

OUTI SIHVONEN

The Vestal Virgins and Power
Tradition and Change in Third Century Rome

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

To be presented, with the permission of
the Faculty of Social Sciences
of Tampere University,
for public discussion in the auditorium K 103
of the Linna building, Kalevantie 5, Tampere,
on the 29 August 2020, at 12 o'clock.

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
Tampere University, Faculty of Social Sciences
Finland

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ISBN 978-952-03-1670-9 (pdf, Trepo)
<http://urn.fi/URN:978-952-03-1670-9>

PunaMusta Oy – Yliopistopaino
Vantaa 2020

Abstract

This dissertation studies the social influence of the Vestal virgins, *virgines Vestales*, in the third century Rome. The cult of Vesta, goddess of the hearth, was an essential part of the Roman state religion and the six Vestal virgins were the only female priesthood of the pontifical college. They were trained to the profession of the priestesses from the early years on of their childhood, and they were required to stay for thirty years in the cult's service. For that term they achieved an independent status receiving great privileges. However, remaining chaste was obligatory under penalty of death – an unchaste Vestal was buried alive within the city walls. Although the Vestals are profoundly studied in the earlier research, their capacity as the influential women is a neglected theme. In order to find out the impact and extent of their agency, the thesis analyses their privileges, their economic benefits and capacity as the independent women of élite. The key questions are: for what purposes, and for whose benefit, did these women use their privileged position and religious power? The temporal focus of this study is third century society which fell into the political and social crisis. Therefore I discuss how the crisis effected to their public roles as the priestesses and benefactresses. In contrast to the Vestals' active role as benefactresses, a question of their significance and social value in imperial politics is studied thoroughly. As the notable figures of the society, the priestesses were the intermediaries between their clients and the imperial house. However, their prominent status was also used as an instrument for manifesting imperial politics and power.

The main materials are the literary as well as epigraphic sources which are analysed with qualitative methods and with a social-historic approach. The numerous honorary inscriptions dedicated to the priestesses during the third century are the important material, which is not studied yet thoroughly in the context of the third century crisis. During this epoch, production of inscriptions declined but the habit of donating them to the Vestals did not suffer such development. The numismatic material provides an important evidence of the Vestals' relationships with the imperial house.

It is shown that the Vestals course of life was an essential for development of their social status and agency. The different stages of female course of life – *puella*, *nupta* and *matrona* – were represented by the six priestesses living in the household of the *Atrium Vestae*. The most influential figure in their cultic institute was the chief Vestal, *virgo Vestalis maxima*, under whose leadership the cult functioned. Her relationship with the imperial women was based on the *amicitia*, friendship, which was possible between the equals. The achievements of a *virgo Vestalis maxima* were manifested in the honorary inscriptions which the dedicators designed to display a Vestal's public role as well as

their own position. The honorary texts have been interpreted as monotonous and formal but the Vestals are praised with different tones and characterizations. Some of the chief Vestals appear as the dutiful benefactresses while some are praised for their religious and sacred character. These specializations create interesting differences among the Vestals and their public images.

One of my main findings is that a Vestal represented her family also during her priesthood, and therefore the status and influence of her family had an effect to her honorary position as a priestess and to the economic benefits which she received. Despite of the times of crisis, their economic position remained secured. Thus, the third century Vestals continued to act influential benefactresses for their biological family members and clients. Taking care of the eternal fire of the state hearth – which was in practice the imperial home altar – the Vestals represented the imperial power. While the third century emperors were often absent from the capital and their term in office was short lived in most cases, the Vestals stayed many decades in their office representing continuity and stability of the Roman state. The significance of my thesis is to demonstrate the various roles of the priestesses and show the scale of the social agency of the élite women in the society which was in the stage of transformation and crisis.

