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The Roles of Patrician and Plebeian Women in Their Religion in the Republic of Rome

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

by
Lesa A. Young
August 2002

Dr. Doug Burgess, Chair

Dr. Dale Schmitt

Dr. Jeff Gold

Keywords: Roman Women, Patrician Women, Plebeian Women,
Religion, Vestal Virgins, Republic

ABSTRACT

The Roles of Patrician and Plebeian Women in Their Religion in the Republic of Rome

by

Lesa A. Young

This paper looks at the roles of patrician and plebeian Roman women in their religion. It investigates the topic during the period of the Republic (509-30 BCE) and pulls the information together in a concise manner.

The primary sources used were narrative histories and literature from the late Republic, as well as from the Imperial period up through the second century, that reflect the opinions of the Imperial period. The secondary sources precipitated further research into primary sources and comparisons of the studies.

It was found that women played private and secondary roles in their religion. Due to changes in the laws and in the society, women in the late Republic had more control over their own interests than did the women in the early Republic, although this control did not widely spread to their religious rituals. Public roles and power were basically limited to the Vestal Virgins.

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2. THE PERIOD OF THE REPUBLIC.....	9
3. PRIVATE RITUALS.....	26
<i>Numina</i>	27
<i>Lararium</i>	28
<i>Penates</i>	30
<i>Vesta</i>	30
<i>Parilia</i>	31
<i>Lemuria</i>	32
<i>Ambarvalia</i>	32
4. LIFE RITUALS.....	34
Rituals at Birth.....	34
Marriage.....	36
Burial Rituals.....	41
Divination and Dream Interpretation.....	43
5. PUBLIC RITUALS.....	44
Participation in Sacrificial Rituals.....	46
Temple/Shrine Worship.....	46
Feasts/Festivals.....	50
Circuses.....	55
<i>Ludi</i>	56
6. PUBLIC ROLES.....	58
Vestal Virgins.....	58
Other Roles.....	63
7. CONCLUSION.....	66

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	69
VITA.....	74

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the roles of Roman women in their religion. It includes both patrician and plebeian women, as well as public and private roles and focuses on the period of the Republic (509-30 BCE). Some of the questions to be looked at are: To what extent were mothers responsible for private rituals at home? What type of activities did they participate in as private citizens in the public festivals? How extensive were public religious positions held by women? What role did the Vestal Virgins play in Rome?

The paper is divided into five chapters: The Period of the Republic, Private Rituals, Life Rituals, Public Rituals, and Public Roles. The Period of the Republic gives background information about the history, politics, and the role of women in these areas throughout the Republic. During the Republic wars, droughts, famines, and other crises made an impact upon the laws pertaining to women and the roles they played. As many men were killed or away from Rome, women had to take a more active leading role in affairs. This impacted attitudes, as well as events, and knowing this helps to understand the women in the Republic. Also included in the first chapter are the mythological stories from Rome's pre and early Republican days. The Rape of the Sabine women, the Rape of Lucretia, and the story of the mother of Coriolanus all represent the traditions of "good Roman women". Then looking at the passage of the *lex Oppia* and eventual repealing, it becomes evident that women moved from the secondary position of coercing the men to achieve their goals, to having the courage and ability to speak out somewhat directly for

their own desires. It never evolves into women having full male rights, but steps are made toward women being responsible for their own interests and welfare.

The chapter on Private Rituals investigates the rituals, roles, and practices of a Roman matron in her own home. As the *mater*, she is responsible for carrying out the requests of the *paterfamilias* and for educating her children in the religious rituals, especially her daughters. Particularly the religious tasks that are typically related to women's work fall to the mothers and daughters, such as weaving wreaths, preparing the salt-cakes, reciting prayers for specific tasks, etc. *Numina*, *Lararium*, *Lares*, *Penates*, *Vesta*, *Parilia*, *Lemuria*, and *Ambarvalia* are discussed in this chapter. Explanations of the rituals and the tasks of women are given for each.

The chapter on Life Rituals explores the rituals and beliefs of the Roman women concerning her major life occurrences. These include birth, marriage, and death. Also included are brief descriptions of divination and dream interpretations. As women, they were not allowed to read the *auspices* or interpret dreams. But as superstitious people, the outcome of these practices definitely impacted women as Romans. The interpretations would define how/what she could do.

The Public Rituals includes the women's roles in public festivals. How they could participate is explored, as well as a number of the festivals. By the end of the Republic, there were so many festivals and holidays that it was a daily occurrence. The men brought foreign beliefs and practices back from wars and included them in the religious calendar so as to not offend any gods. Those investigated in this chapter are the participation in sacrificial rituals, temple/shrine worship, feasts/festivals, circuses, and *ludi*.

The chapter on Public Roles looks at the role of the Vestal Virgins and also at the few other minor public positions, such as the wife of the *flamen* of Jupiter. These leading religious positions were few in number but played a powerful role as far as women were concerned. The Vestals had more independence than any other women, although they still answered to the *Pontifex Maximus*. He played the role of the *paterfamilias* for them. And they walked the line between the genders, being women, having some typical female tasks to do for Rome's hearth, but also having some of the legal rights normally reserved for the males.

The sources used were primary, secondary, and hypertexts. The main primary sources I used were Ovid's *Fasti*, Livy, Plutarch, and Catullus Tibullus. The primary sources were narrative histories and literature from the late Republic and from the Imperial period. The Imperial sources were up through the second century. These sources reflect what the Imperial attitudes were at that time regarding the Republic. By the time of these writings, Augustus had enacted his reforms, idealized the Republic, and held it up as a model Rome that should be followed. The mythologies included were written in the late Republic about the beginning of the Republic but are accepted as generally what the Roman of the time would have accepted as part of the Rome's past.

For the secondary sources I particularly used W. Warde Fowler's works, William Reginald Halliday, Richard A. Bauman, and Finley Hooper. The secondary sources used primary sources for their information and I used their bibliographies to research primary sources. They also used artifacts, legal documents from the Republic and Imperial periods, writings on public buildings, monuments, etc., public records, and primary sources in the original languages. I used translations of the primary sources, as well as of

some of the secondary sources. Most early research done on ancient Rome was in French, German, Latin, or Greek.

I also used the secondary sources as a study in their conclusions, comparisons, and comments on each other's work. This helped to organize the material, to comprehend the implications of the different relationships between festivals, and to pull out the women's roles from the studies of religion in general.

This research was done to fulfill a personal interest in the subject. It was to further a personal search for the meaning of women's roles in their society, particularly in their religion. I chose Rome because of a long-standing interest in the civilization and because the English translations were available for the sources.

CHAPTER 2

THE PERIOD OF THE REPUBLIC

The Republic of Rome (509-30 BCE) was the period between the monarchical and the imperial periods of Rome. It was founded with strong anti-monarchical feelings. This allowed a more representative government to be established. With citizenship came the duties of participating in politics, serving in the military, and having the honor and duty of protecting “hearth and home.” Women of the patrician and plebeian classes were considered citizens, but without the privileges of participating in politics or in military activities. Seven hundred years after the formation of the Republic, the jurist Ulpian (ca. A.D.200) stated, “Women are barred from all civil and public functions. They may not be judges or jurors, or hold magistracies, or appear in court or intercede for others, or be agents.”¹

In the early Republic, important traditions were begun which played a vital role in Rome’s history. Some of these traditions, such as divination methods and temples, had been inherited from the Etruscans during the monarchical period. Others, such as farmer-citizens serving in the government, came from practical necessity in an agricultural society. One early pre-Republican legend was the story of the “Rape of the Sabine Women.” As the story goes, there were no women in Rome. So the Romans invited their neighbors, the Sabines, to come to a festival. The Romans kidnapped the young girls of the Sabines. The women subsequently married and bore sons to the Romans. The Sabines

¹ Richard A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1.

attacked Rome in outrage, and the women intervened in the middle of the battle, and brought peace to the two cities.² Livy recorded the account in his history of Rome.

...but owing to the want of women a single generation was likely to see the end of her greatness, since she had neither prospect of posterity at home nor the right of intermarriage with her neighbours. So, on the advice of the senate, Romulus sent envoys round among all the neighbouring nations to solicit for the new people an alliance and the privilege of intermarrying... Nowhere did the embassy obtain a friendly hearing. In fact men spurned, at the same time that they feared, both for themselves and their descendants, that great power which was then growing up in their midst;... Romulus, ... made ready solemn games in honour of the equestrian Neptune, ... Many people---for they were also eager to see the new city---gathered for the festival, especially those who lived nearest, ... The Sabines, too, came with all their people, including their children and wives. They were hospitably entertained in every house, and when they had looked at the site of the city, its walls, and its numerous building, they marvelled that Rome had so rapidly grown great. When the time came for the show, and people's thoughts and eyes were busy with it, the preconcerted attack began. At a given signal the young Romans darted this way and that, to seize and carry off the maidens. In most cases these were taken by the men in whose path they chanced to be. Some, of exceptional beauty, had been marked out for the chief senators, and were carried off to their houses by plebeians to whom the office had been entrusted. One, who far excelled the rest in mien and loveliness, was seized, the story relates, by the gang of a certain Thalassius. Being repeatedly asked for whom they were bearing her off, they kept shouting that no one should touch her, for they were taking her to Thalassius, and this was the origin of the wedding-cry. The sports broke up in a panic, and the parents of the maidens fled sorrowing. They charged the Romans with the crime of violating hospitality, and invoked the gods to whose solemn games they had come, deceived in violation of religion and honour. The stolen maidens were no more hopeful of their plight, nor less indignant. But Romulus himself went amongst them and explained that the pride of their parents had caused this deed, when they had refused their neighbours the right to intermarry; nevertheless the daughters should be wedded and become co-partners in all the possessions of the Romans, in their citizenship and, dearest privilege of all to the human race, in their children only let them moderate their anger, and give their hearts to those to whom fortune had given their persons. A sense of injury had often given place to affection, and they would find their husbands the kinder for this reason, that every man would earnestly endeavour not only to be a good husband, but also to console his wife for the home and parents she had lost. His arguments were seconded by the wooing of the men, who excused their act on the score of passion and love, the most moving of all pleas to a woman's heart. The resentment of the brides was already much diminished at the very moment when their parents, in

² Finley Hooper, *Roman Realities* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 26.

mourning garb and with tears and lamentations, were attempting to arouse their states to action....Then the Sabine women, whose wrong had given rise to the war, with loosened hair and torn garments, their woman's timidity lost in a sense of their misfortune, dared to go amongst the flying missiles, and rushing in from the side, to part the hostile forces and disarm them of their anger, beseeching their fathers on this side, on that their husbands, that fathers-in-law and sons-in-law should not stain themselves with pious bloodshed, nor pollute with parricide the suppliants' children, grandsons to one party and sons to the other. "If you regret, "they continued," the relationship that unites you, if you regret the marriage-tie, turn your anger against us; we are the cause of war, the cause of wounds, and even death to both our husbands and our parents. It will be better for us to perish than to live, lacking either of you, as widows or as orphans." It was a touching plea, not only to the rank and file, but to their leaders as well. A stillness fell on them, and a sudden hush. Then the leaders came forward to make a truce, and not only did they agree on peace, but they made one people out of the two.³

Another story from the pre-Republic days of Rome, and one in which a woman played a role in the ending of the monarchy, is the legend of the "Rape of Lucretia." The king, Tarquin the Proud, had a son named Sextus. His cousin, Tarquinius Collatinus, had a wife named Lucretia whom Sextus desired. In the husband's absence, Sextus showed up at Lucretia's house and she received him as a guest. Rules of hospitality and kinship required her to let him into the house. In the night, Sextus assaulted Lucretia. He told her if she did not submit, he would kill both her and her slave, and leave them naked together to insinuate they were having an affair. She could not allow either her husband's nor her father's names to be sullied in this manner. Afterwards, she told her father and his friend Brutus what had happened, then stabbed herself. Her father, Brutus, and her husband took revenge upon Sextus. The people were outraged, exiled Tarquin the Proud, and renounced the monarchical system. They also raised Lucretia's memory up to be the model wife and mother. She became the ideal for the patrician matron.⁴

...Lucretia. Beside her couch were baskets of fluffy wool. By a dim light her maidservants were spinning their quota. In their midst she said in a gentle voice, "Hurry

³ Livy *Book I.VIII*9.1ff (trans. B. O. Foster, *Livy*, 13 vols. [London: William Heinemann, 1925]), 33-49.

