific(um) / Bonae deae agresti Felicu(la) / votum solvit iunicem alba(m) / libens animo ob luminibus / restitutes derelictus a medicis post / menses decem beneficio dominae medicinis sanatus per / eam restituta omnia ministerio Canniae Fortunatae (*CIL* 6.68 = *ILS* 3513).

Felix Asinianus, public slave of the pontifices, fulfilled his vow to Bona Dea Agrestis Felicula, willingly and with good cause, (sacrificing) a white heifer on account of his eyesight having been restored. Abandoned by doctors, he recovered after ten months by taking medicines, by the aid of the Mistress. Through her, all things were restored during Cannia Fortunata’s service as ministra.

While credit for Asinianus’ recovery ultimately belongs to Bona Dea, he is also careful to record the service of Cannia Fortunata, who likely supplied him with the medicine.

According to Macrobius, the aedes of Bona Dea housed a pharmacy, which was administered by women he calls antistites:

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62 For the exclusion of men from Bona Dea’s sanctuary, see Tibullus 1.6.21-4; Prop. 4.9.53-60; Ov. _Ars._ 3.637-8, _Fast._ 5.153; Festus 348-50L; Lactant. _Div. inst._ 3.20.3-4; Macrobi. _Sat._ 1.12.26.
63 *CIL* 6.75 = *ILS* 3508: Anteros / Valeri Bonae / Deae Oclatae / d(onum) d(edit) l(ibens a(nimo) (Anteros, (slave) of Valerius, has given this to Bona Dea Oclata, willingly and gladly).
Quidam Medeam putant, quod in aedem eius omne genus herbarum sit, ex quibus antistites
dant plerumque medicinas, et quod templum eius virum introire non liceat, propter iniuriam
quam ab ingrato viro Iasone perpessa est (Macrobi. Sat. 1.12.25).

Some think she [Bona Dea] is Medea, because all kinds of herbs are found in her temple,
from which the antistites mostly make medicines, which they distribute, and because no man
may enter her temple on account of the wrong she suffered at the hands of her ungrateful
husband Jason.

Macrobius may be using the title antistes, which is a general rather than a specific term, as a
synonym for ministra. Regardless of the exact title, women who served in this position were
responsible for preserving and dispensing herbal remedies. As the dedication of Felix
Asinianus suggests, these officials interacted with male and female worshippers on a regular
basis. While Cannia Fortunata may not have been responsible for offering sacrifices pro
populo, her role as a ministra was vital to the healing cult of Bona Dea.

In conclusion, the ancient evidence reveals that Bona Dea was served by several
different female religious officials. A woman known as the damiatrix offered a sacrifice
called the damium. There was also a female sacerdos publica who presided over the women only
rites of Bona Dea on 1 May. Other sacerdotes, magistriæ and ministriæ, who may often have
been freedwomen or slaves, managed the healing cult of Bona Dea, preparing and
administering herbal remedies in the temple pharmacy. We even know the names of some
of these women, including the ministra Cannia Fortunata and the sacerdos Philematio, liberta of
Livia. In addition to the officials discussed here, there were likely other women serving in
the Aventine temple whose responsibilities and identities have been lost to us. It is clear that
the cult of Bona Dea offered women from various social statuses numerous opportunities to
serve in an official capacity.

The Sacerdos of Fortuna Muliebris

Historical accounts regarding the foundation of the sacerdotium of Fortuna Muliebris
(Feminine Fortune) offer a window into the construction and interpretation of female
religious service in the Republican period. According to Roman tradition, the cult of
Fortuna Muliebris was established in 488. In this year, the exiled Coriolanus, who was
encamped outside the walls of Rome at the head of a Volscian army, was persuaded to turn
back by his mother Veturia, his wife Volumnia and an embassy of Roman matronae. As a

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64 For the meaning and use of antistes, see Wissowa 1912: 370, n. 3, 483.
reward for averting the conflict, the *matronae* asked that they be permitted to found, with their own money, a temple to Fortuna Muliebris on the spot where they had interceded for their country. The senate, which had vowed to grant the *matronae* whatever they requested, agreed to establish a temple to the goddess, though they employed public funds for the purpose and delegated the task of the actual foundation to the consul Proculus Verginius Tricostus Rutilus (cos. 486). 66 The senate did, however, grant the women permission to choose one of their number to serve as the first religious official (*ἱέρεια*) of the new cult. According to Dionysius, they chose Valeria, who had first proposed the embassy and persuaded Veturia and Volumnia to join the other women in their mission. 67 Valeria had orchestrated the “victory” over Coriolanus and the Volscians and while she could not have her name on the new temple, as would a victorious male general, she was given the honor of serving as its first *sacerdos*.

Valeria and the *matronae* observed the first anniversary of Coriolanus’ withdraw from Roman territory by sacrificing on behalf of the Roman people (*ὑπὲρ τοῦ δήμου*, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.55.4) upon an altar set up in the precinct of the as yet unfinished *aedes*. In July of the following year, Verginius officially dedicated the temple and additional sacrifices were offered. Though the senate had decreed that the public treasury should meet the expense of the cult statue, the women dedicated another image of Fortuna Muliebris paid for with money they themselves had contributed. This second statue is reported to have twice told the *matronae* that they had made their dedication in accordance with divine will. 68 When news of this astonishing good omen reached the senate, they ordered new sacrifices and rites to be

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66 The episode highlights one of the many limits on female participation in public religion (on this point, see especially Schultz 2006: 37–44). Though the women asked to fund and found the temple themselves, the senate refused to grant this part of their request. In general, the only Romans permitted to dedicate new temples were magistrates who had been granted permission by the appropriate authority. In the early Republic, the power to authorize temple dedications resided with the senate or the tribunes of the plebs, though later it was held by the plebs themselves (Orlin 1997: 162–7). As Schultz (2006: 43–4, 167, n. 74) points out, however, the women may have felt entitled to ask for permission to dedicate a temple to Fortuna Muliebris because their embassy to Coriolanus had been ratified by the senate (Livy 2.40.1; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.43.3–7), which granted them a quasi-official status.