Tiivistelmä

Tutkimus käsittelee Vestan neitsyiden, *virgines Vestales*, yhteiskunnallista vaikutusvaltaa 200-luvun Roomassa. Vestan eli kotilieden jumalattaren kultti oli tärkeä osa Rooman valtion uskontoa ja kuusi Vestan neitsyttä, vestaalia, olivat ainoa naispuolisia papisto pontifex-pappien collegiossa. He tulivat kulttiin jo lapsina oppiakseen papittaren ammatin, jossa heidän oli palveltava seuraavat kolmekymmentä vuotta. Tuona aikana he saavuttivat huomattavan itsenäisen aseman ja laajat privilegiot. Neitseinä pitäytyminen oli kuitenkin pakollista koko virkauran ajan kuolemanrangaistuksen uhalla – siveetön vestaalin joutui elävänä haudatuksi kaupungin muurien sisäpuolelle. Vaikka aiempi tutkimus on käsitellyt vestaaleita laajasti, heidän roolinsa vaikutusvaltaisina naisina on jätetty tutkimuksessa vähäiselle huomiolle. Tutkimuksessa analysoin erityisesti heidän privilegioitaan osana uskonnollista virkaa, heidän taloudellisia etuoikeuksiaan ja asemaansa itsenäisinä eliitin naisina. Näin ollen työni keskiössä on kysymys, mihin tarkoituksiin ja keiden hyödyksi nämä naiset käyttivät etuoikeutettua asemaansa ja uskonnollista vaikutusvaltaansa. Käsitteelen heidän yhteiskunnallista toimintaansa 200-luvun Roomassa, joka joutui tuolloin yhteisöä laajasti koskettaneeseen kriisiin. Tästä johtuen tarkastelen, miten kriisi vaikutti heidän julkiseen rooliinsa papittarina ja patronoina. Vastakkaisena teemana vestaalien aktiiviselle roolille tutkimus keskittyy toisaalta kysymykseen miten heidän keskeisyys ja yhteiskunnallinen arvo hyödynnettiin keisarillisessa politiikassa. Yhteisönsä huomattavina jäseninä vestaalit toimivat välittäjinä klienteillensä, jotka hakivat keisarin huomiota ja hyväksyntää. Vestaalien huomattava yhteiskunnallinen arvoasema ja symboliarvo valjastettiin osaksi keisarin politiikkaa ja vallan manifestaatiota.

Pääasiallinen lähdeaineistoni koostuu kirjallisista ja epigrafisesta materiaalista, jota tutkin kvalitatiivisin metodein ja yhteiskuntahistoriallisesta näkökulmasta käsin. Lukuisat kunniapiirtokirjoitukset, joita papittarille omistettiin 200-luvulla, ovat työssäni tärkeä aineisto. Tätä materiaalia ei ole vielä tutkittu perin pohjin 200-luvun kriisi-ajan tematiikan pohjalta. Piirtokirjoitusten määrä supistui tuolloin, mutta vestaalien kunniapiirtokirjoitusten määrässä tämä kehityssuunta ei ole näkyvissä. Käytän työssäni myös numismaattista aineistoa, joka on tärkeä materiaali tutkittaessa papitarten suhteiden muutoksia keisariperheen kanssa.

Tutkimus osoittaa että vestaalien elämänkaaren eri vaiheet olivat merkittäviä tekijöitä, joiden kautta sosiaalinen status ja toimijuus kehittyivät. Naisen elämänkaari eri vaiheineen – *puella*, *nupta* ja *matrona* – tuli esille kuuden papittaren muodostamassa taloudessa *Atrium Vestae* -talossa. Johtava vestaali, *virgo Vestalis maxima*, oli vaikutusvaltaisain hahmo, jonka alaisuudessa kultti toimi. Hänen

suhteensa keisarillisiin naisiin perustui ystävyys (amicitia), joka oli mahdollista vertaisten kesken. Johtavan vestaalin saavutuksia esiteltiin kunniapiirtokirjoituksissa, joiden laatijat manifestoivat vestaalin statusta siinä missä omaa asemaansa. Kunniapiirtokirjoitusten on tulkittu noudattavan monotonista ja kaavamaisista formulointia, mutta vestaaleja ylistetään hyvinkin eri sävyin ja luonnehdinnoin. Jotkut vestaaleista esitellään velvollisuudentuntoisiksi hyväntekijöiksi ja toisia ylistetään erityisesti heidän uskonnollisuuden ja pyhyiden vuoksi. Painotukset luovat kiinnostavia eroja vestaalien keskuuteen ja julkiseen kuvaan.