⁴ Hooper, *Roman Realities*, 34.

now, hurry, girls. I must send this homemade cloak to your master as soon as it's finished. . . . That man of mine is so impulsive, rushing all over with his sword at the ready. I grow faint and almost die when I imagine him fighting, and a cold chill grips my heart." In tears she stopped and let go the thread she'd begun, and looked modestly down in her lap. That in itself was charming. Her modest tears were charming, . . . Meanwhile a raging fire ignites the young prince, and he is blindly in the grip of mad passion. Her beauty is attractive, her snowy complexion and golden hair, and a charm which is completely uncontrived. Her speech is attractive, and her voice, and her unavailability. The smaller his chances, the greater his desire. . . . As a visitor the villain entered the home of Collatinus. He was warmly received, as a relative by blood. How mistaken minds can be! Unaware of his real motive, the hapless young woman served the villain a meal. He was finished with the meal. The time for sleep had come. It was night and the house was completely dark. He got up and freed his gilded sword from its scabbard, and came, modest wife, to your chamber. As he got on the bed, the king's son spoke: "Lucretia, I've got my sword. It's Tarquin speaking." No reply. She'd lost her voice, the strength to speak was gone and with it all composure. She trembled like a lamb caught away from the fold, lying beneath a predatory wolf. What to do? Resist? A woman who resists will be overpowered. Cry out? The sword in his hand prevented that. Escape? His hands on her breasts were forcing her down, breasts only her husband had ever touched. Her fervent foe persisted with prayers and bribes and threats. Prayers, bribes, and threats had no effect. "No use," he said. "I'll take your life and spread suspicion. Your rapist will bear false witness to adultery. I'll kill a slave and say I caught you together." Fear for her honor triumphed and the girl gave in. . . . At last day dawned. She sat with her hair in disarray, like a mother going to her son's funeral, and summoned her aged father and faithful spouse from camp. Each of them came at once. When they saw her condition, they asked the reason for her grief, who had died, what trouble had struck. She kept still a long time, modestly veiling her face. Her tears pored down in a constant stream. Father and spouse both comforted her tears, and begged her to speak. They wept and grew pale from vague unease. Three times she tried to speak and failed. On the fourth attempt she still didn't look them in the face. "Do I have Tarquin to thank for this too, that I, that I must unhappily speak of my own disgrace?" She told what she could, but not the last part. She wept and her wifely cheeks turned scarlet. Father and spouse pardon what she had been forced to do. "The pardon you grant, I myself refuse." At once she stabbed her breast with a concealed weapon and fell bleeding at her father's feet. Even then, on the point of death, she made sure her collapse was not unseemly—her last concern as she fell. On top of the body, there, groaning for their mutual loss, heedless of propriety, father and husband lay. Brutus "the dolt" was there. . . . That was the monarchy's final hour.⁵

The two classes, plebeian and patrician, were based upon ancestry, not particularly upon wealth, although the patricians came to be the wealthy class. The split in the social grouping may have come out of the struggle to end the rule of the monarchy. The early

⁵ Ovid *Fasti* II, 741ff (trans. Betty Rose Nagle, *Ovid's Fasti Roman Holidays* [Bloomington: Indiana

Republic had the two social classes, with the patricians gaining control of larger amounts of land while shrinking in numbers. In the late Republic, the patricians were part of the noble class of landowners who could claim *consuls*, or chief magistrates, as ancestors.

As the patricians gained in wealth and power, the plebeians turned to them with requests for support and protection. This gave rise to the “institution” of the patron-client relationships. This connection between the classes began out of the need to survive physically and became a method of political survival. The concept of *paterfamilias*, or the father of the family controlling every aspect of his family, supported the patron-client relationships. The patrons became the *paterfamilias* to the clients in some ways, having control in economic issues, then, in turn, requiring loyalty and obedience from their clients. This hierarchy of status and power permeated social, economic, legal, and religious affairs, as well as the Roman perspective of life.

The political set-up was a government of different offices held for specific amounts of time and held accountable with a type of check and balance system. Two consuls were elected for a term of one year and were co-rulers of the city. Their power was limited, but they had *imperium*, or the right to command, *coertio*, legal power to force a citizen to do something (within the law), and *potestas*, power based on moral authority. They split domestic and military duties equally.

The *Pontifex Maximus* held the power to maintain the *pax deorum*, the peace of the gods. Religion was a corporate as well as a private affair; therefore all rituals had to be followed exactly so as to not anger the gods. The Romans were very superstitious and believed in omens, signs, and *numens*, the divine spirits in objects. The welfare and survival of the city depended upon the choices of the gods. The Romans believed that the

gods knew the future and had control over it. This relationship between the city and the gods, especially with Jupiter Optimus Maximus, was contractual and like the patron-client relationships. *Pietas* refers to the respect and piety held towards not only the gods but also towards the family and the state.

The *collegium pontificum*, the college of pontiffs, had originally three priests, but gained thirteen more throughout the Republic. It also had the Flamens, six Vestal Virgins, and the *Rex sacrorum*, King of the sacred rites, who served the city to keep the *pax deorum*.⁶ They would call the *haruspices* to “ ‘take the auspices’ by searching the sky for signs before conducting any business. Especially important were messages interpreted from birds. An outcry from one of them rendered the proceedings ineffective. Otherwise, the direction of their flight was observed; the manner in which eagles and vultures flew was considered significant. An inspection of the entrails of sacrificial animals gave further clues to the will of the gods.”⁷ The mood of the city, as well as the decisions made, were dependent upon the signs. Livy describes this in his history of Rome, even to the point of the accusation of a Vestal of unchastity. “To increase the general anxiety which was now felt, portents implying the anger of the gods were of almost daily occurrence in the City and the country. For this expression of divine wrath no other reason was alleged by the soothsayers, when they had enquired into it both officially and privately, sometimes by inspecting entrails and sometimes by observing the flight of birds, than the failure duly to observe the rites of religion. These alarms at length resulted in the condemnation of Oppia, a Vestal Virgin, for unchastity, and her

⁶ H. J. Rose, *Ancient Roman Religion* (London: Hutchinson’s University Library, n. d.), 83.

⁷ Hooper, *Roman Realities*, 72.

punishment.”⁸ All of the rituals had to be carried out without any accidents or problems arising to ensure that the gods would be happy. Plutarch explains this in his *Coriolanus*:

Whenever the magistrates or priests perform any religious function, a herald goes before them crying out in a loud voice ‘*Hoc age*’. The phrase means ‘Mind this’, and it is intended to remind the people to give their whole attention to the sacred rites and not to allow any pressure of business or worldly preoccupations to disturb them, the implication being that men’s attention is seldom fixed, and most of their duties are, in a sense, extorted from them and effected under constraint. The Romans are also well accustomed to repeating sacrifices and processions, not only for the kind of reason I have described, but on far more trivial grounds. For example, if one of the horses which pull the sacred vehicles should become exhausted and stumble, or if the charioteer should take hold of the reins with his left hand, they decree that the procession must begin again. And at later periods of their history they have been known to perform a single sacrifice thirty times over, because some omission or mistake was believed to have taken place. Such is the piety and reverence of the Roman people in religious matters.⁹

The Senate was the advisory body of the Republic. This political body existed during the monarchy. Livy states that Romulus first appointed one hundred men to the Senate. “He had now no reason to be dissatisfied with his strength, and proceeded to add policy to strength. He appointed a hundred senators, whether because this number seemed to him sufficient, or because there were no more than a hundred who could be designated Fathers. At all events, they received the designation of Fathers from their rank, and their descendants were called patricians.”¹⁰ Livy also indicates that Romulus divided the patricians into thirty *curiae*, “...when he divided the people into thirty *curiae*,...”¹¹ and “...in the fifth century B.C., the elective and legislative functions of the old Curiate Assembly were taken over by a new assembly based on the army. The Centuriate Assembly (*comitia centuriata*) was composed of ‘centuries’ of fighting men assigned

⁸ Livy *Book II*.XLII.9ff.

⁹ Plutarch *Coriolanus* (trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert in *Makers of Rome Nine Lives by Plutarch* [London: Penguin Books, 1965]), 38-39.

¹⁰ Livy *Book I*.VIII.2ff.

¹¹ Livy *Book I*. XIII.7.

according to an assessment of their worth.”¹² The knights were at the top of the ranks due to wealth and land ownership. The *proletariat* were at the bottom of the ranks because they owned very little, if anything. This set a tradition of all male citizens having a voice in the decisions of the city. As the Republic grew, the plebeians used this precedent to eventually force the patricians into allowing them to participate in politics on a more nearly equal basis. The senators kept the “trappings” of royalty in their dress, wearing the toga with the purple border, and in the *lictors*, the twelve bodyguards who accompanied each one everywhere. If the Senate felt an emergency situation warranted it, they gave the consuls power to appoint a dictator for a period of six months to serve the city through the emergency. The dictator appointed a Master of the Horse to serve under him.

Around 450 BCE conflict arose between the two classes. This conflict is labeled by historians as the “Struggle of the Orders.” The plebeians wanted more equality in the political and economic arenas. They were the backbone in strength and numbers which gave Rome military protection from enemy invasions. The plebeians had six issues they wished resolved. These political and economic issues were: (1) they wanted to hold public offices, *magistracies*, (2) they wanted protection from *imperium* with an appeal option, (3) they wanted an assembly of their own, (4) they wished to have the option of marrying into the patrician class, (5) they wanted access to public land for agricultural purposes, and (6) they wanted to settle the problem of debts.¹³

The plebeians withdrew from the city to Aventine Hill. This action made the patricians realize that without the plebeians in the military Rome would fall to invaders.

¹² Hooper, *Roman Realities*, 48.

¹³ M. Cary and H. H. Scullard, *History of Rome* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975), 68-69.

The plebeians organized *aediles*, public officials, to serve as city managers. They also elected tribunes, *tribuni plebis*, to have powers of speech and control. The patricians accepted these actions because they wanted security, although they would rescind their decisions occasionally throughout the next several hundred years. These struggles continued for several centuries. The outcome was that the plebeians gained political control and had a voice in legislating the city.

Political events during the Republic involving women began reforms that eventually changed women's roles: a Vestal buried alive in 337 BCE, the poisoning trials of 331 BCE, the events surrounding Verginia in 307 BCE, the cults of patrician and plebeian chastity in 296 BCE, and the *Stuprum* trials of 295 BCE were some of the occurrences.¹⁴ These events were used by women to gain more control over their own lives, money, and property.

The Law of the Twelve Tables became the basis for public and private law. The law was for all to obey, carved in stone and wood, or "published," and publicly displayed. These laws originally forbade intermarriage between the classes, and three types of marriages were mentioned. One type was *confarreatio*, which were similar to "church ceremonies" and included rituals based on tradition and superstitious beliefs. Only families that held hereditary priesthods participated in this type. A second type of marriage was *coemptio*, a business arrangement. This included a contract, dowry and/or exchange of property. The third type was *usus*, "to have use of". This type had two sub-types: *cum manu*, with the hand, and *sine manu*, without a hand. *Cum manu* placed the wife under the power and protection of her husband, directly from the control of her father, or *paterfamilias*. *Sine manu* allowed her not to be under the power and protection

of her husband. As with all Roman law, loopholes allowed the laws to be manipulated to suit the individual. The *usus* types of marriages were the most common and could be manipulated legally through loopholes by the wife staying away from home and her husband for three consecutive nights a year. Also, these loopholes allowed the women to retain control over their dowries in trust for their daughters.¹⁵

Verginia, a young plebeian woman, was at the center of a change in the laws concerning marriage. Appius Claudius, a patrician consul of ill repute, desired her. She was already engaged to a young man. Appius Claudius had her seized on the street, claiming that she had been born to one of his slave women. It was taken to the *magistrate*, Appius Claudius himself, who ruled in his own favor. Verginia's father pretended to accept the decision and asked to speak to his daughter. He took her aside then stabbed her in the heart. He escaped from the city, and the Senate had to quiet the commotion in the Forum. Later, Appius Claudius was brought to trial but killed himself. This echoed the story of Lucretia, and opened the path to intermarriage between the classes due to the crisis and the Senate's becoming involved.¹⁶

By 186 BCE, a widow could choose her own tutor (a substitute *paterfamilias*) and make her will. With these changes, women's public roles also became greater, lessening their inferior positions. A woman could buy and sell property through the name of her tutor, acting for her own best interest. Some participated in active roles, and others worked from behind the scenes, pressuring male family members to make speeches and pass legislation to accomplish their goals.

¹⁴ Bauman, *Women and Politics*, 13-20.

¹⁵ Alan Watson, *The Law of the Ancient Romans* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1970), 32-35.

¹⁶ Hooper, *Roman Realities*, 38-39.

Some of the protests had specifically feminist goals. Thus, when they campaigned against their disadvantaged status in marriage, they were challenging a system that condemned them to inferiority. At other times they addressed concerns of the community at large, as when they demonstrated against wartime casualty rates, or made their own special contribution to the conflict of the orders, or set up an organization to handle their contributions to the war effort, or exerted significant influence on mainstream politics by promoting new cults."¹⁷

After the trials of 331 BCE, Fabius Rullianus, a curule aedile, founded a shrine for patrician matrons *Pudicitia Patricia* still married to their first husbands. This shrine was in the Forum Boarium. In 296 BCE, another Verginia, a patrician woman married to the plebeian Lucius Volumnius Flamma, was at the center of a crisis concerning the classes. She was denied access to the *Pudicitia Patricia* shrine to worship because her husband was a plebeian. Verginia founded an altar of plebeian chastity, *Pudicitia Plebeia*, for wives of plebeians still married to their first husbands. This altar was erected in her house. She urged the women to compete in their modesty as their husbands competed in their valour. At first, this altar was even more reverently kept than its patrician counterpart but eventually was defiled by the admission of women not as chaste and in time completely disappeared.¹⁸

In 295 BCE, Fabius Gurgus, son of Fabius Rullianus, was one of the curule aediles. Because of drought, pestilence, and continued problems, Gurgus consulted the *Sibylline Books*. From this oracle, he brought a number of matrons to trial on charges of *stuprum*, or systematic fornication. The trials were conducted by the *magistrate* in public and not by the *paterfamilias* in private. This was important in that the women were tried in public and involved the *curule aediles*, as they were in charge of the markets and brothels fell under their jurisdiction. Fines were applied to the women, and Gurgus built a temple to

¹⁷ Bauman, *Women and Politics*, 3.