68 Val. Max. 1.8.4: *rite me, matronae, dedistis riteque dedicatis* (Matrons, you have given me in accordance with religious law, and you have dedicated me in accordance with religious law). See also Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.56.2–3: *Ὅσιῷ πόλεως νόμῳ γυναικεῖς γαμεταὶ δεδωκατέ με* (Matrons, you have dedicated me in accordance with the sacred law of the city); Plut. *Cor.* 37.3: *θεοφιλεὶ με θεσμῷ γυναικεῖς δεδωκατέ* (Women, you have given me in accordance with divinely favored law); Val. Max. 1.8.4: *rite me, matronae, dedistis riteque dedicatis* (Matrons, you have given me in accordance with religious law, and you have dedicated me in accordance with religious law).
performed every year. In addition to this initiative, Valeria called for the institution of new regulations regarding worship of the miraculous cult statue:

αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἐν ἔθει κατεστήσαντο τῇ τῆς ἱερείας χρησάμεναι γνώμῃ, τῷ ξοάνῳ τούτῳ μήτε στεφάνους ἐπιτιθέναι μήτε χεῖρας προσφέρειν γυναῖκας, ὡσις δευτέρων ἐπειράθησαν γάμων, τήν δὲ τιμήν καὶ θεραπείαν αὐτοῦ πᾶσαν ἀποδεδόσθαι ταῖς νεογάμοις (Ant. Rom. 8.56.4).

And the women, upon the advice of their saerdes, established it as a custom that no women who had been married a second time should crown this statue with garlands or touch it with their hands, but that all the honor and worship paid to it should be committed to the newly-married women.

While this passage does not suggest that women who had been married more than once were prohibited from entering the aedes or participating in rites associated with the cult, it is clear that certain ritual activities were entrusted to univirae alone. According to Dionysius, Valeria proposed this new requirement, which the matronae readily adopted.

The veracity of the entire episode has been called into question, though there is some reason to believe that the story is not a complete fabrication. At the very least, it is reasonable to assume that the tale made sense to the early imperial audience for whom our sources were writing. It suggests that women could be imagined as active participants in public religion both as religious officials and advocates for the foundation of a new cult. Livy and Dionysius depict a squabble between the matronae and the senate over the right to fund the new temple of Fortuna Muliebris, and it seems clear that the women are at least partially vindicated by the divine utterance. The episode depicts Roman women utilizing their initiative and money to commemorate a historical event. While women were not the equals of men in the religious sphere, this story suggests that they could contribute to public religious life at the highest level. Moreover, it is particularly noteworthy that a female religious official could be portrayed as a figure important enough to influence cultic practice and institute new sacred regulations.

Many of the details of this later aetiology, if it should be regarded as such, were undoubtedly created to explain certain cultic realities, including the presence of more than one cult statue within the aedes of Fortuna Muliebris. Similarly, it seems likely that during the

69 See also Tert. Monog. 17.4.
70 Mommsen (1874: 24), Gagé (1963: 48-63), Champeaux (1982: 342-60) and Mustakallio (1990: 130-1) argue that the account is a later fabrication. Schultz (2006: 40-1), on the other hand, argues that the story might have a basis in historical reality.
late Republic, the cult was a public one under the supervision of a female official who offered sacrifices on behalf of the *populus Romanus*. This *sacerdos* was almost certainly an *univira* and may often have belonged to an elite family.\(^{72}\) Though it seems highly unlikely that she was elected directly by the Roman *matronae*, perhaps this possibility should not be entirely discounted. In any case, Livy and Dionysius provide a small window into a religious landscape that must have been populated by many women caring for silent and unremembered cult statues. They confirm once again that there were female religious officials at Rome who were important figures within the cults they supervised.

**Sacerdotes of Bacchus**

Female religious officials were also central figures in one of the most famous historical episodes involving Roman women’s religious activity: the violent suppression of the Bacchanalian cult by the senate and consuls in 186.\(^{73}\) Gender, particularly the definition of official roles for men and women in the cult, was clearly at issue in the scandal.\(^{74}\) According to Livy, our primary literary source for the events of this year, the consul of 186, Sp. Postumius Albinus, was alerted to the debauched nature of the Bacchic rites by Aebutius, a young man of equestrian rank, and Hispala Faecenia, a freedwoman and former initiate of the cult.\(^{75}\) The senate reacted by issuing restrictions on the celebration of the Bacchanalian cult and, if Livy is to be believed, imprisoned or executed seven thousand people.

The so-called *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* confirms that the senate imposed severe and wide-ranging limitations on Bacchic worship that were enforced by capital sanctions. The text of this document, preserved in an inscription found at Tirolo in Bruttium, does not represent a single senatorial decree, but rather is a letter addressed to the allies (*foederati*) drawn up at a meeting of the senate on the Nones of October 186 in the

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\(^{72}\) Champeaux 1982: 348-9; Boëls-Janssen 1993: 376-7; Schultz 2006: 75. Gagé (1963: 48-63) had argued that the *sacerdos* of Fortuna Muliebris was a virgin.

\(^{73}\) The bibliography on this subject is enormous. For a detailed treatment of the entire topic, see Pailler 1988, with extensive bibliography. See also Flower 2002a; Schultz 2006: 82-92.

\(^{74}\) For the importance of gender roles and gender ideology in the Bacchic scandal, see especially Flower 2002a, whose analysis I follow closely here, and Schultz 2006: 82-92.

\(^{75}\) Livy 39.8.1-19.7. Though Livy claims that Postumius “discovered” the Bacchic cult in 186, worship of Dionysius was widespread in Italy, particularly in Southern Italy and Campania, from an early period (see, for example, Jeanmaire 1951; Brühl 1953; Nilsson 1957). A funerary inscription from Cumae reveals that initiation rites were also being practiced as early as the fifth century (Turcan 1986). Moreover, as Livy himself points out, the consuls were assigned the task of suppressing the “domestic conspiracy” (*intestinae coniurationis*) at the beginning of the year while other business was put on hold, which suggests that the senate had decided to take the situation seriously even before the new consuls took office (Flower 2002a: 82).
Temple of Bellona with both consuls presiding. The letter outlines various decisions made by the senate about the Bacchanalian cult and includes specific instructions about how the text was to be publicized and enforced. The provisions recorded in the Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus suggest that the senate took action in 186 in order to regulate certain forms of Bacchic worship in Rome and Italy, rather than to eradicate the Bacchanalian cult entirely. While certain practices were subject to an absolute ban, exceptions were possible in several instances. Other cult activities were evidently allowed to continue without special permission and were thus implicitly endorsed by the senate. When considered as a group, these sanctions and exceptions suggest that, among other things, the senate was preoccupied with the definition of appropriate gender roles within the cult.