Eräs työn pääasiallisista löydöksistä on, että vestaali oli perheensä edustaja myös pappautensa aikana. Tästä syystä hänen perheensä asema ja vaikutusvalta vaikuttivat hänen kunnia-asemaansa papittarena ja myös taloudellisiin etuihin. Huolimatta kriisiajasta vestaalien taloudellinen asema pysyi turvattuna ja näin ollen vestaalit pystyivät antamaan taloudellista tukeaan biologisen perheensä jäsenille ja klienteilleen. Vestaalit edustivat itse asiassa keisarillista valtaa, sillä heidän hoitamansa kotiliesi oli käytännössä keisarillinen kotialttari. Kun 200-luvun keisarit olivat usein poissa pääkaupungista ja heidän valtakautensa jäin usein suhteellisen lyhyeksi, vestaalit sitä vastoin pysyivät virassaan useita vuosikymmeniä ja edustivat Rooman valtion jatkuvuutta ja pysyvyyttä. Tutkimukseni merkitys onkin ollut tuoda esiin papitarten roolien moninaisuus ja näyttää heidän yhteiskunnallisen toiminnan laajuus yhteiskunnassa, joka oli muutoksen ja kriisin keskellä.

Acknowledgements

No man is an island and a historian is even less so but her/his work is produced in co-operation with the academic society. I have been fortunate to get advice and help from many people and institutions. First and foremost I thank my supervisor, Docent Katariina Mustakallio for all her support and counsels through the years. I have benefitted greatly for her encouragement, supervision and her stimulating, thought-provoking lectures. During her directorship in the Finnish Institute of Rome, Villa Lante (2009-2013) there were several occasions for me to explore the museums, libraries and academic institutes of Rome in her guidance. Her impressive knowledge of ancient culture and her warm and wise attitude towards the world and people have made an enduring impression on me and I cherish her advice in my heart.

Professor Christian Krötzl I thank for organizing seminars and giving thoughtful advises throughout this working process beginning from the first years as doctoral student up to this moment of graduating. Likewise Professor emerita Marjatta Hietala gave me inspiration with her grand example and conversations with her remain as the memorable episodes in my mind.

If I ever needed someone to clear my thoughts and set the new goals – and I did need! – Docent Ville Vuolanto provided me help with his clever advice and comments and clear insight. My cordial thanks for *optimus magister*.

I would like to express my humble and warm thanks to the pre-examiners of my work, Docent Maijastina Kahlos and Professor, Director of Institutum Romanum Finlandiae (2017-2021) Arja Karivieri. Your comments, suggestions and corrections have made my thesis so much better. Also Professor Helène Whittaker provided me valuable comments and criticism for which I am sincerely grateful.

Undoubtedly the courses and periods of time spent in the Finnish Institute in Rome, Villa Lante have been very important for my work and for my development as a scholar. I would like to express my gratitude to the former directors of the institute, PhD Kaj Sandberg and Professor Mika Kajava. Furthermore I thank Docent Ria Berg, Docent Jussi Hanska, and Docent Marika Räsänen for their teaching and advice during my visits in the institute. Likewise, I owe thanks for intendant of Villa Lante, MA Simo Örmä who is not only an excellent lecturer but have helped me with many practicalities. I thank him and his good sense of humour for bearing my ignorance.

Throughout the years I have participated in various seminars and conferences where themes and questions of this work have been discussed. I would like to thank collectively all the fellow participants who helped me with their questions and suggestions. I want to express my gratitude for their teaching and support for Docent Marja-Leena Hänninen, Docent Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Professor Christian Laes, Docent Juhani Sarsila, and Lecturer (emerita) Maija-Leena Kallela. For stimulating conversations, support and friendship I give my thanks to MA Pia Mustonen, PhD Jussi Rantala and PhD Jaakkojuhani Peltonen. Your sense of humour and intellect have supported me through this working process – also during those moments of doubt. Other scholars and colleagues who have helped me and to whom I want to express my gratitude, are as follows: PhD Jenni Kuuliala,

PhD Elina Pyy, PhD Samuli Simelius, PhD Sanna Joska, PhD Laura Nissin, PhD Miikka Tamminen, MA Roosa Kallunki and MA Lauri Uusi-Talo.