Venus Obsequens (Obedient Venus). As there was enough money to build a temple, the conclusion is that there were a large number of matrons involved.¹⁹

Another example of women's stepping to the forefront and taking action involves Veturia, Coriolanus' mother, and a group of women. During the struggles, Coriolanus had alienated the plebeians because of his stand against the grain imports being sold at low prices. He took refuge with the Volsci, a neighboring enemy. Veturia and her companions went to the enemy camp to ask Coriolanus not to attack Rome. Plutarch's account in *Coriolanus* states that the women had been offering prayers in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus during the days of crisis:

During these days of crisis in Rome various groups of women went to all the temples in the city, but the greatest number and the most nobly born offered up their prayers at the shrine of Jupiter Capitolinus. One of these was Valeria, a sister of the great Publicola, who had rendered the state such immense services, both in war and in political life. Publicola had died some years before, as I have mentioned, but Valeria was still living and enjoyed great honour and respect in Rome, since her life was seen to be in every way worthy of her noble birth. This woman, then, suddenly experienced one of those intuitions such as I have described, and recognizing with an insight which must surely have been divinely inspired what would be the best course, rose from her knees and called upon the other women to accompany her to the house of Marcus's mother, Volumnia. She entered, and when she saw Volumnia sitting with her daughter-in-law Vergilia, holding Marcus's children on her lap, she called her companions round her and said: 'Volumnia and Vergilia, we have come to you as women to women, not because we have been ordered here by Senate or the consuls, but because our god, as I believe, has listened to our prayers and put into our hearts the inspiration that we should turn to you. . . . With this she took Marcus's children and Vergilia, and set out with the other women for the Volscian camp. They were a pitiful sight, and even the enemy greeted them with a respectful silence. . . they heard Volumnia speak as follows: "My son, even if we were to say nothing, the wretchedness of our dress and our appearance should make you understand in what misery we have lived at home, ever since you were banished. . . . You shall never attack Rome unless you trample first upon the dead body of the mother who bore you. . . . At this Marcus cried out: "Mother, mother, what have you done?" Then he raised her up and tenderly pressed her hand. "You have won your victory," he told her, 'you have saved Rome,

¹⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

but you have destroyed your son'.²⁰

This event was important enough that it is mentioned by several Roman writers. Appian tells of the event in his account of the history of Rome. It broke precedent with tradition, and the male-dominated society, allowing the women to participate actively in politics.

But Valeria, the daughter of Publicola, brought a company of women to Veturia, the mother of Marcius, and to Volumnia his wife. All these, clad in mourning garments and bringing their children to join in the supplication, implored that they would go out with them to meet Marcius, and beseech him to spare them and their country. Accordingly, by permission of the Senate, they went forth, women and alone, to the camp of the enemy... "Do not," she said, "cure an evil by an incurable evil. Do not be the cause of calamities that will smite yourself as well as those who have wronged you. Whither do you carry the torch? From the fields to the city? From the city to your own hearth-stone? From your own hearthstone to the temples of the gods? Have mercy, my son, on me and on your country as we plead"...But I submit even to this: I will prostrate myself before you." So speaking she flung herself on the ground. He burst into tears, sprang up and caught hold of her, exclaiming with the deepest emotion: "Mother, you have gained the victory, but it is a victory by which you will undo your son."²¹

Change in the Republic of Rome was further fueled by almost continuous warfare.

The internal struggles were basically without bloodshed, but the external struggles claimed the lives of thousands of able Roman citizens. These wars caused other problems, like famine, because the men were not at home to help ensure the food supply. Drought and disease also took their toll on crops and humans. All of this made life difficult for the women left at home, trying to survive and support their families.

The fifth century saw the defensive wars. The Etruscans, Latins, Sabines, Gauls, Aequi, Volsci, Samnites, and other neighboring groups attacked Rome. The women again

²⁰ Plutarch *Coriolanus*, 46-49.

²¹ Appian *Concerning Italy* (trans. Horace White in *Appian's Roman History*, vol.1 [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1912], (47-51), 2.5.3.4.5.

stepped forward to help Rome, this time (390 BCE) giving up their gold for the cause of the war with the Gauls, and their hair to be made into bowstrings.²²

During the fourth century Rome began the wars of expansion. Rome began to conquer the neighbors who had previously attacked it. The *Pax Romana*, Roman Peace, slowly began to take shape. The Latin League was formed to make alliances with former enemies to put an end to the wars. Rome allowed some to become citizens with some rights but not to vote unless they were in the city on election-day. All allies and friends answered directly to Rome in an effort to keep them from joining sides against Rome.

In 331 BCE another event occurred that made an impact on the role of women. The poisoning trials took place, notable because the women were tried under public criminal law in the courts instead of at home under the jurisdiction of the *paterfamilias*. Many people died from “something mysterious” instead of famine and war. A slave woman negotiated with the *curule aedile*, Q. Fabius Maximus, giving information about the poisonings for her protection. She told Fabius that some matrons were making the poison and giving it to their husbands and other citizens. Twenty matrons were summoned to the Forum for investigation. Two patrician women, Cornelia and Sergia, insisted that the substance was medicine. Challenged by the slave woman to prove her false by drinking it, the women did so and died. In a “witch hunt” that followed, 170 matrons were found guilty and punished. These 170 matrons were tried by a special commission which was established by the Senate.²³

By the third century, Rome plunged further afield, drawn into wars with Greece and Carthage. The Punic Wars with Hannibal brought changes, too. Reorganization of the

²² Bauman, *Women and Politics*, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

military, addition of a “navy,” a fighting fleet, trade, loss of manpower, and gains of territories all added to the transition of this period. Traditions were upset during the wars. The process of fighting and trying to win the war caused changes in the political arena. With the men away at war, the women had to step up to the forefront and became more involved in economics and politics because they wanted the war to end.

In 215 BCE the *lex Oppia* was passed which stated women could possess no more than one half of an ounce of gold and could not wear purple or ride in a two-wheeled carriage within a mile of the city, unless it was in a religious festival.²⁴ The Senate believed that the matrons should be at home, taking care of practical business, not out “riding around flaunting their wealth.” They believed that undermining traditions would weaken the strength of Rome. Because they played a more active role in politics due to the wars, the matrons did not like “getting their hands slapped” by the Senate. “One of the best known incidents...was a demonstration that took place in 195 B.C., when matrons marched on the center of Rome to demand that the magistrates abolish a law first promulgated in 216, the Oppian Law.”²⁵ “At the time when they demonstrated for the repeal of the Oppian Law, some of them, having lost their fathers and husbands, may have been under the authority of a relatively uninterested guardian. These women will have been freer to mill around in the streets and make demands of the government.”²⁶

The second century continued the expansionist wars. The Macedonian Wars occupied Rome’s power and military strength in Greece and in Asia Minor. Hellenistic culture began to have a profound effect upon a lot of Roman citizens. Not all of the citizens

²⁴ Ibid., 25.

²⁵ Pauline Schmitt Pantel, ed., *A History of Women in the West I. From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 399.

were enthusiastic about the “foreign” culture. They believed that it was eroding Roman traditions. But for many, and especially the patrician matrons and their daughters, the Hellenistic influences allowed them to become educated.²⁷ Many Greeks served as tutor slaves in the Roman families. The daughters were allowed to become literate and study. This naturally gave rise to more interest in politics and business by women. The most respectable Roman matron, representing all the Roman ideals and traditions, was Cornelia Gracchus. She was educated and wrote letters extensively. Her father was Scipio Africanus, hero of the Punic Wars. She married Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus and remained a widow honoring his name after his death about 150 B.C. Out of twelve children, two sons survived into adulthood, Tiberius Gracchus and Gaius Gracchus, along with one daughter, Sempronia. “These two boys Cornelia brought up with such care and such ambitious hopes that, although by common consent no Romans have ever been more naturally gifted, they were considered to owe their virtues even more to their education than to their heredity.”²⁸ Tiberius entered politics first as the elder son and became a supporter of the plebeian class for the grain dole. The city had grown large enough so that food had to be imported, as it was impossible to grow enough in the surrounding countryside to feed the entire population. The slave population also had increased tremendously due to captives of the wars, so the lower classes of Rome could not find enough work to support themselves. Therefore, Gracchus believed that the cheap grain, as well as land reforms (putting public land long held by patricians into the hands of the lower classes for food production), were necessary. His political opponents had him

²⁶ Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 180.

²⁷ Elaine Fantham, *Aemilia Pudentilla: or the Wealthy Widow's Choice*, Richard Hawley and Barbara Levick, ed., *Women in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1995), 226.

murdered because of his reform beliefs. Gaius also promoted reforms to help the plebeian classes. He tried to achieve full citizenship for the Latin allies, and the old Latin rights for all the other Italians. Cowell commented upon these issues, as well as upon the Social War that followed.

We lack detailed knowledge of this confused and discreditable period. It culminated in that bitter Social War in which Rome had to fight again for supremacy in Italy....After one or two defeats, Rome saw that no peace could be permanent that refused civic rights to Italians. Citizenship was therefore promised in 90 B.C. to all the allies willing to lay down their arms...The Social War was the last spontaneous mass movement in the history of the Roman Republic, but it was not the Romans who took the initiative. It was a struggle that overlaid a civil war in Rome itself, provoked by no mass movement and serving not public so much as private and personal ambitions nourished upon the power of supreme military command.²⁹

In the first century, the late Republic, political events kept Rome in chaos. The Social War's irony was that the final outcome of the Gracchi murders and reform efforts did accomplish what the brothers had set out to do. Civil War then broke out with different political factions trying to gain control of the consulships and the senate. Wars in Gaul and in the East and slave revolts added to the chaos. Women were less restricted by laws and traditions than they ever had been. They participated in the political scene with strong, indirect methods. By 44 BCE, Julius Caesar was Dictator for life, which frightened many Romans because they were so anti-monarchical. His political opponents murdered him in the Forum. The Republic was over by that time and further chaos followed with the second triumvirate scrambling for the complete power to "rule" Rome. In 27 BCE Augustus won this internal struggle for power, became the Emperor, and founded the Roman Empire.

²⁸ Plutarch *Tiberius Gracchus* (trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert in *Makers of Rome Nine Lives by Plutarch* [London: Penguin Books, 1965]), 154.

²⁹ F.R. Cowell, *Cicero and the Roman Republic* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1948), 210-211.

CHAPTER 3

PRIVATE RITUALS

A Roman woman, whether she was a patrician or a plebeian, was the mater of the house. The patrician wife was the epitome of this idea and was referred to as the matron. Both answered ultimately to the paterfamilias but were responsible for homekeeping, having the home run smoothly and according to Roman custom. This included tending the fire, fetching water, preparing food for meals, raising children, spinning, weaving, making clothes, and seeing to the details for the rituals that kept the gods happy and, therefore, the family safe, secure, prosperous, and happy. Cicero, in *De Natura Deorum*, speaks of piety, reverence, and religion: “For all these are tributes which it is our duty to render in purity and holiness to the divine powers solely on the assumption that they take notice of them, and that some service has been rendered by the immortal gods to the race of men.”³⁰ A Roman woman’s religion permeated her life. The rituals practiced were a result of beliefs about the gods and the world as they related to an agrarian lifestyle of survival. Many of these rituals had origins far back in time prior to the Republic. Roman custom was to keep the traditions of the ancestors because it was tradition, and also because if you stopped, you might offend or anger the gods. One of the customs during the Republic was to continue to add new religions, rituals, and beliefs to the old, traditional ones. All of the expansionist wars and the trade throughout the Mediterranean Basin brought these new ideas into the Roman world. This caused Rome to eventually embrace all religions in the empire for fear of offending gods. As the women learned of

these new beliefs, they incorporated some of the new rituals into their existing belief and ritual patterns.

Numina

A *numen* was a spirit, influence, or power that the Romans believed to be present in objects and in areas of locality. This belief came out of pre-Republican times from the forms of religion of animism and dynamism. It was an indication that the gods were present and working. H. J. Rose quotes Manilius as quoting Hesiod: “the gods of the woodland and the *numina* sacred to the Nymphs.”³¹ Natural areas, like groves of trees, springs, rivers, mountains, and single natural objects all were considered to have *numen*.³²

Romans believed that they could invoke the help and support of *numina* with rituals, prayers, or sacrifices. This so permeated their belief system, that almost all activity had a relation to some ritual to provoke good *numen*. Cato gives directions in *On Agriculture* for the ritual to ask for good *numen* when clearing land....

The following is the Roman formula to be observed in thinning a grove: A pig is to be sacrificed, and the following prayer uttered: “Whether thou be god or goddess to whom this grove is dedicated, as it is thy right to receive a sacrifice of a pig for the thinning of this sacred grove, and to this intent, whether I or one at my bidding do it, may it be rightly done. To this end, in offering this pig to thee I humbly beg that thou wilt be gracious and merciful to me, to my house and house hold, and to my children. Wilt thou deign to receive this pig which I offer thee to this end.”³³

This belief system also extended to objects. The door of a house had several *numina* that required different prayers to invoke each one necessary for the actions of going in and coming out. A doorway was considered dangerous because of its nature of being an

³¹ H. J. Rose, *Ancient Roman Religion* (London: Hutchinson’s University Library, n. d.), 15.

³² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

opening, and, therefore, evil spirits could also possibly come through it. Janus was the god of beginnings, or of going into something new. He was associated, with his two faces, with going through the door into something new and looking backwards at what was behind. Therefore, every time a Roman woman went through the door, she had a prayer to say, depending on whether she was coming into the house or leaving it to enter the public world. There were also *numina* for the threshold, the hinges, the lintel, the physical door, and so forth. Each *numen* required separate rituals, for the Roman woman believed that the gods were there to protect her and to help ensure her own happiness, if she asked for help, and, if the gods were listening at the time she asked, and, if the gods felt so inclined. The practical Roman entered each ritual knowing in advance what was being requested of the god or goddess and what the price would be. In a sense, it was a bargaining relationship with the god because the god was told what the terms were and what was being requested.

Lararium

A *Lararium*, or shrine that contained statues, was in all Roman homes. It was an altar of some sort for the *Lar Familiaris*. This god brought economic luck to the family. Each month upon the *Kalends*, or new moon, the *Nones*, or first quarter, and upon the *Ides*, or full moon, the family offered worship at the *Lararium*. This included swags of flowers and herbs, as well as a food offering given to the god with prayers. Also upon family occasions, such as a birth or marriage, the rituals were observed.³⁴

³³ Cato *On Agriculture* (trans. William Davis Hooper in *Marcus Porcius Cato On Agriculture Marcus Terentius Varro On Agriculture* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1934], 121) 134.

³⁴ William Reginald Halliday, *Lectures on the History of Roman Religion from Numa to Augustus* (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool Ltd., 1922), 29.

Daily rituals for the *Lar Familiaris* were also observed for different occasions and to honor the god. H. J. Rose quotes Horace about a plebeian *mater*:

There is a well-known passage in Horace, a humorously kindly address to a simple and pious country-woman, in which he assures her that if she is guilty of such a sin (he implies that it is the only one at all likely in her case, and no doubt, since a domestic altar is meant, it is one which might occur while she was tidying her house) the simplest of offerings, a handful of salted grain, would be enough to recover the favour of the little household gods she has offended.³⁵

The *Lares* were also still worshipped on the outside of the home, in the fields from where they originated. They were originally the *numina* of the boundaries of the fields. These outside gods were called *Lares Compitales* or *Lares* of the Crossroads. On the corners of the fields, where properties met, the families erected shrines that were open to all four sides.³⁶ Each family performed its own sacrifices and rituals about fifteen feet back from the shrine on its own property. The evening before the ritual was to occur, the eldest daughter made a woolen doll for every member of the household and a woolen ball for every slave. The *mater* then followed her husband around the field and hung these woolen images upon the shrine or fence around the property. The Romans believed that the *Lares* would put some of their own *numen* into the woolen images and, therefore, protect and help the family members. A possible reason for the difference in the shapes of the figures was that the ball representing the slave had no head. *Caput* means head, and also refers to a legal citizen. A slave was not a legal citizen; therefore, the head was left off his image. The *paterfamilias* hung his plow before the shrine, and the entire family participated in a feast. This took place after the harvest season and in early winter, usually in January.³⁷

³⁵ Rose, *Ancient Roman Religion*, 20.

³⁶ Halliday, *Lectures*, 28.

³⁷ Rose, *Ancient Roman Religion*, 38-39.

Penates

The *Penates* were the gods in the cupboard where the food was stored and represented the food for the family to survive. The *penus*, or storeroom, was behind the hearth. Because of the importance of food for survival, prayers and rituals were offered to the *Penates* daily. Rose paraphrases Horace in describing the rituals the *mater* performs for these gods:

Of the *Penates* something is said in that ode of Horace... The good country-woman there garlands them with rosemary and myrtle; at the first of every month she makes formal prayer, presumably to all the deities of her household, raising her hands palm upwards towards the sky, the regular ancient gesture on ordinary occasions... she gives them offerings of corn and wine and occasionally a pig, probably a sucking-pig. The great and expensive sacrifices of cows and bulls are not for her, nor for domestic cult generally, and from what we know of ancient sacrifices it is safe to say that the pig, after the proper portions had been given to the friendly little deities, form the staple of the family dinner.³⁸

Vesta

Vesta was the spirit of the fire, the center of the family life and the home. Daily care of the hearth-fire was of utmost importance as it served for warmth, light, and heat. Meals were prepared on the open fire and hearth, and, therefore, *Vesta* kept the family alive. The hearth was swept clean and always kept burning, and garlands of flowers were placed upon it on festival days. The dining table was placed in front of the hearth with the salt-cellar and the sacred salt-cake upon it. The daughters' responsibility was to bake the sacred salt-cake. The main meal was eaten at mid-day, and after the first main

³⁸ Ibid., 28.

course, a period of silence was followed by the ritual of offering *Vesta* a piece of the salt-cake. It was placed upon a small sacrificial plate and then tossed into the fire.³⁹

At the beginning of June, the *mater* performed rituals to *Vesta* by fasting and purifying the hearth, utensils, storerooms, and cupboards. Earlier in the spring, at the beginning of the new year in March, the old fire was extinguished, and a new one started by rubbing two sticks together.⁴⁰ Cicero, in *The Nature of the Gods*, says of *Vesta*, “We always make our last prayers and sacrifices to this goddess, who is the guardian of our most private lives.”⁴¹

Parilia

The *Parilia* was an old festival that had its roots in pre-Republican times. It was a family and a public festival. W. Warde Fowler translates Ovid’s description of the ritual: “The sheep-fold was decked with green boughs and a great wreath was hung on the gate.”⁴² The *mater* would have gathered and woven the flowers together to make the wreath and boughs. At daybreak the shepherd purified the sheep and fold and built a large bonfire; the *mater* prepared the food and drink for the offerings to *Pales*. This would have included baskets and cakes of millet, pails of milk, and other appropriate foods. After the meal and offerings then the prayers and petitions, a special prayer is recited four times while wetting the hands with dew. Following this, a wooden antique bowl filled with warm milk and wine is shared before everyone jumps over the bonfire.

³⁹ W. Warde Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People from the Earliest Times to the Age of Augustus* (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1922), 73.

⁴⁰ W. Warde Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic* (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1925), 153.

⁴¹ Cicero *The Nature of the Gods* (trans. Horace C. P. McGregor [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972]), 2.66-68.

⁴² Fowler, *Festivals*, 80.

Tibullus refers to the festival and suggests it was a fertility rite. “And drenched in wine the shepherd will chaunt the feast of Pales, the shepherd’s holiday. Ye wolves, be ye then far from the fold. Full of drink, he will fire the light straw heaps in the appointed way, and leap across the sacred flames. Then shall his dame bear offspring,…”⁴³

Lemuria

The *lemures* were ghosts that were houseless, not ancestors. On May 9th, 11th, and 13th they were believed to be prowling around. The Roman woman followed her husband around the house at midnight while he spat nine black beans onto the floor. Beans were considered ghost food and were more tempting because that had been in a human’s mouth. This ritual was done barefoot so that contact with the earth was kept. The husband would say, “With these I ransom me and mine,” without looking backwards over his shoulder. They believed the ghosts followed and ate the beans. Then the ghosts would be asked politely to leave, the couple would wash their hands, and bang copper pots together.⁴⁴

Ambarvalia

All present hush. We purify the crops and lands in the fashion handed down from our ancestors of old. Come to us, Bacchus, with the sweet grape cluster hanging from thy horns, and, Ceres, wreath thy temples with the corn-ears.

Upon this holy day let earth, let ploughman rest. Hang up the share and let the heavy labour cease. Loose from the yokes their straps; now by the well-filled manger

⁴³ Catullus Tibullus and Pervigilium Veneris *The Poems of Gaius Valerius Catullus* (trans. F. W. Cornish) *Tibullus* (trans. J. P. Postgate) *Pervigilium Veneris* (trans. J. W. Mackail [London: William Heinemann, 1913; Reprint, rev., New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1928], (277), 2.5.

⁴⁴ Rose, *Ancient Roman Religions*, 33-34.

must the oxen stand with garlands round their heads. Let all things be at the service of the god; let no spinner choose to set her hand to the task of wool. Ye too I bid stand far away---let none be nigh the altar to whom Love's goddess gave her pleasures yesternight. The powers above ask purity. Clean be the raiment that ye come in, and clean the hands to take the waters from the spring. Mark how to the shining altar goes the holy lamb, and behind the white procession; the olive binds their hair. Gods of our sires, we cleanse the farms, we cleanse the farming folk. Do ye outside our boundaries drive all evil things.⁴⁵

This account from Tibullus explains this ritual very well. On May 29 the olive wreaths for their heads were supplied by the women. Everyone had to be pure (no sex the night before), they had a holiday from work, dressed in white, and paraded around the perimeter of the field three times. On the third time, prayers were said and the three victims, a bull, a sheep, and a pig, were sacrificed to Ceres and Bacchus.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Tibullus, 2.1.

⁴⁶ Fowler, *Festivals*, 126.

CHAPTER 4

LIFE RITUALS

The events that mark the passage of life were also observed with special rituals. Birth, marriage, and death were all special occasions in a woman's life. To invoke the good *numina* for help and protection was the reason for the rituals associated with these life events.

Divination and dream interpretation were also closely intertwined with a Roman woman's life. Both of these methods of interpreting what the gods were saying affected her actions and decisions on a daily basis.

Rituals at Birth

The Romans believed that individual *numina* were responsible for each aspect of giving birth and for the creation of the child. Juno was believed to be in attendance on the mother. Lucina made the baby see light. Candelifera watched over the light that burned continuously in the birth-room. The list goes on. When the baby was born, if it was not weak or deformed, and if there was not a surplus of infants, and in particular of girls, then the baby was laid on the ground at the feet of the *paterfamilias*. Being on the ground invoked the good *numina* of the earth for growth and fertility. If the *paterfamilias* picked the child up, he or she became a member of the family. If not, then the child was exposed and left to the gods.

The child was placed in the cradle, and the *mater* saw to it that three people ritually guarded the house all night from *numina* that might want to cause trouble. *Intercidona*,

or Cut in two, chopped at the threshold with an ax. *Pilumnus*, or Pounder, pounded the threshold with a pestle. And *Deverra*, or Sweeper, swept it with a broom.⁴⁷

Eight days after a daughter was born, a solemn ceremony for purification took place. Nine days passed before the ceremony for sons. A feast was prepared for family and friends. Gifts were brought for the child. For the daughter, a couch was laid for Juno Lucina and for a son, a table was laid for Hercules. For either, a *bulla*, or charm, was hung around the child's neck. It was either round or heart-shaped and made of leather for plebeians and gold for patricians. This was worn around the daughter's neck until she got married. The son wore his until he became a man and changed from wearing the *toga praetexta*, a cloak with a purple hem, to wearing the toga of an adult male citizen. The child was also given a name at this ceremony. Sons received three names, his given name, his *gens*, or clan name, and his family's name. Girls received only the family name, and perhaps the number she was in the sibling line-up was used for her given name. If a daughter was the eighth child, or daughter, she might be called Octavia.⁴⁸

A birthday was recognized and had a festive flair to it. Prayers, incense, and food offerings must have been made to invoke the pleasure of the gods. Tibullus remarks on birthdays in several poems in *Book 3*.

XI

Cerintus' Birthday

This day that made thee live for me, Cerintus, shall be for me one to be hallowed always and set among the festivals. . . . Great Genius, take this incense with a will, and smile upon my prayer, . . .

XII

Sulpicia's Birthday

Juno of the birthday, receive the holy piles of incense which the accomplished maid's soft hand now offers thee. To-day she is thine wholly; most joyfully she has decked herself for thee, to stand before thy altar a sight for all to see. . . . They are

⁴⁷ H. J. Rose, *Ancient Roman Religion* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, n. d.), 42-43.

⁴⁸ F. R. Cowell, *Everyday Life in Ancient Rome* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), 36.

making offering to thee, holy goddess, thrice with cake and thrice with wine, and the mother eagerly enjoins upon her child what she must pray for.

XIV *Before her Birthday*

My hated birthday is at hand, to be kept all joylessly in the odious country and without Cerinthus.⁴⁹

Marriage

The *coemptio* type of marriage was the one that was similar to a form of bride purchase. The copper coins the bride brought with her were symbolic of a dowry. This form of marriage was practiced mainly among the plebeians. The rituals were based upon tradition and superstitious beliefs. The *paterfamilias* was ultimately in charge of the family, which included final responsibility for the worship of the household gods. The daughter was under his jurisdiction. When she left the family to marry, she changed to the jurisdiction of her husband's family. The Romans were afraid that the gods of the father's household would be offended at losing a worshiper, so one part of the marriage ritual was for the bride to show reluctance at leaving home. This was accomplished by the bride's literally being torn from her mother's arms, or kidnapped.