The senate’s letter urges the destruction of Bacchic cult sites (Bacanalia), except those in which there is something sacred (extrad quam sei quid ibei sacri est, 28). A Bacanal could also be maintained with special permission from the senate through the praetor urbanus (3-4). The decree forbids common funds (11), the exchange of oaths between worshippers (13-4) and the performance of secret rituals (15). Men were permitted to enter a meeting of Bacchic women (Bacae), but only with authorization (7-9), and mixed groups of men and women with more than five participants could meet, provided they had obtained permission from the senate (19-22).

The senate’s letter also regulates who is allowed to serve as a sacerdos or official in the Bacchanalian cult. Men are banned from any leadership role, whether as a sacerdos, magister or promagister, without the possibility of an exception. Members of the cult were also prohibited from appointing women as magistrae or promagistrae, but the decree leaves open the possibility that women could continue to serve as sacerdotes:

Sacerdos nequis vir eset; magister neque vir neque mulier quisquam eset; / neve pecuniam quisquam eorum comoine[m h]abuise vel[let]; neve magistratum, / neve pro magistratu[d], neque virum [neque mul]ierem quiquam fecise velet (10-12).

CIL 12.581 = ILS 18 = ILLRP 511. The inscription was discovered in 1640 at Tirolo in Bruttium and thus reveals only the information that the senate wished to convey to the locals in the Bruttian ager Teuranus (Flower 2002: 81).

For a close reading of the text, see Tierney 1947. The document consists of a series of separate provisions whose relationship to one another is not always clear. Furthermore, the letter contains no explanatory information or any indication of the senate’s rationale for an individual ruling. As a result, the text has proved exceedingly difficult to interpret.

These cult spaces were evidently regarded as dangerous places where men and women had been meeting in secret and interacting in unacceptable ways. Nonetheless, the senate was careful to recognize that some Bacanalia contained sacred objects, which suggests that they did recognize the legitimacy of the cult in some situations.
Let no man be a sacerdos, let no man or woman whatsoever be an official, let none of them consent to having money in a common fund, let no one consent to appointing either a man or a woman as an official or an acting official.\textsuperscript{79}

These provisions suggest that female sacerdotes were permitted, while men were categorically excluded from holding these positions. Other evidence suggests that women traditionally filled all sacerdotal roles in the cult of Bacchus. A female figure on a third century B.C. sarcophagus said to have come from the tomb of the Triclinium at Tarquinii may even represent a sacerdos of the god (Fig. 59).\textsuperscript{80} She is barefoot and wears a tunic, elaborate jewelry and a headdress. From her shoulder hangs a tassel that marks the high rank of Etruscan women in art from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. The woman holds an ivy-topped thrysos and a kantharos (a two-handled drinking cup), both characteristic attributes of followers of Bacchus in Greek and Roman art. Although there is no inscriptive evidence to confirm her identification as a sacerdos of Bacchus, the suggestion is attractive.

The provisions related to the size and composition of cult groups also reaffirm the role of women in the Bacchanalian cult. These regulations apply only to groups including both male and female worshippers. Such mixed gender groups were to consist of no more than five participants, of which three were required to be women, and were presumably expected to be led by a female sacerdos. Groups composed exclusively of women were evidently permitted to meet without any restriction. Indeed, the senate acknowledges that such cult groups will continue to worship under the leadership of a female sacerdos in the second clause of the letter, where men are prohibited from entering a group of Bacchic women (Baca) without permission (7-10).

While modern scholars have often argued that the senate sought to limit women’s growing influence in Roman society by suppressing the Bacchanalian cult, the interpretation offered here suggests otherwise.\textsuperscript{81} The Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus confirms traditional cultic roles for women as sacerdotes and worshippers of Bacchus and regulates the behavior of men who attempt to enter spheres traditionally associated with women and take up leadership roles there. At the same time, several of the provisions clearly aim to strip away elements that endowed the cult with a formal structure similar to that of collegia or priestly

\textsuperscript{79} Translation adapted from Flower 2002a: 95.
\textsuperscript{81} For this interpretation, see Flower 2002a. For a summary of earlier views, see Paillier 1988: 523-96.
colleges associated with the state religion. Following the decree of 186, groups of Bacchic worshippers were no longer permitted to hold funds in common, nor were they permitted to select magistrates of either gender. These provisions represent an attempt by the Roman senate to regulate the organization of private cult associations. They do not, however, imply that the senate hoped to curb the influence of religious officials associated with the cult of Bacchus simply because they were women. Rather, the decree confirms that while religious service was apportioned according to gender, women were in no way excluded from fulfilling official roles. In fact, their service was essential.

**Support Personnel**

No Roman religious official ever worked in isolation. Many rituals involved cooperation between a number of different officials and a range of religious functionaries and ritual specialists always accompanied them. These figures, whose subordinate status has tended to render them less visible in the ancient sources and more easily overlooked by modern scholars, made vital contributions to public religion at Rome. Many of these specialists were women. Festus, for example, refers to a group of otherwise unknown female religious specialists called *simpulatrix*es:

Simpulum vas parvulum non dissimile cyatho, quo vinum in sacrificiis libabatur; unde et mulieres rebus divinis deditae simpulatrixes (455L).

*A simpulum* is a small vessel, not dissimilar to a *cyathus*, from which wine used to be poured out as an offering in sacrifices; from which, also, women devoted to divine matters are called *simpulatrixes*.

In order for these women to have taken their name from the *simpulum*, they must have used the vessel to pour libations on regular ritual occasions. By definition, *simpulatrixes* were qualified to participate in sacrificial rites. The *simpulum*, also known as the *simpuwium*, was essentially a ladle with a long handle that was used to pour libations at sacrificial rites. It was a symbol of priestly status and appears frequently in Roman coinage alongside other sacrificial and religious implements such as the *secessipita* (sacrificial knife) and the *lituus* (priestly wand). That a group of women “devoted to divine matters” could be named after such an important symbol of religious authority offers further confirmation that women were involved in every aspect of public religious service, including sacrifice.