I would like to express my gratitude to the various institutions and foundations which have provided me support: Kone Foundation, Ella and Georg Ehrnrooth Foundation, Tampere City Science Foundation and Villa Lanten Ystävät ry. I would also like to thank the faculty of Social Sciences of the Tampere University for grants that enabled me to traveling and a grant to cover the costs of language checking of my work. My deepest thanks go to PhD Lori Jones who skilfully corrected my English. Needless to say that all remaining errors are on my responsibility. Furthermore, valuable assistance and support have provided me study coordinator MA Teijo Rätty and administrative assistant MA Risto Kunnari, who are always ready to help.

For my friends and family I am ever grateful for their support and love. I am blessed with fine parents and dear sister to whom I express my cordial thanks. My very best friend MA Annika Ahonen has supported me through the years. Her friendship means more to me than I can ever express. Finally I thank MA Antti T. Oikarinen – my partner in crime – for everything and more. You are a great husband and wonderful dad for our Juho-Eemil and Anna-Sofia. Thank you for this seventeen years of adventure. I dedicate my work for my grandmothers Anna-Liisa (1922-1997) and Vieno (1912-2006) who first got me interested in history and old stories.

Tampere, July 2020
Outi Sihvonen

Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| Abbreviations | xiii |
| Greek and Latin Authors | xv |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1. Research Context | 1 |
| 1.2. Source Materials and Methods | 4 |
| Epigraphic Materials concerning the Vestals | 4 |
| Vestals in the Literary Sources | 9 |
| Interactive Vestals – Communities and Companions | 11 |
| Themes and Concepts of the Study | 14 |
| 1.3. Studying the Third Century | 18 |
| 1.4. Previous Research | 23 |
| 2. Foundations for the Vestals’ Agency | 27 |
| 2.1. Best of the Best – the Importance of Ancestry | 28 |
| 2.2. Becoming Independent – Exemption from the <i>Patria Potestas</i> | 35 |
| 2.3. The Vestals’ Other Privileges | 42 |
| Capacity in Court - <i>Ius Testimonii Dicendi</i> and Exemption from Swearing an Oath | 43 |
| Manifesting Inviolability – <i>Sacrosanctitas</i> | 48 |
| Indulgent Vestals – Manifesting <i>Clementia</i> | 53 |
| Right to have <i>Lictores</i> | 57 |
| Right to Use Carriages | 61 |
| 2.4. Financial Independence and the Vestals’ Economic Activities | 66 |
| <i>Stipendium Publicum</i> | 68 |
| Vestals’ Finances during the Times of Crisis | 72 |
| Compensation for the Loss of Patrimony? | 74 |
| <i>Agri</i> and <i>Arca</i> – Other Sources of Income | 76 |
| <i>Tabellae Immunitatis</i> – Exemption from Taxation | 82 |
| 2.5. Collegial Ties between the Priestesses | 86 |
| Age Requirements | 87 |
| Training, Promotions and the Lifelong Office | 91 |
| <i>Virgo Vestalis Maxima</i> – Her Appearance, Duties and Authority | 94 |
| Working together | 100 |
| 3. Interaction between the Vestals and their Devotees | 106 |
| 3.1. From Sacral to Commercial - The Functions of the <i>Atrium Vestae</i> | 108 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 3.2. Imperial Propaganda and the <i>Atrium Vestae</i> | 113 |
| Honouring Practices of Roman Women – Literary Evidence | 117 |
| Honouring the Vestals and Elite Women – Epigraphic Sources | 119 |
| Vestals in Visual Arts and Numismatics | 128 |
| 3.3. <i>Virgo Vestalis, Soror Sanctissima</i> - Family Members as Dedicators | 132 |
| Why Offer a Daughter to the Cult of Vesta? | 133 |
| The Vestals in the Role of Daughters, Sisters and Aunts | 138 |
| Did Certain Families Occupy the Cult of Vesta? | 141 |
| 3.4. <i>Praestantissima Patrona</i> – Clients Honouring the Vestals | 145 |
| 3.5. The Third Century <i>Fictores</i> as Dedicators | 149 |
| From Professional Connections to Bureaucratic Linkages..... | 149 |
| Clients and Assistant Officials of the Vestals..... | 151 |
| New Order of the <i>Fictores</i> | 155 |
| 3.6. Priests as Dedicators in the Vestal Inscriptions..... | 158 |
| The Emesian Sun-Cult – The Severans, Rome and Traditions | 158 |
| The Case of the Severan <i>Sacerdos Solis</i> | 160 |
| <i>Sacerdotes sacrae urbis</i> | 164 |
| Cultic Connections with the Vestals..... | 166 |
| 3.7. Vestals and the Messages in Inscriptions | 169 |
| Honour and Praise for Religious Professionalism | 170 |
| <i>Super Omnes Retro Maxima</i> | 172 |
| 4. The Vestals as Agents of Power and Politics | 178 |
| 4.1. The <i>Atrium Vestae</i> of the Early Severan Dynasty | 181 |
| <i>Senatores</i> Authorizing the Vestals’ Activities..... | 183 |
| The Equestrian Order – Supporters of the Severans..... | 189 |
| Worshipping the Emperor in the <i>Atrium Vestae</i> | 192 |
| 4.2. Persecuted Vestals and Imperial Control..... | 196 |
| The Context for Caracalla’s Politics towards the Vestals | 196 |
| Sweeping away the Opposition – The Vestal Purge..... | 202 |
| Emperor Controlling the Vestals – Ideal and Practice..... | 206 |
| 4.3. The Priestesses as Instruments of Change and Continuity | 210 |
| The Emesian Sun Cult and Vesta Merged..... | 211 |
| Damage Control and Restoration – The Cult of Vesta during the Late Severan Era | 217 |
| 4.4. The Vestals and the Imperial Women | 222 |
| Imperial Women, the Vestals and <i>Amicitia</i> | 224 |
| Vestals’ Supporting and Empowering Role | 228 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Continuity of the Vestals' Public Role? | 232 |
| <i>Filia – Patrona – Sacerdos</i> : The Many Sides of the Vestals | 238 |
| Appendix I: Epigraphic sources | 244 |
| Honorific Inscriptions for the Vestal Virgins | 244 |
| The <i>Tabellae Immunitatis</i> | 260 |
| The Honorary Inscriptions for the Vestals in Athens and in Greek..... | 262 |
| Appendix II. Illustrations..... | 264 |
| Bibliography | 267 |