The second part of the ritual was the journey to the husband's home. Because she was no longer under the protection of her father's gods and had not yet been received into the husband's family and the protection of his gods, she was in a very dangerous position. The Romans believed that bad *numina* could cause her harm en route. Therefore, precautions were taken to ensure her protection. In the early republic, she wore a *tunica recta*, or straight smock, with a toga over it. In the late republic, women who wore togas

⁴⁹ Catullus Tibullus and Pervigilium Veneris (trans. J. P. Postgate in *Tibullus* [London: William Heinemann, 1913]), 3.11,12,14.

were considered prostitutes, so the custom changed for the bride to wear a *stola*, a long gown. She wore a veil, a *flammeum*, of red or yellow, and this covered her head and face for protection. Her hair was parted with a spear into six sections, three on either side of her head, and tied with woolen ribbons. Three being a lucky number, both sides of her head were then protected. A wreath of flowers and herbs that she had gathered and woven together was worn on top of her head to protect her from above. Around her waist was tied a woolen sash, tied in a special knot. Thus dressed, she proceeded towards her husband's house. Behind her walked a matron, protecting her. Because she had never been a widow, no bad *numina* clung to her. On either side and in front of the bride walked three boys, all of whom must have both parents living. The one in front carried a torch of whitethorn for luck. The ones on each side held each arm. She carried a distaff and spindle. Guests shouted jokes and greetings to drown out ill-wishes that might be spoken. The more indecent the jokes were, the luckier they were. Nuts were thrown and the torch thrown up for someone to catch. They believed that if the bride or groom wished to end the marriage (pre-divorce times), they could bring about the death of the other one by placing the torch somewhere on the wedding night. The bride could place it under the marriage bed and the groom could burn it upon a grave.

The third part of the ritual began when the bride arrived at the groom's house. The groom lifted her over the threshold so that she would not stumble or step on the threshold. She must win the favor of the *numina* at the doorway, so she would rub wolf-fat upon the doorposts. In the late Republic, she would use hog's lard or olive oil. Then she would fasten wool to the posts. The groom would then ask her who she was, and she replied, "Where thou are Gaius, I am Gaia," referring to the fact that she now belonged to

her husband's clan. Then a sacrifice was made to Jupiter. After the ceremony of the door, she next touched fire, the hearth, and water. She then took the three coins she had with her and gave the first to the groom. The second she laid before the deities of the house in the *Lararium*, and the third she placed in the *Lares Compitales*. After the consummation of the marriage on the wedding night, the bride became *materfamilias*, the mother of the house.⁵⁰ Catullus refers to several of the rituals in one of his poems:

LXI

O haunter of the Heliconian mount, Urania's son, thou who bearest away the tender maid to her bridegroom, O Hymenaeus Hymen, O Hymen Hymenaeus!
Bind thy brows with the flowers of fragrant marjoram, put on the marriage veil, hither, hither merrily come, wearing on thy snow-white foot the yellow shoe, And wakening on this joyful day, singing with resonant voice the nuptial songs, beat the ground with thy feet, shake with thy hand the pine torch.
...for thee the maidens loose their garments from the girdle: for thee the bridegroom listens fearfully with eager ear.
Thou thyself givest into the hands of the fiery youth the blooming maiden from her mother's bosom, O Hymenaeus Hymen, ...
Throw open the fastenings of the door; the bride is coming. See you how the torches shake their shining tresses? ... Yet listening rather to this, she weeps that she must go ... Raise aloft the torches, boys: I see the wedding veil coming
... let the favourite boy give away nuts to the slaves, ...
You too, O bride, be sure you refuse not what your husband claims, lest he go elsewhere to find it. ...
See how mighty and rich for you is the house of your husband; be content to be here, ...
Lift across the threshold with a good omen your golden feet, and enter within the polished door. ...
Ye, honest matrons, well wedded to ancient husbands, set the damsel in her place. ...⁵¹

The *confarreatio* type of marriage was observed by patricians whose families held hereditary priesthoods. This "...involved a solemn religious ceremony performed by two senior priests, the *Flamen Dialis* and the *Pontifex Maximus*. This was marked by the exchange of wafers made from wheat ... and was strictly binding for life, divorce being

⁵⁰ Rose, *Ancient Roman Religion*, 32,43-46.

practically impossible.”⁵² The wafers were the sacred spelt. The couple sat in two chairs placed beside each other and covered in lambskin. A bloodless sacrifice was made to Jupiter and then the couple shared a cake made from the sacred spelt.⁵³

As the Republic progressed, the *confarreatio* became less used and another form rose in popularity. This form was *usus*. The term came from the idea of using. No ceremony took place. The couple lived together as man and wife for a year and then were legally married. The *cum manu* type meant she was legally under the hand, or control, of her husband and the *paterfamilias* of his family. The *sine manu* type occurred when she spent three consecutive nights during the year away from her husband. This meant legally that she was not under his hand, or control. By the late Republic, this form became the most popular of all, as it allowed women to control their own wealth and property. This form of legal control over her own property allowed the woman to keep land in her own family instead of it passing to her husband.

Women still had to retain a guardian of some sort to participate in legal and economic activities and to use dowry or remarry. Also, if her daughter planned to marry and needed a dowry, the guardian had to consent. Any activities where she might lose her land outside of the family required the guardian’s consent. If her husband died without appointing someone, the woman’s uncle on her father’s side became her guardian. If there were no such uncle, the local magistrate would appoint someone to be her tutor. In reality, the woman herself had a lot of control over who was appointed. Therefore, she could gain even more freedom. She had the freedom to dispose of her personal wealth as

⁵¹ Catullus *Poems* 61.

⁵² Cowell, *Everyday Life*, 56.

⁵³ William Reginald Halliday, *Lectures on the History of Roman Religion* (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool Ltd., 1922), 34.

she desired: jewelry, household possessions, and clothes. She also could loan money at small interest rates.

During the Republic, several events occurred that changed the roles of women in their religious practices as well as in their participation in economic and political activities. Many of these were instigated because of marriage laws and customs. This area of legal rights allowed the women, mainly patrician, to maneuver loopholes in the laws to their own benefit.

In 296 B. C. a crisis arose around the shrine to Pudicitia (Chastity). This shrine was for patrician women to worship at in the Forum Boarium. To be able to worship there, the matrons could only have been married to a patrician husband one time. Verginia was a patrician married to a plebeian whose career was in the military and political arenas. She was denied access to the shrine, so she compensated by founding one on her own for plebeian *maters*. She promoted the idea of chastity among the plebeians to surpass the patricians. Her cult was restricted in the beginning, also, but according to Livy, later was defiled and destroyed by less than pure women. This brought the issue of interclass marriages to the attention of the lawyers, as well as the issue of *sine manu* marriages.⁵⁴

The next events were the *stuprum* trials of 295 B. C. The year had been a hard one, and the *curule aedile* Fabius Gurges consulted the Sibylline Books. These were old oracles that the Romans consulted from time to time, especially in emergencies. From this advice he received, he brought to trial many matrons on charges of *stuprum*, or systematic fornication. The matrons were trading as prostitutes. And as the *curule aediles* were the market masters, they were in charge of the brothels. The matrons were tried by magistrates with public law, not in home courts under the *paterfamilias*. The

women were fined, and Gurges used the money to to build a temple to Venus Obsequens.⁵⁵

Another outcome of the change in marriage styles was the fact that the *sine manu* marriages allowed for no-fault divorces. In 307 BCE, L. Annius was a senator who divorced his wife without having the *consilium amicorum*, or council of friends, present. The censors expelled him from the senate. This set a precedent because of the laws associated with property and divorce. If a man divorced his wife for reasons other than using poison, drinking, substituting children, or committing adultery, he forfeited his property, including the wife's dowry. The council was required to be present for any divorce based upon these issues. Therefore, without the council present, the wife could retain her dowry.⁵⁶

Burial Rituals

Death was feared as an unknown and contagious illness. It was also a time of concern for the continuance of the family. The heir tried to catch the last breath of the dying family member. The eyes were then closed, lamentations and prayers recited, and the corpse was washed, anointed, and dressed in the robes of the highest position held in life. The deceased laid in state in the *atrium* adorned with flowers and wreaths for three to seven days. The feet were pointed towards the door, and a slave stood watch.

The fire was extinguished and an evergreen bough was placed outside to alert passersby of the death. Contact with the dead was taboo. The nocturnal funeral procession was accompanied by torchlight, musicians, and professional mourners. The

⁵⁴ Richard A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1992), 15-16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

grave or pyre was outside the city walls. A last farewell was repeated three times over the grave.

Distinguished statesmen were honored with a diurnal public procession to the Forum and then to the grave. Masks of honorable ancestors were worn by actors dressed in the robes of the highest position attained by the ancestors. Instead of the mourners of more humble funerals, these public displays had male choirs, dancers, and the manumitted slaves of the deceased. The corpse was upon a garlanded bier open for view. At the Forum, the ancestors sat in a circle of ivory chairs while the heir gave the eulogy.

Afterwards, the family purified themselves and the house with fire and water, swept out the house, and sacrificed a sow. They still remained unclean for nine days, and were taboo. On the ninth day, an offering was given at the tomb, and then a feast that included changing from mourning clothes to gala attire occurred.⁵⁷ Cremation was also practiced, and if used, the nearest relative lit the pyre without looking at the corpse.⁵⁸

Tibullus refers to the masks of the ancestors in his *Eulogy of Messalla*: “For though thou hast distinctions abundant in thy ancient family, *thy* thirst for fame is not to be sated with the renown of ancestors, nor dost thou ask what saith the scroll beneath each mask; but thou strivest to surpass the olden honours of thy line, thyself a greater lustre to posterity than ancestry to thee.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid., 18-19.

⁵⁷ Halliday, *Lectures*, 35-38.

⁵⁸ Rose, *Ancient Roman Religion*, 47.

⁵⁹ Tibullus 3.7.28-31.

Divination and Dream Interpretation

As a woman, the *materfamilias* had no right or power to read the signs. But the outcome of this belief affected her entire life. The Roman woman corrected and redirected her actions all day long. From simple actions like stumbling or dropping food on the floor, to watching birds, to looking for directions and patterns of flight, she looked for signs and answers to prayers in daily events. If she accidentally made a mistake she would take corrective steps so that she would not anger the gods. Cicero comments on this subject:

Then there is the evidence of predictions and prophecies of things to come. Surely these prove that the future is foretold, portended, foreshadowed, and predicted to mankind. Hence they are called revelations, portents, signs, and wonders....
But through the negligence of our leaders the art of augury has been lost, and men no longer believe in the truth of omens, which are now taken only as a formality....
The authority of the augur is great. But the art of the soothsayer is divine....
The crux of the matter is known to all men everywhere. From their birth it is inscribed upon their minds that gods exist....⁶⁰

Dreams were believed to be an important channel through which to receive messages from the gods. The Roman woman would have interpreted important dreams as a sign to indicate what her actions should be.

CHAPTER 5

PUBLIC RITUALS

The Roman woman participated in some community activities and rituals to practice religious festivals and to worship the deities. Women's roles in the majority of public religious festivals could only be observation. Some rituals were for patrician *matrons*, others were for plebeians, and still others were inclusive of all women. The most important public roles for women were the six Vestal Virgins. These priestesses held the highest position in the important corporate cult of *Vesta*. A few other public positions were held by women, such as the wife of the *Flamen Dialis* and priestesses of less important cults. But the women's roles always came under the jurisdiction of the males, as the *paterfamilias*, priests, or the *Pontifex Maximus*.

The annual calendar was full of specified days for particular rituals and observances for the different deities. Rituals may have been for one or more days, depending upon which ritual it was. Not all of the rituals took place in the temples of the deities. Tradition held that some were observed in different locations around Rome. The earliest ones were rooted in the agrarian lifestyle of the pre and early Republic. As the Republic continued, other cults and practices were introduced from the foreign wars and trade. Roman tradition was to continue the old cults and practices, while adding new ones to the society. They did not want to offend the old deities from neglect, nor the new ones from non-observation of rituals. Therefore, by the end of the Republic, nearly every day was one on which to observe some ritual for one or more deities. Some days required a legal

⁶⁰ Cicero *The Nature of the Gods* (trans. Horace C.P. McGregor [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972], 124-128), 2.3-13.

holiday as well, some a holiday from work, and some days the rituals were in addition to the normal working day.

The public rituals, like the private rituals, were originally ordered around the calendar year beginning in March. This was due to the agrarian lifestyle of the pre and early Republic of Rome. Many of the festivals had grown out of ancient fertility rites and customs designed to strengthen the beliefs that the gods would ensure plenty of food from the crops if they were appeased with sacrifices, prayers, and rituals, like the *Parilia*. At the other end of the agrarian year, festivals were held in thanksgiving to the gods for the harvest. During the intense work times of planting and harvest, the festivals were more limited as to number, length, and intensity because the farmers needed to spend their time in the fields. During the winter months, more socialization occurred with the festivals because less time was needed in the fields managing the food crops.

Also, many festivals were to honor and memorialize previous occurrences in Roman history. These were to keep the traditions, *gloria*, *pietas*, and *fama* foremost in the thoughts of the citizens of Rome. These festivals were typically in the month in which the historical event had occurred.