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82 Flemming 2007: 96.
83 For the symbolism of the *simpulum*, see Siebert 1999: 47-51, 236-9.
Festus also mentions a woman called the *canifera* who carried the *canum*, a wicker box that held ceremonial objects.\(^8^4\) This same function may often have been performed by children. The *tutulatae*, for example, were young girls who assisted at the rites held in the *curiae*.\(^8^5\) According to Dionysius, they performed the same duties assigned to Greek *kanephoroi* and *arrhephoroi*.\(^8^6\) In Greek cult, the *kanephoros* was an unmarried virgin who led the sacrificial procession to the altar carrying the *kanoun*, a ritual basket, on her head. Athenian *kanephori*, including the maidens on the Parthenon frieze, wore richly embroidered festival mantles that marked their special ritual status, and we may perhaps imagine that Roman girls chosen to perform a similar function were dressed in a special costume as well.\(^8^7\)

There is also epigraphic evidence for women bearing the titles *magistra* (magistrate) and *ministra* (minister) of various cults.\(^8^8\) A group of four *magistriae* from Minturnae made an offering to Venus (?), while two *magistriae* of Diana from Aquinum dedicated a statue base.\(^8^9\) The epitaph of a *ministra* of Salus from the vicinity of Amiternum records that she died at age thirty after serving the goddess for thirteen years.\(^9^0\) Inscriptions from the imperial period record *ministriae* of servile and libertine status, including two *libertae* who built a shrine (*aedes*) to Bona Dea using their own funds.\(^9^1\) In most cases, it is impossible to determine what duties and functions were assigned to these figures. We have seen that Cannia Fortunata, *ministra* of Bona Dea, may have dispensed medicine to Felix Asinianus, but such information is exceedingly rare.\(^9^2\) In general, it seems likely that *magistriae* and *ministriae* were responsible for the care and maintenance of the sanctuaries whose cults they served.\(^9^3\)

\(^8^4\) Festus 57L.

\(^8^5\) As we have seen, *tutulatae* may often have been the daughters of the married couples who served jointly in the curionate (see chapter seven). When these couples lacked a child of the right age, a girl was chosen from among the families of the *curiae* to serve until she married.

\(^8^6\) Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.22.2.

\(^8^7\) For the *kanephori* and their costume, see Roccos 1995.

\(^8^8\) For *magistriae* and *ministriae* in the epigraphic record, see especially Richlin 1997; Schultz 2006: 69-74. Most epigraphic evidence for female cult officials comes from funerary inscriptions that simply attest to the fact that the deceased had held an office thought worthy of commemoration, though occasionally it is possible to determine more about her social status and family situation. For example, the epitaphs of *magistriae* and *ministriae* reveal that these women were often of libertine or servile status. Since the vast majority of the inscriptions collected by Richlin and Schultz date to the imperial period and were found outside of the city of Rome, I will mention only a few examples.

\(^8^9\) *CIL* 1.2,2685 = *ILLSRP* 737 (Minturnae); *AE* 1978.99 (Aquinum).

\(^9^0\) *CIL* 9.4460 = *ILLS* 3828.

\(^9^1\) *CIL* 5.762 = *ILLS* 3498, with Brouwer 1989: 116-8, No. 113B.

\(^9^2\) See above.

Together, this literary and epigraphic evidence suggests that there were many women at Rome, both slave and free, who fulfilled a variety of vitally important supporting roles within public religion. The temples of Bona Dea and Vesta, for example, which were off-limits to men, may have employed female ostiarii (doorkeepers) and aediti (sacristans). Women may also have served as tibicines (flute-players) or fidicines (lyre-players) in cultic processions and at sacrificial rites. Aelia Recepta was a tympanistria (drummer) associated with the cult of the Magna Mater in the imperial period. Animal sacrifice in particular required a large supporting cast. Aides known as popae were responsible for striking the sacrificial victim with an ax, while other victimarii saw to the actual slaughtering and butchering of the animal. Though these religious practitioners receive little comment in literary texts, they are often depicted with great care and attention to detail in reliefs depicting ritual processions and sacrifices. The majority of these ritual specialists were likely men, but it is surely worth noting that the only popa known by name is a freedwoman, Critonia Philema.

Female Religious Specialists

Republican Rome was apparently inhabited by numerous individuals of diverse origin who offered a variety of religious services. Many of them were women expert in divination. In Plautus’ Miles gloriosus, the old man Periplectomenus lists a number of female divinatory specialists whom an imaginary wife might wish to employ at great cost to her husband:

da quod dem quinquatribus praecantrici, coniectrici, hariolae atque haruspicae (692-3).

Give me some money to give to the woman who performs incantations (praecantrix) at the festival of Minerva, and to the dream interpreter (coniectrix), and the inspired prophetess (hariolae) and the woman who inspects entrails (haruspica). These figures were likely all local or freelance ritual specialists who functioned outside of the official religious system. Some seem to have gone door to door, while others could be

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94 For attendants and servants of religious officials in the city of Rome, see Purell 1983; Horster 2007.
95 CIL 6.2264 = ILS 4165, with Rüpke 2008: 508, No. 455.
97 For the religious specialists discussed in this section, see Dickie 2001.
98 For the translation of these titles, see Dickie 2001: 162.
found in markets.\textsuperscript{99} Many likely doubled as prostitutes, a profession that is closely associated with magic and divination in the ancient sources.\textsuperscript{100} Varro complains that most Roman women hire female praecantrices instead of showing their sick children to a doctor, a comment that reflects the male perception that women were superstitious and easily duped by unscrupulous religious experts.\textsuperscript{101} Male bias aside, it seems likely that these female religious specialists were more popular with other women than with men. As Periplectomenus is quick to point out, all would have expected payment in return for these services.

Marius employed a Syrian seer named Martha, who accompanied him on his campaign against the Germanic tribes of the Cimbri and Teutones.\textsuperscript{102} According to Plutarch, Marius made sacrifices at her bidding and used her predictions of victory to boost the morale of his troops. The way in which Marius and Martha were introduced underscores the notion that freelance religious specialists were generally held in higher esteem by Roman women than they were by men. Martha had initially presented herself to the senate, but her offer to predict the future was rejected. The \textit{saga} next gained an audience with the wives of the senators and convinced them of her skills. In particular, Martha endeared herself to Julia, the wife of Marius, by sitting at her feet during the gladiatorial games and successfully predicting which of the contestants would be victorious. Following this impressive feat, Plutarch claims, Julia sent Martha to her husband, who also admired her abilities. Marius apparently gave Martha a litter and allowed her to appear at the sacrifices clothed in a purple robe that was fastened with a clasp, and carrying a spear that was adorned with fillets and wreathes.\textsuperscript{103} Martha’s role could not have been an official one and Marius must also have maintained a pullarius (chicken keeper). The predictions, and spectacle, Martha provided likely supplemented and enhanced the traditional procedures, but her services were funded by Marius alone.