Abbreviations

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| <i>AC</i> | L'Antiquité classique. |
| <i>AE</i> | L'Année Épigraphique (Paris 1888-) |
| <i>AFLPer(class)</i> | Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia di Perugia. 1, Studi classici. |
| <i>AHB</i> | The Ancient History Bulletin |
| <i>AJA</i> | American Journal of Archaeology |
| <i>AJPh</i> | American Journal of Philology |
| <i>AM</i> | Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung |
| <i>AncSoc</i> | Ancient Society |
| <i>ANRW</i> | Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt |
| <i>ARCTOS</i> | Arctos: acta philologica Fennica. Helsinki |
| <i>Athenaeum</i> | Athenaeum. Studi di Letteratura e Storia dell'Antichità. |
| <i>BAR-IS</i> | British Archaeological Reports, International Series |
| <i>BCH</i> | Bulletin de correspondance hellénique |
| <i>CEFR</i> | Collection de l'École française de Rome |
| <i>CIL</i> | <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (1863–) |
| <i>ClAnt</i> | Classical Antiquity |
| <i>CPh</i> | Classical Philology |
| <i>EL</i> | Études de lettres: revue de la Faculté des lettres / Université de Lausanne. Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, Faculté des lettres |
| <i>Epigraphica</i> | Epigraphica: periodico internazionale di epigrafia |
| <i>FOS</i> | Raepsaet-Charlier M.-T., Prosopographie des femmes de l'ordre senatorial (Ier-IIe siècles), Leuven 1987. |
| <i>FS</i> | Rüpke J., <i>Fasti sacerdotum</i> . A Prosopography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome, 300 BC to AD 499. Transl. David Richardson. Oxford 2008. |
| <i>GRBS</i> | Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| <i>G&R</i> | Greece and Rome |
| <i>Historia</i> | Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte |
| <i>Historical Methods</i> | Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History |
| <i>HThR</i> | Harvard Theological Review |
| <i>Hyperboreus</i> | Hyperboreus: studia classica. St. Petersburg: Bibliotheca Classica Petropolitana |
| <i>IG</i> | Inscriptiones Graecae |
| <i>JRS</i> | Journal of Roman Studies |
| <i>Latomus</i> | Latomus: Revue d'études latines |
| <i>LawLit</i> | Law and Literature |
| <i>LTUR</i> | Lexikon Topographicum Urbis Romae (Rome, 1993-2000) |
| <i>MMABull</i> | The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin |
| <i>MÉFRA</i> | Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Antiquité |
| <i>Mnemosyne</i> | Mnemosyne: bibliotheca classica Batava |
| <i>NSc</i> | Notizie degli scavi di antichità |
| <i>Numen</i> | Numen: International Review for the History of Religions |
| <i>OCD</i> | Oxford Classical Dictionary |
| <i>PBSR</i> | Papers of the British School at Rome |
| <i>Phoenix</i> | Phoenix: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada |
| <i>PIR</i> | <i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani Saeculi I, II, III</i> (Berlin, second ed. 1933-) |
| <i>RE</i> | Paulys Realencyclopaedie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft |
| <i>REL</i> | Revue des études latines |
| <i>RendPontAcc</i> | Atti della Pontificia Accademia romana di archeologia |
| <i>RIDA</i> | Revue internationale des droits de l'antiquité |
| <i>RM</i> | Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung |
| <i>RSR</i> | Religious Studies Review |