The types of public religious observances were varied. These observances included temple worship, races, prayers and incense burning, street festivals, and feasts, among others. Women were usually not allowed to grind grain for bloodless sacrifices, nor were they allowed to sacrifice an animal. They participated from behind the scenes, in a supportive role, but were a vital necessity to the rituals because they represented the wholesome completeness of Rome. As the matrons of Rome, they were an important part

in the security of Rome's future. They completed the marriages and produced the children.⁶¹

Participation in Sacrificial Rituals

“It wickedly browsed on twigs a devout old woman had been bringing the country gods.”⁶² This was in reference in a story about a sacrificial fire upon an altar. Women rarely participated actively in sacrifices. Going back to the legend of the Sabine Women, tradition and laws had passed down that women could not touch grain or bloody animals for their husbands to make sacrifices. This had been interpreted to include all women being forbidden to participate in preparations of sacrifices. They participated by gathering wood for the fire, weaving garlands of flowers for the statues and altars, and other such similar activities.

One of the rare exceptions was the sacrifice of the pig on May 1 at the temple of Bona Dea. Whether it was because no men were allowed in the temple, or that because no men were involved at all in the sacrifice (therefore not breaking the law), the result was that only women were present for the sacrifice, and so women must have made the sacrifice of the pig.

Temple/Shrine Worship

On January 15 Carmentalia was celebrated. This commemorated the event in history for which Ovid gives an account. The Senate forbade the matrons to ride in *carpenta*, a

⁶¹ John Scheid, “The Religious Roles of Roman Women” in *A History of Women in the West: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, ed. Pauline Schmitt Pantel, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, gen ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1992), 377-381.

⁶² Ovid, *Fasti*, 1.381ff (trans. Betty Rose Nagle, *Ovid's Fasti Roman Holidays* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995]), 47.

two-wheeled carriage used by the women. Their response to the Senate was the method to most quickly cut off the future of Rome: to abort their unborn children. The goddess *Carmenta* was associated with childbirth and prophecy. Because it was an agrarian society, even marriages and births were factored into the planting/harvesting cycle. April was a popular month for marriages; therefore, January saw quite a few births. The temple was at the southern end of the Capitol. According to Ovid, the rituals included prayers and “no animal skins”, which probably meant grain offerings and incense.⁶³

When the Sun rises two days after the Ides, services will be repeated for the Arcadian goddess. Roman matrons used to ride in wagons called ‘carpenta’ (derived, I think, from Evander’s mother Carmenta). Soon this privilege was taken away, and every matron resolved not to continue her ungrateful husband’s line. To avoid giving birth, she recklessly groped and gouged, aborting the burden growing in her womb. They say the senate censured the wives’ atrocities, but restored the right they’d been deprived of, and order the same rites now be repeated for the Arcadian mother, in thanks for sons and daughters. Animal skins must not be brought inside that shrine, to keep the pure altars free of death’s taint. If any of you is fond of archaic rites, during the prayers you will hear epithets you didn’t know before.⁶⁴

The first of the month is called the Kalends, which is sacred to Juno. The first of the year was March, which made the Kalends of March extra special. It was called the *Matronalia*, a time for matrons to honor Juno Lucina. As the protectress of matrons, Juno Lucina was associated with childbirth. Again, the agrarian calendar fits this holiday, as it is in the spring, suitable for human gestation periods to fit into the planting and harvesting cycle. For the public rituals for *Matronalia*, the matrons dedicated her temple to Juno Lucina. “Now the fields are productive, now is the season for breeding, now birds prepare sheltering homes in the branches. Latin mothers rightly celebrate the productive season, when childbirth gets active duty and answered prayers...Latin daughters-in-law

⁶³ W. Warde Fowler, *Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic* (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1925), 290-293.

⁶⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, I.617ff.

dedicated a temple to Juno for the city on this date, if I remember right...my mother's crowd packs my temple....Bring flowers to the goddess: in flowering plants this goddess delights. Garland your heads with delicate flowers. Say, 'Lucina, you have brought us all to light.' Say, 'Come answer the prayers of a woman in labor. But if any of you is pregnant, let her loosen her hair and pray that the goddess gently ease her delivery.'⁶⁵

On April 1, *Veneri Verticordiae*, the cult of Venus, and *Fortuna Virilis*, the cult of Fortuna, were celebrated by matrons and plebeians. The cult of Fortuna is older, being supplanted with the cult of Venus. Because of the nature of love and fertility associated with Venus and Fortuna, it apparently is in the calendar year in the spring to fit the ancient agrarian lifestyle. The women bathed and decorated the statue of Venus in her temple with flowers and jewels. Then they adorned themselves with myrtle for purity, burned incense in the baths, drank a poppy juice and honey concoction, and bathed in the public baths (probably originally in the river) to have luck with the men.⁶⁶ Ovid's account begins with myths of Venus, and then tells of the customs of the day.

Duly you worship the goddess, Latin wives, old and young, and you who may not dress like respectable women. Remove the golden necklace from the goddess' marble neck, remove her ornaments: she must be thoroughly bathed. Replace the golden necklace on her neck when it is dry: now you must give her new flowers, new roses. She further demands that you be bathed beneath green myrtle: learn the specific reason for this demand. Naked on the shore she was drying her dripping hair: a randy bunch of satyrs saw the goddess. Noticing them, she covered her body with a screen of myrtle: this kept her safe, so she demands you repeat it. Now learn why you give incense to Manly Fortune where the baths are damp with cold water. That place admits all women with their clothing removed and sees a naked body's every blemish. Manly Fortune takes care of covering these and hiding them from men, and does so on request for a little incense. Don't be reluctant to take a dose of poppy crushed in snow-white milk with honey drained from the comb. When her passionate husband first took Venus home, she drank this; from then on she was a wife. Appease her with humble words; under her sway abide beauty, character, and good reputation. Sexual morality at Rome once slipped from ancestral standards; the ancients consulted

⁶⁵ Ovid, *Fasti*, III.241ff

⁶⁶ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic*, 68-69.

the Sibylline Books, which demanded a temple for Venus. When it was duly built, from that Venus got the epithet "Changer of Hearts." Always smile, goddess most fair, on Aeneas' descendants and safeguard your many daughters-in-law.⁶⁷

Another day of honoring and petitioning Venus in her temple was on April 23.

Prostitutes were legal in Rome. They were registered with the *aediles*, as a marketable business. They paid taxes on their earnings and were accepted as part of Roman society. Ovid describes their customs of petitioning Venus to help their business. This festival is also related to wine, which also was probably a considerable factor in the prostitutes' business. "I will likewise treat Vinalia. A Single day comes between the two. Girls of the street, worship the power of Venus Erycina; Venus helps business for licensed working girls. With a gift of incense ask for beauty and your public's patronage. Ask for sweet-talk and spicy jokes. Give our lady pleasing mint along with her myrtle, and a basket covered with an arrangement of roses. Now you should pack the temple right next to the Colline Gate."⁶⁸

Bona Dea was celebrated on May 1, in the middle of the festival of Flora. On this day, the temple was dedicated to Bona Dea. This was an ancient women-only ceremony, as Bona Dea was another earth goddess. Wine could not be offered in the temple, as wine. Originally, milk or milk mixed with honey were the libations offered. Later, if wine were used, it was called milk, offered in a pot called a "vase for honey". Myrtle was not allowed in the temple, relating back to the myth of Fauna (Bona Dea). This myth of Faunus beating Fauna with the branch of myrtle, also manifested itself in the ritual beating of slave women, driving them out of the temple. An *herbarium* was in the temple in which healing herbs were kept. Snakes were also kept in the temple, again relating

⁶⁷ Ovid, *Fasti*, IV, 133ff.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 863ff.

back to the myth of Faunus and Fauna. A sacrificial pig was offered. The pig was another animal representing fertility, as well as being less expensive than the large corporate sacrificial animals like the cow, bull, or horse.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, the Good Goddess must be my theme. There's a natural outcrop which has given its name to the place they call the Rock; it's a good part of the Aventine. Here Remus had stood in vain, that time when the birds of the Palatine gave his brother the first omen. There on the gently sloping ridge, the senate decreed a temple which loathes the gaze of men. It was dedicated by a descendant of the ancient Crassus family, a maiden who had never submitted to a man's embrace. Livia has restored it, in order to imitate her husband and follow his lead in every respect.⁷⁰

Matrons celebrated *Matralia* on June 11. They had celebrated Juno again in her temple on the Kalends of June. The cult of *Matralia* had some unusual rituals. Only a matron still in her original marriage (not widowed, not remarried) could garland the statue in the temple with clothing, jewelry, and flowers. Only one female slave was allowed into the temple, and then subsequently thrown out with a box on the ears. The sacrificial cakes were cooked in an old-fashioned earthenware pot, and the matrons prayed for their nieces and nephews first, saving prayers for their own children for last.⁷¹ They carried their nieces and nephews in their arms to the temple.

Go, good matrons---Matralia is your festival---and offer golden cakes to the goddess from Thebes. Next to the bridges and the Circus is a very famous district famed for the bull's statue erected there. This is the place and date that King Servius' besceptered hands founded Mother Matuta's holy temple. Who is the goddess, why does she bar slavegirls from the doorstep of her temple (for she does) and demand roasted cakes?⁷²

Feasts/Festivals

⁶⁹ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic*, 94-95.

⁷⁰ Ovid, *Fasti*, V.148ff.

⁷¹ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic*, 154-155.

⁷² Ovid, *Fasti*, VI.475ff.

The *Lupercalia* was celebrated on the 15 of February. This festival began with the sacrifices of goats and sacred cakes made by the Vestals. Two young men had their foreheads smeared with the blood, then wiped with wool dipped in milk. Laughing, they stripped and put on the goat skins and a head wreath, then sat down to the feast. Afterwards, they began running around the base of the Palatine Hill, leading two groups of youths. As they ran, women who wished to become fertile and bear children, would step into their paths. The youths would then strike the women with strips of the slaughtered goats' hides, which were called *februa*. They may have believed that the whipping would drive out the evil powers that kept them from becoming pregnant, and energized the fertile powers within their bodies.⁷³

The third morning after the Ides beholds the naked Luperci, A she-goat had been duly sacrificed to horny-hooved Faunus and the crowd came as invited to the meager feast. . . .Bride, what are you waiting for? Strong drugs won't make you a mother, nor prayer nor incantation. Put up with blows from a fertilizing hand and "father-in-law" will soon be "grandfather," as he longs to be. Once upon a time harsh fate kept wives from scarcely ever redeeming their pledges of love. "What was the good of carrying off the Sabine women?" Romulus cried (this happened during his reign), "if that assault has brought me war instead of strength? Better to have had no daughters-in-law." At the foot of the Esquiline Hill was a grove, uncut for many years named after mighty Juno. When they had come there, both brides and husbands alike humbly went down on bended knees. The tree tops suddenly stirred and shook in the grove, and an amazing revelation came from the goddess. "Let a sacred billy-goat mount Italian matrons." The weird pronouncement appalled the frightened crowd. An exiled diviner, whose name has been lost with the passage of time, had recently arrived from Etruscan soil. He slaughtered a goat. As instructed, the girls offered their backs to be struck by strips of its hide. For the tenth time a crescent moon was waxing, when suddenly the couples all became parents.⁷⁴

Ovid gives mythical stories about Romulus to explain this festival. Plutarch alludes to them, as well as giving a similar explanation in his *Life of Romulus*. He adds the sacrifice of a dog to his explanation.

⁷³ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic*, 310-321.

⁷⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, 267ff.

The Lupercalia, by the time of its celebration, may seem to be a feast of purification, for it is solemnized on the dies nefasti, or non-court days, of the month February, which name signifies purification, and the very day of the feast was anciently called Februata; but its name is equivalent to the Greek Lycaea; and it seems thus to be of great antiquity, and brought in by the Arcadians who came with Evander. Yet this is but dubious, for it may come as well from the wolf that nursed Romulus; and we see the Luperci, the priests, begin their course from the place where they say Romulus was exposed. But the ceremonies performed in it render the origin of the thing more difficult to be guessed at; for there are goats killed, then, two young noblemen's sons being brought, some are to stain their foreheads with the bloody knife, others presently to wipe it off with wool dipped in milk; then the young boys must laugh after their foreheads are wiped; that done, having cut the goats' skins into thongs, they run about naked, only with something about their middle, lashing all they meet; and the young wives do not avoid their strokes, fancying they will help conception and child-birth. Another thing peculiar to this feast is for the Luperci to sacrifice a dog. But as, a certain poet who wrote fabulous explanations of Roman customs in elegiac verses, says, that Romulus and Remus, after the conquest of Amulius, ran joyfully to the place where the wolf gave them suck; and that in imitation of that, this feast was held, and two young noblemen ran—and that the bloody knife applied to their foreheads was a sign of the danger and bloodshed of that day; the cleansing of them in milk, a remembrance of their food and nourishment. Caius Acilius writes, that before the city was built, the cattle of Romulus and Remus one day going astray, they, praying to the god Faunus, ran out to seek them naked, wishing not to be troubled with sweat, and that this is why the Luperci run naked. If the sacrifice be by way of purification, a dog might very well be sacrificed; for the Greeks, in their lustrations, carry out young dogs, and frequently use this ceremony of periscylacismus as they call it. Or if again it is a sacrifice of gratitude to the wolf that nourished and preserved Romulus, there is good reason in killing a dog, as being an enemy to wolves. Unless indeed, after all, the creature is punished for hindering the Luperci in their running.⁷⁵

The timing for this festival fitted neatly into the old agrarian cycle. The young matrons who did not give birth in January would have probably been looking for a way to become fertile as spring began. Having children was of primary importance to the families and the future of Rome.