The vast majority of female diviners would not have achieved the level of success that Martha enjoyed as a member of Marius’ entourage. Nonetheless, her story confirms

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{99} Dickie 2001: 163.
\textsuperscript{100} Dickie 2001: 163-5.
\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Catus vel de liberis educandis} fr. 15 Riese.
\textsuperscript{102} Martha is described as a \textit{saga} (wise woman) by Frontinus (\textit{Strat.} 1.11.12), a \textit{sacriola} (devotee of a divinity) by Valerius Maximus (1.3.4) and as a \textit{μαντίς} (seer) by Plutarch (\textit{Mar.} 17.1-5). As Dickie (2001: 166) notes, the different terms do not necessarily reflect a disagreement over who Martha was, but rather signify the difficulty of finding a term to accurately describe an itinerant Syrian “holy woman.”
\textsuperscript{103} Plut. \textit{Mar.} 17.4: πρὸς δὲ τὰς θυσίας κατησ αυτής φοινικίδα διπλὴν ἐμπεπορπημένη καὶ λόχυχν ἀναδεδεμένην ταινίας καὶ στεφανώμαςι φέρουσα (she attended the sacrifices clothed in a double purple robe that was fastened with a clasp, and carrying a spear that was wreathed with fillets and wreathes).
\end{flushleft}
that there was a role in Roman society for female religious specialists who sought to use their
professed divinatory skills for profit. These women were evidently more popular with other
women, who, according to the stereotypes exploited by Plautus and Varro, were eager to
consult seers and *sagae* on nearly every matter. Because they operated outside of the official
religious system, there was no check on the number of women who could adopt a career in
incantation or divination. For this reason, such “professionals” may have been the most
pervasive female religious figures in the city. They interacted with ordinary Romans on a
daily basis and provided advice on a wide variety of private matters.

Finally, there is evidence for female religious specialists who may have operated in
both public and private contexts. Some dealt with the expiation of prodigies. Festus
mentions a *sacerdos* called the *piatrix*, “who was accustomed to perform expiations” (*quae
expiare erat solita*, 432L), and was also called *simpulatrix* by some, *saga* or *expiatrix* by others.\(^{104}\) Since *piatrices* are not mentioned in any ancient discussion of official expiatory practices,
Celia Schultz suggests that these women were generally employed by private individuals,
rather than the state.\(^{105}\) This may often have been the case. On the other hand, given that a
considerable number of public expiatory rituals in Roman history involved women, an
official role for some of the female religious specialists mentioned above is not entirely
inconceivable.\(^{106}\) A Sibylline Oracle preserved by Phlegon of Tralles, for example, calls for
rites to be performed by “sacrificially knowledgeable old women” (*ἐπισταμένως θυσίαν
γράτη*, *Mir.* 10.22-3 Diels). Rebecca Flemming has identified these women with the *sagae*,
whom Festus describes elsewhere as “experienced in sacred matters” (*perita sacrorum,
427L*).\(^{107}\) Though much uncertainty remains, it seems possible that women who specialized
in the expiation of prodigies were occasionally employed by the Roman state.

**Conclusion**

The material covered in this chapter allows us to begin to appreciate a fuller range of
female religious activity in ancient Rome. The public priesthoods of Liber, Ceres, Bona Dea
and Fortuna Muliebris provide a context for the more familiar offices held by the Vestals

\(^{104}\) For the merits of reading *simpulatrix* in place of *simulatrix*, the alternative given in the MSS, see Flemming
2007: 106, n. 77.


\(^{106}\) Flemming 2007: 106.

\(^{107}\) Flemming 2007: 107. The oracle details a complex set of expiatory rites to be performed in response to the
birth of a hermaphrodite. Phlegon dates it to 125, while MacBain (1982: 127-35) prefers 133.
and flaminicae. As a group, they underscore the remarkable variety present in the Roman religious system at the level of institutional organization. Several cults required the service of an individual female sacerdos. Others, such as that of the Bona Dea, for instance, supported multiple female religious officials simultaneously. Some women, including the saliae and possibly the sacerdotes of Liber, served in an official capacity on a temporary basis. Magistriæ, ministriæ and other female support personnel also had a crucial role in the practice of public religion at Rome, though they did not bear the title sacerdos. Women were not restricted to religious offices of a particular type. Instead, they served the gods in numerous contexts at every level of official public religion in the city of Rome and also a wide range of unofficial positions.
Conclusion

In early December, A.D. 384, Fabia Aconia Paulina delivered a laudatio (eulogy) at the funeral of her husband, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus. Praetextatus was a member of three of the four major religious colleges at Rome and a leading figure in pagan intellectual circles, as well as a successful senator and the consul designate for the following year. The laudatio, which has been preserved in poetic form on a marble statue base, lavishes praise on him for his personal qualities and public successes. It is also strikingly autobiographical. Paulina, who was an initiate into several Greek mystery cults, a recipient of the taurobolium at Rome and a sacerdos of the Magna Mater, Hecate, and Ceres, is eager to provide the details of her own public career in addition to Praetextatus’ elaborate cursus. In doing so, she vocalizes the otherwise unspoken personal and social fulfillment that women could find in religious practice. Indeed, Paulina’s discussion of her official religious activities makes the poem an essential text not only for the study of the late fourth century, but also for the study of women’s religions in ancient Rome more generally.

The monument reveals that Paulina had been initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries, the Lernan rites of Liber, Demeter and Kore, and the cult of Hecate on Aegina. Praetextatus served as her witness (testis), which indicates that he had been initiated before her. Paulina’s impressive list of initiations, which includes the most prestigious mystery cult in the entire Mediterranean, demonstrates her commitment to traditional polytheism and confirms her status as an active member of the pagan aristocracy. But her autobiography includes even more important religious honors, including the title ministra of Hecate, which

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1 Funerary speeches were the climax of the aristocratic funeral spectacle, during which the family advertised the achievements of the recently deceased and his ancestors in the presence of the entire community. Elite funerals may often have included two speeches (Flower 1996: 131). In addition to the laudatio pro rostris, the official eulogy delivered from the rostra in the forum, a simpler speech could be given at the funeral pyre. Although we cannot be certain, Paulina’s laudatio was likely delivered at her husband’s pyre.