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| <i>SAECULUM</i> | SAECULUM: Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte |
| <i>SPhV</i> | Studia Philologica Valentina |
| <i>SHHA</i> | Studia historica. Historia antigua. Salamanca |
| <i>TAPA</i> | Transactions of the American Philosophical Society |
| <i>ZPE</i> | Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik |

Greek and Latin Authors

The names and works of ancient authors are abbreviated according to the guidelines of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th edition). *Scriptores Historia Augusta* (*SHA*) is an exception and this work is abbreviated according to system of Lessing C. and his work *Scriptorum Historiae Augustae Lexicon* (Hildesheim, Georg Olms, 1964).

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| Ambr. | Ambrosius |
| <i>De Virgin.</i> | <i>De virginibus</i> |
| <i>Relat.</i> | <i>Relationes</i> |
| | |
| Cass. Dio | Cassius Dio |
| | |
| Cic. | Cicero |
| <i>Att.</i> | <i>Epistulae ad Atticum</i> |
| <i>Cael.</i> | <i>Pro Caelio</i> |
| <i>Cat.</i> | <i>In Catilinam</i> |
| <i>Dom.</i> | <i>De domo sua</i> |
| <i>Fam.</i> | <i>Epistulae ad familiares</i> |
| <i>Font.</i> | <i>Pro Fonteio</i> |
| <i>Har. resp.</i> | <i>De haruspicum responso</i> |
| <i>Inv. rhet.</i> | <i>De inventione rhetorica</i> |
| <i>Rep.</i> | <i>De republica</i> |

| | |
|--|--|
| Cod. Theod. | Codex Theodosianus |
| Dion. Hal. | Dionysios of Halicarnassos |
| Gai. <i>Inst.</i> | Gaius <i>Institutiones</i> |
| Gell. <i>NA</i> | Aulus Gellius <i>Noctes Atticae</i> |
| Herod. | Herodian |
| Liv. | Livius |
| Ovid. <i>Fast.</i> | Ovidius <i>Fasti</i> |
| Plin. <i>HN</i> | Plinius the Elder <i>Naturalis historia</i> |
| Plin. <i>Ep.</i> | Plinius the Younger <i>Epistulae</i> |
| Plut. <i>Mor. Quaest. Rom.</i> <i>Vit. Cic</i> <i>Vit. Crass.</i> <i>Vit. Num.</i> <i>Vit. Publ.</i> | Plutarch <i>Moralia Quaestiones Romanae</i> <i>Vitae Cicero</i> <i>Vitae Crassus</i> <i>Vitae Parallelae Numa</i> <i>Vitae Publicola</i> |

Vit. Rom. *Vitae Romulus*

Prudent.

Prudentius

C. Symm.

Contra Symmachum

Sen.

Seneca the Younger

Clem.

De clementia

Dial.

Dialogi

Ep.

Epistulae

Prov.