Anna Perennae was celebrated on March 15. This was also a plebeian festival, held on the Campus Martius, or Field of Mars. Men and women had a picnic. Small structures and tents were constructed to house the pairs for the day, and some couples would just lie

⁷⁵Plutarch, *Life of Romulus*, 06/02/02, 20-21
Wysiyg://17/http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_plutarch_romulus.htm

on the open field. Drinking, saying prayers for long lives, and dancing were the order for the day.⁷⁶ Ovid describes where the holiday came from in two separate tales, as well as referring to the customs of the day.

On the Ides the merry festival of Anna Perenna takes place, not far from the banks of the wandering Tiber. The common people come and drink scattered about on the grass, each man stretched out with his partner. Some rough it out in the open, a few pitch tents; some set up cane poles instead of sturdy pillars, and spread their togas out on top. But they still warm up from the sun and the wine, and pray for as many years as they drink toasts. There you'll find a man who drinks up Nestor's years and a woman whose cups have made her a Sibyl. There they sing whatever they've learned at the shows and wave their hands nimbly along with the words. They set the punchbowl aside and perform crude reels, and a stylish girlfriend lets down her hair and dances. They come back home staggering, a spectacle for the masses, and the crowd they run into calls them lucky....She seemed to speak: "I'm the nymph of the peaceful Numicius, called Anna Perenna for hiding in a perennial river." At once they feasted happily in the fields they had wandered, and filled themselves and the day with much wine....A certain Anna came from Bovillae, a town near the city, a poor old woman, but very industrious. With her white hair tucked up in a light babushka she would knead country-style loaves with her palsied hand. Come morning she used to distribute them, still hot from the oven, to the people. The people were grateful for these supplies. When peace was settled at home, they erected a statue to Perenna because she brought them help when they'd run out. Now it remains to tell why girls sing indecent songs, for they get together and sing some shocking stuff...so old jokes are made and indecent things are sung and it is a pleasure to have tricked a mighty god.⁷⁷

The *Liberalia* was celebrated on March 17. *Liber* was probably a creative, productive spirit full of blessings. It was an Italian deity from pre Republic days. Therefore, the plebeians, as more closely related to the peasant farmers of pre Republic days, continued this festival. It was held in the streets of Rome. Old women, crowned with wreaths of ivy, sat along the street selling honey and oil cakes for on the spot sacrifices. They had portable altars sitting beside them and made the sacrifice on behalf of the buyer.⁷⁸ Ovid tells that this holiday is also in honor of Bacchus. This may be an example of the overlay

⁷⁶ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic*, 50-51.

⁷⁷ Ovid, *Fasti*, III.522ff.

⁷⁸ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic*, 54-55.

of foreign gods onto earlier Roman gods that occurred during the Republic due to the foreign trade and wars. Bacchus was originally Greek, and Ovid describes some of the history of this god in the introduction of this holiday. Young boys graduated into their togas on this day, and, as mothers, the women would have participated as observers, as well as buying the honey cakes to make a grain offering.

The third day after the Ides is full of honor for Bacchus....The function of this passage is to set down the reasons why the Vine Planter summons people to his libation cakes. Before your birth, Liber, altars went without tribute, and one could find grass on the cold hearths....You were the first to give cinnamon and captured incense and the roasted innards of a cow led in triumph. "Libations" are named for their originator, as are "libation" cakes, part of which is given to hallowed hearths. Libation cakes are made for the god because he loves sweet liquids and reportedly he discovered honey....Father Bacchus enjoys honey, so we duly offer its discoverer shining honey drizzled over a warm libation cake. There's no arcane reason why a woman takes charge of this. He incites troops of women with his thyrsus rod. Why an old woman does this, you may ask. That age is fonder of wine and loves the gifts of the loaded vine. Why is she garlanded with ivy? Ivy is precious to Bacchus....It remains for me to find out why the liberal toga is given to boys on your day, splendid Bacchus.⁷⁹

In December, *Saturnalia* was celebrated. This was a time of socializing with family and friends. In the old agrarian lifestyle, this was the period of little agricultural work, so more time could be spent relaxing. On December 17, the festival began with a public sacrifice at Saturn's temple, followed by a large feast. Women would have attended this and participated by observation and partaking of the feast. Family rituals of baths and sacrifices of suckling pigs followed on the next several days. Rounds of parties, social visits, gift giving, games, and general merrymaking followed. Wax candles (representing light returning after the winter solstice), candies, and earthenware images were sold in the marketplace for gift giving. Slaves were feted by their owners at feasts in their homes.

⁷⁹ Ovid, *Fasti*, III.715ff.

This may have been traditional from the pre Republic days of the farm workers enjoying time off after working hard all year.⁸⁰

Circuses

The festivals on February 27 and March 14 were called *Equirria*, and were the horse races, *Circuses*, held to honor Mars. These races were held on the Campius Martius (the field of Mars), and signified the beginning of a new year. The four racing stables in Rome were each assigned a color: Greens, Blues, Whites, and Reds. Women sat with the men at the races, fully enjoying the spectacle.⁸¹ Ovid refers to the *Equirria* in his February 27 and March 14 entries: “Now two more days are left of the second month, and Mars whips up his speedy equine team. *Equirria* has kept its accurate designation, for the races which the god beholds in his very own Field.”⁸² “When the sun with rosy day in his swift chariot has six times lifted up his disk and set it down as often, you’ll see the second *Equirria* on grassy Mars’ Field which the Tiber threatens at the bend in the river. But if it happens to be flooded with water spilling over the banks, the race will be run on the dusty Caelian Hill.”⁸³

On April 10, Ovid makes a reference to a parade in the Circus before the horse races: “When the next Dawn has looked upon Rome the conqueror, and the stars disperse to make room for the Sun, the Circus will be packed when the gods’ statues are paraded, and horses will race like the wind for first prize.”⁸⁴ The women would have been at the

⁸⁰ Fowler, *The Festivals of the Period of the Republic*, 271-273.

⁸¹ Lionel Casson, *Everyday Life in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 102-103.

⁸² Ovid, *Fasti*, II.857ff.

⁸³ Ovid, *Fasti*, III.517ff.

⁸⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, IV.389ff.

Circus to observe the parade of the statues. This is one of several times throughout the year when the statues of the gods were garlanded, draped with clothes and jewels, and exhibited for all to see. They were not only paraded but also set up in scenes of feasts and banquets.

On April 19, as part of the celebration of Ceres, women watched foxes run through the Circus with burning torches strapped to their backs. Ceres' festival and temple were associated with the plebeians, as fines collected by the tribunes were spent on this temple. Also, associated with the political and economical realms, grain (Ceres) was necessary to import for the people living in the city to have food. The plebeians, slaves, foreigners, and visitors would not have had country estates in which to escape as the patricians did. "When the third day has dawned after the Hyades' retreat, the Circus will have horses at their post positions. So I have to explain the reason why foxes are turned loose with burning torches tied to their backs."⁸⁵

Ludi

Ludi, or games, were another popular way of celebrating the feast days of gods and goddesses. The goddess Flora's festival began on April 28 and continued until May 3. Originally, this was an ancient fertility festival in the spring for the agrarian society. It became another feast day of the prostitutes, and combining the games with the business girls heightened the indecent free-for-all event. Shows, drunkenness, and hares and goats turned loose in the Circus Maximus were the popular attractions. Vetches, lupines, and beans, as well as medals with obscene representations engraved upon them were scattered among the participants at the Circus. These particular animals and plants were known to

be prolific breeders. This old fertility festival kept to its theme throughout its entire length. Valerius Maximus told a tale of Cato the Younger withdrawing from the theatre when the *mimae* began to undress.⁸⁶ Ovid gives a story about Flora, as well as the customs of the people.

Be with us, mother of flowers, honored with bawdy shows: I've postponed your turn from the previous month. Your holiday begins in April and runs into the month of May:...I was getting ready to ask why there's greater lewdness and more permissive bawdiness in these shows, but it came to me that this divinity isn't a stern one and that she brings gifts connected with pleasure. At parties every brow is wreathed with chains of flowers and the polished table is piled with roses. A drunken reveller dances with a wreath of bast in his hair, inspired by wine to indiscretion. A drunken lover serenades his girlfriend's callous door with pliant garlands in his perfumed hair. No serious business is conducted by the crown that wears a wreath, and water drinkers don't wear flower chains....Of course the reason why the crowd of streetwalkers honors these shows isn't hard to figure out. Flora isn't one of the bluenoses, isn't one of the uppercrust. She wants her rites open to a lower-class crowd...But why, when people dress in white for Cere's festival, do multi-colored fashions suit this goddess?...Why are there netted at your shows, not African lions, but harmless roe deer and twitching hares?...⁸⁷

While women on the whole did not retain prominent leadership positions in Roman cults, there were some positions of an unusual nature that were held by women. As they were few in number, they actually were more marginal than mainstream for women's roles in their religion. The majority of women served in the capacity of supporter, observer, and general citizen participant. Other than the few cults that were designated women only, women participated alongside men in the public festivals.

⁸⁵ Ovid, *Fasti*, IV.679ff.

⁸⁶ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic*, 93-95.

⁸⁷ Ovid, *Fasti*, V.183ff.

CHAPTER 6

PUBLIC ROLES

Vestal Virgins

The dominant public positions in corporate temple worship that women held were the six Vestal Virgins. These priestesses served the goddess Vesta at her round temple in the Forum. The fire of Vesta was the hearth of the city of Rome. Vesta was an ancient goddess from the pre Republican days of the agrarian society. She was not anthropomorphized as the other gods and goddesses in the pantheon. She remained as the pure essence of fire. She was the heart and essence of the city, as the hearth fire was the center and essence of the home, family, and its survival. Ovid discusses this in *Fasti*:

Vesta, be favorable. To you I now open my lips in devotions, if I am permitted to come to your ritual....When Rome had passed forty anniversaries, people say that a shrine welcomed the goddess who keeps the flame, the project of that peace-loving king, the most god-fearing soul ever produced by the Sabine territory. The roofs of bronze you see today were then straw-thatched, and the walls were plaited from pliant wattles. This tiny spot, the site of the Vestals' official residence, was then the palace of King Numa the long-beard. But the shape of the temple, which survives to this day, was there before, they say, and a commendable reason is behind that shape.... Vesta's temple looks the same. Not a single corner sticks out, and the dome protects it from the rain. Why do virgin attendants minister to the goddess, you ask? ...No wonder that a virgin is delighted by a virgin attendant and welcomes chaste hands to her rites. Don't imagine that Vesta is anything but living flame; you won't see a single substance born from flame. And so she's rightly a virgin, she doesn't produce nor receive any seeds, and she loves her virgin associates. For quite a while I stupidly thought there were statues of Vesta. I soon learned there weren't any in the domed rotunda. A fire that never goes out is hidden in that temple; neither Vesta nor the fire has a single likeness. The earth is very stable. From being very stable, Vesta gets her name, as in Greek she's Hestia from her heavy resting. The hearth is named for its hearty warmth that heartens all, but it used to be at the front of the house. From this I believe the "vestibule" derives, and praying with a preamble to Vesta, who occupies first place....a clean little dish brings the food offered to Vesta. Look at the bread hanging down from garlanded asses, and wreaths of flowers festooning rough millstones. The early peasants used ovens only for toasting barley (the goddess of ovens has rites of her own): the hearth itself got the bread ready, buried in the ashes, with a broken roof-tile laid on the warm ground. And so the baker honors the hearth

and our Lady of Hearths and the ass that turns the volcanic millstones.⁸⁸

Six young girls of bodily perfection between the ages of six and ten, who had living parents of the patrician class were chosen to serve for thirty years. The first ten were as novices, learning the rituals, the second ten were of servitude, and the last ten were served as mentors for the young novices.

The *Pontifex Maximus* led them away from their fathers by the hand. He became the *paterfamilias* for the girls. They remained virgins until the thirty years were over, living in the hall of Vesta next to the temple. After their thirty years, they were free to marry if they wished, although few did. "...and of those who did marry, things did not go well for they were afflicted with regret and depression for the rest of their lives."⁸⁹ The punishment for breaking their chastity oath was to be buried alive near the Colline gate.

"Here they prepare a small room, with an entrance from above. In it there is a bed with a cover, a lighted lamp, and some of the basic necessities of life, such as bread, water in a bucket, milk, oil, because they consider it impious to allow a body that is consecrated to the most holy rites to die of starvation (4). They put the woman who is being punished on a litter, which they cover over from outside and bind down with straps, so that not even her voice can be heard, and they take her through the Forum. Everyone there stands aside silently and follows the litter without a word, in serious dejection. There is no other sight so terrifying, (10.7) and the city finds no day more distasteful than that day. When the litter is borne to the special place, the attendants unfasten her chains and the chief priest says certain secret prayers and lifts his hands to the gods in prayer because of he is required to carry out the execution, and he leads the victim out veiled and settles her on the ladder that carries her down to the room. Then he, along with the other priests, turns away. The ladder is removed from the entrance and a great pile of earth is placed over the room to hide it, so that the place is on a level with the rest of the mound."⁹⁰

Their punishment for lesser infractions was to be beaten by the *Pontifex Maximus* while

⁸⁸ Ovid, *Fasti*, VI.249ff (trans. Betty Rose Nagle, *Ovid's Fasti Roman Holidays* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995]), 159.