2 For full biographies of Praetextatus and Paulina, see Kahlos 2002.

3 CIL 6.1779 = ILS 1259. The majority of scholars who have worked on the text agree that it closely resembles the laudatio she delivered at her husband’s funeral (see, for example, Dronke 1984: 21; Kahlos 1994, 2002; Stevenson 2005: 59). While it was not necessarily a common practice, abbreviated versions of laudationes were occasionally inscribed on funerary monuments; the so-called laudatio Turiae is perhaps the most famous example of this phenomenon. Furthermore, it is possible to identify echoes of the poem in letters penned by Jerome (Ep. 23.3) and Symmachus (Rel. 12.2) just days after the funeral. Since it is unlikely that the inscription on the monument could have been engraved so quickly, we must conclude that the two men heard Paulina express the same sentiments at her husband’s funeral.
indicates that she had achieved further distinction in this cult. This supposition is confirmed by a separate inscription dedicated to Paulina alone, where she is identified as the *hierophantria* of Hecate and Ceres. Paulina had also undergone the *taurobolium* and later served as an *antistes* of Dindymene (Magna Mater) and Attis. While it is not clear what sacred obligations she was expected to fulfill in this role, the title typically refers to a female religious official closely associated with the sanctuary of the deity she served, perhaps in this case the Phrygianum.

Near the end of the poem, Paulina claims that her husband has ensured her fame and reputation and even boasts that men and women alike commend and desire the honors that have been bestowed upon her:

> te propter omnis me beatam, me piam celebrant, quod ipse me bonam disseminas, totum per orbem ignota noscor omnibus. nam te marito cur placere non queam? exemplum de me Romulae matres petunt subolemque pulchram, si tuae similis, putant. optant, probantque nunc viri nunc feminae, quae tu magister indidisti insignia (30-7).

Because of you everyone proclaims me holy and blessed, since it is you who spread my goodness throughout the world. Although unknown, I am known to all. With you as my husband how could I fail to please? The matrons of Romulus’ city seek me as a model and regard their offspring as beautiful if it resembles yours. Men and women alike both seek after and acclaim the honors which you, my teacher, have given me.

This remarkable passage speaks to a crucial interpretive issue in the study of women’s religions in the ancient world. Many scholars who have studied the *laudatio* emphasize the marginalization Paulina must have experienced as a Roman woman. While I do not wish to deny or diminish in any way the very real gender inequalities present in Roman society, the approach generally taken to this poem, which represents one of our only opportunities to recover a female perspective on religious participation, strikes me as overly pessimistic. Paulina is not only eager to communicate the extent of her religious experiences, she is also determined to make the reader understand that her *insignia* were the envy of both women and men. When we consider that Praetextatus was initiated into the same rites as his wife,

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4 In Greek-style mystery cults, a male official known as the *hierophantes*, literally “the one who shows the holy things,” presided over the central rites of the initiation process. He was typically assisted by one or more female *hierophantides* (Connelly 2007). Based on information gleaned from the epigraphic texts related to Praetextatus and Paulina, it appears that the couple held these prestigious positions in the cult of Hecate and perhaps in one or more of the mystery cults of Ceres.

there is little reason to doubt that Paulina’s claim is at least partially true. Both Praetextatus and Paulina advertised their prestigious initiations and religious offices in order to make a statement about their wealth, social status and religious piety.

Traditional religious practices, both public and private, were evidently a very important part of Paulina’s life. In the *laudatio*, she cleverly incorporates a narrative of her own religious history into the panegyric of her husband. Our understanding of women and their role in Roman religion would undoubtedly be very different if we had access to more voices like Paulina’s. Women’s religions were embedded in the patriarchal structure of ancient society, but the autobiographical poem authored by Paulina suggests that religious beliefs and practices were also internalized and supported by women and men alike. The epitaph suggests that Roman women were not coerced or duped into participating in cult, but rather were willing social actors.

The evidence considered in this dissertation, though it is often mediated through the voice of male authors, also confirms that Roman women had a stake in civic religion. The old consensus that women were barred from sacrificing has been effectively demolished. In fact, the ancient evidence suggests that official religious service is the one area of public life in which Roman women assumed roles of equal legitimacy and comparable status to those of men. Although the specific ritual context was often different, female religious officials performed many of the same ritual acts carried out by their male colleagues, including blood sacrifice. The ritual sphere allowed women a degree of autonomy and agency they generally lacked in other contexts. Categorically excluded from voting in the assembly or holding political office, women affirmed and enacted their citizenship by participating in public cult and representing their fellow citizens to the gods. Religious practice, both in the Roman household and in public life, was gender inclusive.

The ritual responsibilities assigned to female religious officials varied widely. The Vestals tended the eternal flame on the hearth of Vesta and manufactured *mola salsa*. They also participated in a variety of agricultural and purification rites and offered sacrifices and prayers for the well being of the Roman people. Their position within the religious system was absolutely central. The *flaminica Dialis* and the *regina sacrorum* are also known to have

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6 For this view, see also Schultz 2006; Connelly 2007.
7 For gender and agency in the study of religion, see, for example, Clark 2004: 217-42. The essays in Parea and Tzanetou (2007) explore this issue in the context of ancient Greek and Roman religious culture.
offered regular sacrifices in the *regia*, which stood in the heart of the Roman *forum*. The *antistites* of Bona Dea, on the other hand, prepared herbal remedies in the goddess’ Aventine temple for a healing cult that was patronized primarily by freedmen and slaves. In every case, specific religious activities were associated with an individual office. At Rome, a religious official derived his or her authority to perform ritual acts from his or her institutional position. When sacrificial and ritual capacity is understood in this way, we are able to understand more fully how the religious system was able to accommodate such a variety of officials, including those who were primarily concerned with the cult of an individual deity, such as the Vestals and the *flamines* and *flaminicae*, and those like the *augures* and *pontifices*, whose duties included advising the senate and magistrates on religious matters. The inauguration ceremony or rite of *captio* transformed a citizen into a religious official with particular rights and responsibilities.

In order for an individual to take up his new status as a religious official, however, he had to meet certain office-specific selection criteria. A potential *curio*, for example, was expected to be a member of the *curia* he would represent, while a *flamen maior* had to be the son of a confarreate marriage and be living in a marriage concluded by that rite. The *sacerdos Cereris*, on the other hand, was a Greek-born woman who became a Roman citizen just prior to taking up her office. In each case, the selection criteria were tied to the specific requirements and obligations of the office in question. Marriage was central to the Roman flaminate, which required the full participation of both the *flamen* and his wife, the *flaminica*. The *sacerdos Cereris* was chosen for her “foreign knowledge” (*peregrina scientia*, Cic. *Balb.* 55), and charged with presiding over the Roman version of the Greek rites of Ceres and Proserpina. Within the ritual system, official status was carefully regulated.