De providential

SHA

Scriptores Historiae Augustae

Alex. Sev.

Alexander Severus

Aurel.

Aurelian

Didus. Iul.

Didus Iulianus

Gd.

Gordiani tres

Heliogab.

Heliogabalus

Max.

Maximini duo.

Val.

Valeriani duo

Suet.

Suetonius

Aug.

Divus Augustus

Calig.

Gaius Caligula

Claud.

Divus Claudius

Dom.

Domitianus

Iul.

Divus Iulius

Ner.

Nero

Tib.

Tiberius

Symm.

Symmachus

Ep.

Epistulae

Relat.

Relationes

Tac.

Ann.

Hist.

Tacitus

Annales

Historiae

Val. Max.

Valerius Maximus

1. Introduction

This study explores the social influence and religious power of the Vestal virgins, with a special focus on third-century Rome. Rather than examining their sacral role and religious duties as such, however, my main research task is to determine how the priestesses and their families used their social and religious influence during a period marked by ongoing political and cultural crises. The third century has been unstudied in relation to the Vestal virgins' role and office holding; examining it here thus offers both unnoticed context and a new perspective on the priestesses' social influence. In short, my main questions are: for what purposes, and for whose benefit, did these women use their privileged position and religious power?

To answer these questions, my analysis focuses, first, on the extraordinary social status and privileges that the Vestal virgins enjoyed. This study portrays the Vestals and their families as active agents, and explores their office holding and status systematically. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the priestesses were used as instruments of imperial religious politics. As such, I also highlight the significance of interactions between imperial powers and the priestesses. Overall, this dissertation thoroughly examines the diverse roles of all the main actors associated with the Vestal virgins's power and influence during the turbulent third century.

1.1. Research Context

Women's social influence and public office holding was severely limited in Roman society: women neither had the right to vote, nor the ability to hold any civic office. Even so, empresses, priestesses, and wealthy women of the senatorial order could achieve influential positions and participated in community building.¹ Considering the *Vestales* specifically, numerous studies have examined both their religious duties and their social roles.² Religion and cult life were profound elements of Roman

¹ For female religious participation in the same period, see especially Hemelrijk E. 2015; Raepsaet-Charlier M.T. 2005; Staples A. 1998; Takács S. A. 2008. There are numerous studies concerning the social and public role of the empresses. For this study, most useful have been the followings: Alexandridis A. 2004; Frei-Stolba R. 1998, 65-89; Langford J. 2013.

² The pioneering works of several scholars have clarified the Vestals' social position as well as their presentations in imperial propaganda. For the historical development of the Vestals' social status, see Mekacher N. 2006; Mustakallio K. 2007. For their religious roles and sexual status, see, for example, Beard M. 1980; Cancik-Lindemaier H. 1996. For juridical aspects, see Guizzi F. 1968. For their presentations in public propaganda, see Lindner M. 2015; Cappelli R. 1986.

society and imperial politics. The Roman historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus advised that in order to understand the Romans, one must understand their religion; he also noted that it was their religion and their piety that guaranteed the Romans' success.³ By studying the Vestals, we, in turn, are able to uncover more about how Roman society functioned and developed.

At the center of this study are several honorary inscriptions dedicated to the priestesses during the third century. These monuments were set up in the *Atrium Vestae*, the residence of the priestesses, when an honoured Vestal was in office. These written manifestations and laudations, engraved on marble, were instruments used to communicate with audiences in third-century Roman society. I have chosen here to use the word 'interaction' to describe the sometimes complex relationship processes that existed between the Vestals, their dedicators, and public audiences through these inscriptions, since the term indicates reciprocity between two or more people or groups. Other terms, such as 'communicate', are also relevant to describe the inscriptions' intended purposes and functions. Underlying this study, therefore, is not just the interaction between the Vestals' status and their socio-religious power, but also the relationships between the various parties associated in some way with the inscriptions, both individuals and groups. These relationships, in turn, were variously based either on equality and interdependence, or on the subordination of one party (or set of parties) to another.