⁸⁹ Mary R. Leftkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*, 408. Vestalvirgins. <http://www.uky.edu/ArtsSciences/Classics/wlgr/wlgr-religion4> 01/27/98

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.9.

standing naked behind a curtain in a dark place.

“When they go out they are preceded by *lictors* with the *fasces*, and if they accidentally happen to meet a criminal being led to execution, his life is spared. The virgin must swear that the meeting was involuntary and accidental and not planned. Any one who goes underneath a Vestal’s litter when she is being carried is put to death.”⁹¹

Their main duty was to keep the city’s hearth-fire burning. At the beginning of each year, in March, the old fire was extinguished, the hearth and temple cleaned and purified. “So that Vesta too may shine decked with fresh leaves, the gray laurel withdraws from her Trojan hearth. Besides, they say a new fire is made in that secret shrine and the flame gains strength from this renewal.”⁹² A new fire was started by rubbing two sticks together and transported to the temple in a bronze lantern. There was a *penus*, or storehouse, behind the altar in which holy objects seen only by the Vestals were stored. This was also cleaned and purified at the beginning of each new year. It was swept and the debris thrown into the Tiber.⁹³ “Until gentle Tiber’s muddy waters have brought the scourings from Trojan Vesta’s temple down to the sea...”⁹⁴ The Vestals had to draw water from the spring and carry it to the temple in a bucket that was cone shaped so that it could not be put upon the ground en route.⁹⁵

The Vestals made the sacred salt-cakes to be used on the feasts of Vesta, *Lupercalia*, and the Banquet of Jupiter.⁹⁶ “The days from May 7-14 were occupied by the Vestal Virgins in preparing the *mola salsa*, or sacred salt-cake, for use at the Vestalia in June, on

⁹¹ Ibid., 10.4.

⁹² Ovid, *Fasti*, III.141ff.

⁹³ R. M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 90-91.

⁹⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, 227ff.

⁹⁵ Robert E. A. Palmer, *Roman Religion and Roman Empire Five Essays* (Philadelphia: Haney Foundation Series, 1974), 125.

the Ides of September, and at the *Lupercalia*. This was made from the first ears of standing corn in a primitive fashion by the three senior Vestals, and is no doubt, like most of their ritual, a relic of the domestic functions of the daughters of the family.”⁹⁷ On April 15, on *Fordicidia*, the Vestals participated in a public sacrifice. This was one instance where they performed a male priest’s ritual: handling blood in a sacrifice.

“The cows were offered, as all authorities agree, to Tellus, who, as we shall see, may be an indigitation of the same earth power represented by Ceres, Bona Dea, Dea Dia, and other female deities. The unborn calves were torn by attendants of the *virgo vestalis maxima* from the womb of the mother and burnt, and their ashes were kept by the Vestals for use at the *Parilia* a few days later. This was the first ceremony in the year in which the Vestals took an active part, and it was the first of a series of acts all of which are connected with the fruits of the earth, their growth, ripening, and harvesting. The object of burning the unborn calves seems to have been to procure the fertility of the corn now growing in the womb of mother earth, to whom the sacrifice was offered.”⁹⁸

When the third day after Venus’ Ides has dawned, the high-priest will sacrifice a brood cow. A “brood” cow is one that bears, called bountiful from bearing. From this they also think “birth” is derived. Now the stock is pregnant, the earth too is pregnant with seed. To the teeming Earth a teeming victim is given. One cow falls on Jupiter’s stronghold, and the thirty wards each get one and drip with copiously spattered blood. But when the acolytes have ripped the calves from the wombs and offered the carved-up innards to the smoking hearths, the eldest Vestal burns up the calves in the fire, for the ashes that purify on Pales’ day.”⁹⁹

Vesta’s particular feast was on June 9, in which only women could attend, and that was in bare feet. The Vestals helped the *Pontifex Maximus* lead the procession to begin the sacrifices of the consuls to start the year. On May 15 the Vestals, the Priestess of Jupiter, dressed in mourning, and the *pontifices*, *consuls*, and magistrates processed around Rome collecting the rush-puppets from the *sacra Argiorum*, or small shrines.

⁹⁶ H. J. Rose, *Religion in Greece and Rome* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 203.

⁹⁷ W. Warde Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic* (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1925), 110-111.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹⁹ Ovid, *Fasti*, IV.629ff.

These puppets were then dropped into the Tiber from the oldest bridge.¹⁰⁰ “On this date it’s also the custom for the Vestals to toss straw dummies of the men of yore from the wooden bridge. Whoever believes that carcasses were tossed to death at age sixty, condemns our ancestors of a wicked crime....”¹⁰¹

The Vestal Virgins also helped with other rituals and ceremonies throughout the year. Their presence during public rituals was necessary: at sacrifices, the games, processions, etc., accompanying the *Pontifex Maximus*, or *Flamen Dialis*. “On August 21 his sacrifice was performed, says Tertullian, by the Flamen Quirinalis in the presence of the Vestals.”¹⁰²

At the *Bona Dea* in December, the Vestals were present and performed the sacrifice of the suckling pig, as no men were allowed into the rituals. The ritual included a dinner in a private home of a consul. The decorations were of ivy. The women present ate the flesh of the sacrificed pig, drank wine, sang, and danced.¹⁰³

The Vestals had some of the rights of male citizens: having the *lictors*, participating in certain sacrifices, and participating in public rituals. After their retirement from being priestesses, they had control of their own legal and economic interests while they lived. “Moreover, in Labeo’s Commentaries on the Twelve Tables, he wrote: ‘A Vestal Virgin is neither heir to an intestate person nor is anyone her heir if she dies intestate, but her estate passes to the public treasury.’”¹⁰⁴ They could move in society as male citizens. This allowed them the independence to stay single and take care of themselves.

¹⁰⁰ Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings Women’s Religions Among Pagans, Jew, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 86.

¹⁰¹ Ovid, *Fasti*, 621ff.

¹⁰² Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic*, 209.

¹⁰³ Verena Zinserling, *Women in Greece and Rome* (New York: Abner Schram, 1973), 62.

¹⁰⁴ Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome*, 409.

Other Roles

Other formalized public roles were the wives of the *Flamen Dialis*, and the wife of the priest of Jupiter. These husband and wife teams worked as a unit for the priests' roles. They could not perform their public duties without their wives being present. The wives also had some duties independent of their husbands. These included certain rituals and preparations for ceremonies. "I myself have seen the flamen's wife requesting 'februa'. Requesting 'februa,' she was given a pine bough."¹⁰⁵ "If any of you girls want to marry, even if you're both in a hurry, put it off. A little wait has great advantages. Weapons stir up battles; battles are unsuitable for couples. Better to wait 'til the shields have been put out of sight. And for periods of time in March and in June, women may not marry, and the priestess may not comb her hair. On these days even the girded wife of Jupiter's pointy-capped flamen must keep her hair uncombed."¹⁰⁶ "...but I found that this month's first half is inopportune for weddings, as the venerable wife of Jupiter's flamen told me: "Until gentle Tiber's muddy waters have brought the scourings from Trojan Vesta's temple down to the sea, I may not comb down my hair with a comb of boxwood, nor trim my nails with an iron utensil, nor have contact with my husband no matter that he's Jupiter's priest, no matter that our vows were 'til death do us part."¹⁰⁷

There were other lesser priests whose wives also held a public position for some rituals. Some of the foreign cults had female priestesses instead of priests. These women served this foreign god or goddess in that temple, observing rituals and prayers.¹⁰⁸

Priestesses also served under priests such as Artemis, at Ephesus, and Enyo, at Comona

¹⁰⁵ Ovid, *Fasti*, II.27ff.

¹⁰⁶ Ovid, *Fasti*, III.393ff.

¹⁰⁷ Ovid, *Fasti*, VI.225ff.

¹⁰⁸ Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 86.

in Asia Minor. At Comona there were “sacred slaves” who worked in the temple doing menial tasks.¹⁰⁹ Temple prostitutes, or *hetairae*, were serving the temples, with their fees going to the temples.

The priestess of Apollo kept the *Sibylline* books for Rome. These were books of oracles that she interpreted, or read, when consulted by the priests on specific actions for Rome to follow. Some of these foreign cults with priestesses were: Isis, Demeter (benefactor of orphans and children), and Cybele. These women, of socially prominent and wealthy families, funded festivals, public entertainments, sacrifices, and banquets. A priestess of Bacchus altered the rites which caused such an uproar as to result in new laws being passed to limit the rituals in 186 BCE. Originally, the rites were restricted to women, held three days a year and matrons took turns serving as priestesses. Paculla Annia, as priestess, initiated her sons, Minius and Herennius Cerrinius. They held the rites at night for five nights. The rituals changed from these rites for women into sexual orgies of homosexual acts of men. Apparently those men who tried to refrain from participating were sacrificed as victims. Men, in “states of possession”, would utter prophecies and women dressed as *maenads* ran around plunging burning torches into the Tiber. An investigation was carried out with some of the defendants committing suicide, some were imprisoned, and some were executed (or turned over to their *paterfamilias* to have the sentence carried out). The new law called for dismantling the Bacchic sites, forbade cult places, and prohibited citizens from participating in rites. Violaters were punished by death.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 45.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 43-44.

Roman women played a part in public religion by holding certain positions as priestesses. These positions, such as the wives of the *Flamens* of several different gods, the Sibylline, and the priestesses of foreign gods were minimal in number. The six Vestal Virgins held their positions for thirty years. All of these few public positions were occupied for long periods of time by the same women. Therefore, the number of women holding a public position was few. But they were important in the corporate rituals of the Romans to placate their gods. These women had to play the role they held, performing the rites and rituals on a daily basis that were considered a necessity for Roman peace and prosperity.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The women's roles changed during the Republic. The patrician women were bound into specific roles more than the plebeian women because of the importance the society put on reputation, family connections, and wealth. If the patrician women stepped out of their assigned roles, then it reflected negatively on their husbands' reputations. But by the end of the Republic, the patrician women could use the laws to their advantage to gain control of their own wealth and property and remain divorced or widowed with a "token" male guardian in name only. Many chose their own tutors and had complete control over their lives. This reflects a lessening of the importance of the Rape of Lucretia story's moral from the beginning of the period. The figure of Lucretia had long been held as a model Roman matron, committing suicide rather than having anything she was involved in sully her husband's name. As the Roman patrician woman became more independent, she was less attached to her husband's name and reputation. Many were associated by name with their father and family line, and some made a name for themselves, like Cornelius Gracchi.

The matron was responsible for the raising of her children, the future of Rome. This held true for patrician and plebeian women. They were in charge of having the desires of the *paterfamilias* executed, in maintaining a home that was a model of Rome. This included performing tasks necessary to invoke the good spirits that kept their home and family safe, secure, fed, and prosperous. She was responsible for all tasks that related to

women's work, as well as any extra tasks asked of her. Her religion permeated her life, as there were prayers to be said for the beginning and ending of every task.

A woman's life expectancy was around twenty-nine years. She was chosen at birth by the *paterfamilias* to live, and was given only the family name. Possibly for a given name she was numbered. Value on her life was much less than for her brother. Her birthday was celebrated, though, and dowry given at her marriage. She usually married soon after age eleven. During the Republic, the legalities of marriages changed, allowing the Roman woman to control her own property and affairs. This is what gave her the independence she received by the end of the Republic. The family name continued on into death, as ancestors were honored and remembered.

On the whole, women did not have leading public positions. Their participation in public festivals was by watching and being present. Plebeian women were a little freer in their participation, because their reputation was not so much at stake. They could participate in the games, parades, circuses, picnics, and drunken revelries much more freely. Some temple worship rituals were for patrician women only, and the plebeian women countered with their own private temple worship activities. Many of the public cults were foreign cults that were incorporated into the calendar. Many women participated more freely in these foreign cults as there were not all the ritualistic rules associated with them.

The few public religious roles that women held were the Vestal Virgins, and the wives of some of the priests, and the *Sibylline* priestess. The Vestals played a very important part in Rome: they kept the hearth of Rome. Rome believed that the center of the home was the hearth, or Vesta, and the Vestals were responsible for the center of Rome, the

public hearth. They kept the fire, participated in many rituals indirectly, and served the goddess and city for thirty years. They had many of the same legal rights as male citizens and could keep these rights when retired from service. The priestess of Apollo also played an important, but indirect, part in Rome. When the senate or a priest needed an answer to a question, she was asked to interpret the *Sibylline* books. Thereby, she influenced the decisions of the senate and priests. The *flamen* of Jupiter could not serve without his wife by his side, so this priestess also played a very important indirect part in Rome.

Although strides were made during the Republic for women, they still basically had the same roles to fulfill: care for their children, be responsible for their home, and participate in the private rituals and prayers that affected their personal lives. As to my personal interest in the research, my questions were answered in that women's roles have not changed much from the patrician and plebeian women's roles, and theirs did not change extensively from the beginning to the end of the Republic.

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