Once installed in office, a religious official’s relationship to the community was altered fundamentally. He or she was now responsible to act on behalf of the community (or a subset of it), whether as a ritual agent or an advisor who consulted special books and sacred laws. This new relationship was constructed and expressed in different ways. The *sacerdos Cereris*, who had been born a Greek woman, was made a Roman citizen so that she could pray and sacrifice on behalf of citizens “with the frame of mind of a native and a citizen” (*mente domestica et civili*, Cic. *Balb.* 55). The Vestals underwent the most dramatic change in status: release from *patria potestas* and freedom from *tutela* ensured that a *sacerdos* of
Vesta belonged to and represented not an individual Roman family, but rather the entire community.

In keeping with their special status, Roman religious officials were often differentiated from their fellow citizens by their dress and adornment. The apex was regarded as the insigne (emblem) of the flamen, an unmistakable mark of his status and function. The brightly colored flammenum would have made the flaminica Dialis instantly recognizable on the streets of Rome. The Vestals, whose costume may have been the most elaborate, were differentiated from other women by their special hairstyle, the seni crines, as well as their infulae, vittae, suffibula and special soft shoes. Clothing and other adornment helped to construct a religious identity and communicated an official’s status to the community. Dress could also serve an important ritual function, since Roman religious officials could not fulfill sacrifice without a veil or special headgear.

It is clear that women could hold official positions within the religious system. There is also evidence that the Romans viewed their female religious officials as specialists. The Vestals, for instance, could advise the pontifices and the senate on matters related to their sphere of influence, as they did following the so-called Bona Dea scandal in 62. Older Vestals were also responsible for teaching the sacra to new initiates, who would in turn impart the traditions they had received to the next generation. As we have just seen, the sacerdos Cereris was selected for her Greek scientia. In literature, female religious officials are depicted as respected and knowledgeable women who understand and even influence sacred regulations within the cults they serve. Ovid’s flaminica Dialis, for example, appears as a repository of religious knowledge related to women’s lives, particularly the days on which marriage ought to be avoided. Valeria, the first sacerdos of Fortuna Muliebris, is credited with instituting a rule that prohibited any woman who had been married a second time from adorning the goddess’ cult statue. This evidence suggests that female religious officials enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy and authority over the rituals and religious regulations of their own cults. In other words, women were not simply tools of the male priestly hierarchy, but rather ritual agents in their own right.

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8 Serv. Aen. 1.305.
9 As noted in the introduction, possession of “religious expertise” has been suggested as one possible definition of a Roman religious official.
In Rome, as in other societies, religion and religious activities helped to define gender roles and the relationship between the sexes. By considering the offices held by women as a group, we are better able to understand the relationship between the normal feminine roles of daughter, wife and mother, and the role of female religious officials. The Vestals were chosen as young girls and remained celibate throughout their tenure in office. Many of their ritual obligations may normally have been assigned to the young women of typical Roman households. By contrast, the position and responsibilities of the flaminicae and the regina sacrorum were defined by their marital status. The nature of the relationship between these religious officials and the lives of other Roman women can be illustrated most clearly by the costume of the Roman bride, who stood on the threshold between maidenhood and married life. Young nuptae wore the seni crines, the hairstyle of the Vestal Virgins, as a pledge of their virginal purity and the flammeum, the brightly colored veil of the flaminica Dialis, as an assurance of their future fidelity and matronal castitas. Together, the Vestals and the flaminica represented the virtues associated with two crucial phases of a woman’s life.

If religious institutions and the performance of rituals simultaneously reflected and shaped the specific social roles assigned to women (and men), it stands to reason that rites requiring cooperation between the sexes helped to inculcate socially sanctioned patterns of gender relations. The structure of the flaminate, for example, reflected women’s subordinate position in Roman society. At the same time, however, it demonstrates that the religious activities of men and women reinforced and complemented one another. This principle was true at the level of household, local and citywide cult. Husbands and wives observed domestic rites together with the help of their children and household slaves, just as flamines and flaminicae served jointly in the public sphere. Moreover, the flaminate and other offices like it confirm that both men and women fulfilled official roles in Roman religion. The flaminicae and the regina sacrorum were not simply the wives of male religious officials, they were sacredotes in their own right. Nor was cooperation between the genders limited to husbands and wives. In his symbolic picture of Rome’s permanence and his own poetic immortality, Horace links the pontifex and the Vestal and positions both on the Capitol. At Rome, men and women served their gods together.

10 For this point, see Schultz 2006: 80-1.
Appendix
Public Religious Officials in Republican Rome

The **collegium pontificum**¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Social Status</th>
<th>Duration of office</th>
<th>Major activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pontifices</strong> (The head of the college was known as the <em>pontifex maximus</em>)</td>
<td>3, 4, 9 from the <em>lex Ogulnia</em> on, 15 under Sulla, 16 under Caesar</td>
<td>Originally patricians, also plebeians from the <em>lex Ogulnia</em> on</td>
<td>Normally for life</td>
<td>Advised the senate and magistrates on religious traditions and sacred law, regulated the calendar, participated in certain religious rites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flamen and flaminica Dialis</strong></td>
<td>1 couple</td>
<td>Patrician</td>
<td>For life, but resigned following a major ritual error or the death of either spouse</td>
<td>Primarily concerned with the cult of Jupiter. The <em>flamen</em> participated in the Vinalia and the festival of Fides. He also presided over marriages by <em>confarreatio</em>. The <em>flaminica</em> sacrificed to Jupiter on the <em>nundinae</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flamen and flaminica Martialis</strong></td>
<td>1 couple</td>
<td>Patrician</td>
<td>For life, but resigned following a major ritual error (and perhaps the death of either spouse)</td>
<td>Primarily concerned with the cult of Mars. The <em>flamen</em> participated in the festival of Fides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flamen and flaminica? Quirinalis</strong></td>
<td>1 couple?</td>
<td>Patrician</td>
<td>Same as <em>flamen</em> and <em>flaminica Martialis</em></td>
<td>Primarily concerned with the cult of Quirinus. The <em>flamen</em> sacrificed to Consus and at the Robigalia and Larentalia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flamines and flaminicæ minores</strong></td>
<td>12 couples?</td>
<td>Plebeians</td>
<td>For life?</td>
<td>Primarily concerned with the cult of individual deities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rex and regina sacrorum</strong></td>
<td>1 couple</td>
<td>Patrician</td>
<td>For life, but perhaps</td>
<td>Believed to have taken over the religious obligations of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ This table is based on similar lists compiled by Mary Beard (1990: 20-1), John Scheid (2003: 134-5) and Jörg Rüpke (2007b: 223-8).
resigned following the death of either spouse
the king and queen after the regal period. The *regina* sacrificed to Juno on the *kalendae*.

| **Virgines Vestales**  
| (The eldest Vestal was known as the *virgo maxima*) | Originally 22, 6 throughout the historical period | Patricians and plebeians | Thirty years, though most remained in the order for life | Guarded the communal hearth and *penus*, produced *mola salsa*, participated in the New Year’s rites on 1 March, the Fordicidia, Parilia, Argei, Vestalia, Consualia, Opsconsivia, October Horse, Bona Dea, and Parentalia. |

### Other collegia and sodalitates

| **Augures** | 3, 6, 9 from the *lex Ogulnia* on, 15 under Sulla, 16 under Caesar | Originally patricians, also plebeians from the *lex Ogulnia* on | For life | Controlled the auspices, advised the senate and magistrates, performed inaugurations. |
| **Curiones and wives**  
| (The head of the college was known as the *curio maximus*) | 30 couples | Perhaps originally patricians, later also plebeians | For life, but perhaps resigned following the death of either spouse | Celebrated the sacrifices of the *curiae*. |
| **Fetiales**  
| (Operated in pairs: a *pater patratus* and a *verbenarius*) | 20 | Perhaps originally patricians, later also plebeians | Normally for life | Communicated the diplomatic decisions of the senate, ritually declared war. |
| **Fratres Arvales** | 12 | Unknown | For life | Sacrificed to Dea Dia. |
| **Luperci** | 2 groups of 12? each  
<p>| (<em>Fabiani</em> and <em>Quinctiales</em>) | Originally patrician, later also plebeians | Temporarily | Participated in the rites of the Lupercalia. |
| <strong>(Quin)decemviri sacris faciundis</strong> | Originally 2, 10 from 367 on, 15 by 51, 16 | Originally patricians, also plebeians | Normally for life | Looked after and consulted the Sibyline books. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Saliae Virgines</strong> (The head of the association was known as the praesul)</th>
<th>Under Caesar</th>
<th>from 367 on</th>
<th>Temporary</th>
<th>Sacrificed in the regia.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salii</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>For life, but resignation was common after election to another public office</td>
<td>Associated with the cult of Mars. Processed and danced through the city in March and October.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Septemviri epulones</strong></td>
<td>Originally 3, 7 from the lex Domitia on, 10 under Caesar</td>
<td>Patricians and plebeians</td>
<td>Normally for life</td>
<td>Organized ritual feasts for the gods. Controlled the public games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sodales Titii</strong></td>
<td>12?</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Dealt with the auspices?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Other public religious offices** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Damiatrix** | 1 | Unknown | Unknown | Offered the damium to Bona Dea. |
| **Flamines and flaminicae? montanorum** | 7 couples? | Unknown | Unknown | Performed rites on behalf of the communities of the montes. |
| **Sacerdos of Bona Dea** | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown | Primarily concerned with the cult of Bona Dea. |
| **Sacerdos of Ceres** | 1 | Greek born | Unknown | Primarily concerned with the cult of Ceres. |
| **Sacerdos of Dis Pater? (Attested only in the imperial period)** | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown | Primarily concerned with the cult of Dis Pater. |
| **Sacerdos of Fortuna Muliebris** | 1 | Unknown | Unknown | Primarily concerned with the cult of Fortuna Muliebris. |
| **Sacerdotes of Liber? (May not have been public officials)** | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown | Offered sacrifices for a fee at the Liberalia. |
| **Tubicines sacrorum** | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown | Purified the tubi at the Tubilustrium. |
----. 2007. The Roman Triumph. Cambridge, MA.


----. 2007. Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi. NY.


Thompson, J. E.  2005.  Images of Vesta and the Vestal Virgins in Roman State Religion and Imperial Policy of the First and Second Centuries A.D.  Diss.  Yale University.  New Haven.


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Figure 47  Detail of the South Processional Frieze of the Ara Pacis Augustae showing Augustus, his attendants and the *flamines*. 13-9 B.C. Museo dell’Ara Pacis Augustae, Rome. Photo courtesy of vroma.org

Figure 48  Medallion of Julia Domna showing six Vestal Virgins sacrificing at a small altar in front of the *aedes Vestae*, early third century A.D. Photo courtesy of vroma.org.

Figure 49  Detail of the altar relief of the Ara Pacis Augustae showing a *lictor* and a Vestal Virgin. Rome, 13-9 B.C. Museo dell’Ara Pacis Augustae, Rome. Photo by author.

Figure 50  Denarius of C. Clodius Vestalis showing Flora and Claudia, 41 B.C. (Crawford 512/1). Photo © Trustees of the British Museum

Figure 51  Fresco from the House of Julius Polybius, Pompeii showing the *genius* and *inno* sacrificing. Second century B.C. (Panetta 2005, p. 108).

Figure 52  Detail of the South Processional Frieze of the Ara Pacis Augustae showing three *flamines*. Rome, 13-9 B.C. Museo dell’Ara Pacis Augustae, Rome. Photo © F. Tronchin.

Figure 53  Fresco from the Villa Imperiale showing a bride seated on a bridal couch. Pompeii, first century B.C. Museo Nazionale Archeologico, Naples. Photo courtesy of unisob.na.it.
Figure 54  Fresco from the Villa of the Mysteries showing a bride wearing the *flammeum*. Pompeii, first century B.C. Museo Nazionale Archeologico, Naples. Photo courtesy of vroma.org

Figure 55  Detail of the *Aldobrandini Wedding* showing a bride with her *flammeum*. Rome, first century B.C. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Musei Vaticani. Photo © Zenodot Verlagsgesellschaft mbH.

Figure 56  Denarius of C. Servilius showing Flora and two warriors, 57 B.C. (Crawford 423). Photo © Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 57  Plan of the eastern side of the *forum* during the archaic period showing the *regia* (1), the *aedes Vestae* (2), the *atrium Vestae* (3) and the house of the *rex* and *regina sacrorum* (Coarelli 2007, Fig. 21).

Figure 58  Renaissance drawing after the lost funerary monument of Hateria, *sacerdos Ditis Patris*. *Codex Pighianus* fol. 035r. Photo courtesy of the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin.

Figure 59  Stone sarcophagus lid showing a *sacerdos* or initiate of Bacchus. Tarquinia, third century B.C. The British Museum. Photo © Trustees of the British Museum.