In contrast to previous studies, the Vestals' social influence is studied here against the backdrop of the cultural and political crises of the third century.⁴ This period is particularly interesting since the social orders and the relatively peaceful political conditions of the earlier principate actually came to end well before a new administration, the tetrarch, was created in 284 CE. Cutting across this research is the question of whether the era of crisis had any noticeable effect on the Vestals' social status. These priestesses represented a religious institution that not only had a very long tradition, but that was also accustomed to functioning in a peaceful and prosperous society. Thus, this study explores changes and continuities in the traditional Vestal institute. Was continuity of the ancient cult of Vesta jeopardized as wider Roman social structures underwent a great change? This study focuses on a period that begins at the turn of the third century – the beginning of the Severan dynasty in 193 CE –

³ Dion. Hal. 2.73.1-4.

⁴ An early study by A. Nock discusses the third-century Vestals and social crises. See Nock D.A. 1930.

and ends in the early fourth century. However, I also use material from other periods to better contextualize the third-century situation.

This study begins with an analysis of the conditions that enabled the priestesses to achieve their office holding and to advance to an especially privileged social position. A strict hierarchy and gradual advancements characterized the Vestal institution, wherein six priestesses occupied the office at any given time. Each woman's term in office was relatively long, lasting some thirty years, after which the priestesses were free to resign their position and pursue a regular 'civilian life'. Special attention is paid here to the internal dynamics of the institution, allowing for discussion of the women's separate positions based on age and different classifications within the hierarchy. The individual Vestals and their activities lie at the core of this examination; as such, this study concerns contemporary priestesses of the third century rather than the ideal and distant Vestals of Rome's legendary past. Epigraphical evidence provides the settings, although this material also imposes many scholarly challenges because of their short-spoken style or fragmentary state. The chief Vestal virgin, *virgo Vestalis maxima*, takes centre stage here, although her colleagues and their agencies are also analysed. This comparative viewpoint better enables an estimation of how the order's hierarchical structure affected each priestess's ability to exploit her personal privileges.

In order to discover how the Vestals used their position, and how various others exploited it (both individually and as a group), I examine the social relationships between the priestesses and their contemporaries. These social relations allow us to study the extent of their influence: who benefitted from their religious office? From this, the larger research issue concerning the priestesses' socio-religious power is twofolded. This study explores the Vestals both as active agents of influence and power, and as instruments used by emperors for their imperial religious politics. Since they took care of the state hearth, which practically was an imperial home altar, the Vestals held a totally unique position compared to all other religious officials. The extent to which the Vestals appeared in imperial politics varied during the third century, but was particularly intense during the Severan dynasty. To date, the impact of the Severans on the Vestal cult has not been fully analysed, even though several noticeable changes in the cult can be traced to the reigns of the four Severan emperors. The Severans succeeded in maintaining dynastic continuity for more than forty years, and this inevitably influenced both imperial administration and cult life. The question of how and in what manner the Severans used

or modified the traditional forms of the cult of Vesta, and incorporated the priestesses into their religious projects and political messages, is therefore an important component of this study.

1.2. Source Materials and Methods

In this study of third-century Vestals, I use a social-historical approach and analyze my sources with qualitative methods. My main primary sources consist of literary and epigraphical materials, complemented with the visual evidence of art history, archaeology and numismatic material. I closely examine the individuals presented in the inscriptions, and the relations between them and the Vestals. Prosopographical studies and onomastic research thus provide an important aid for clarifying family relations and individual lives. As the methodological issues are so intensively tangled in the sources, I discuss them below while analyzing the character of the source materials. Likewise, key concepts, such as interaction, are explained to demonstrate their significance in this study.

Several of the concepts and terms that I use in this study have different meaning and associations in modern society. I have considered the difficulty of transferring words such as ‘interaction’ or ‘family’ or ‘friendship’ to an ancient culture without defining them properly. I thus discuss key terms as necessary throughout the work. Without a doubt, researchers’ exposure to the ideas and mentalities of their own contemporary societies has also affected this present study. The question of how society changes and survives as old establishments and state and religious institutions break away, is an important question for our modern society. Understanding the methods used by past generations as they faced similar challenges may help us to see our own possibilities.

Epigraphic Materials concerning the Vestals

In the process of interpreting epigraphic materials, one must ask what their purpose was in the context of ancient society. Trying to connect with others, and needing to interact with other people at different levels and in different ways, is a fundamental characteristic of human behavior. The inscriptions

answered this human need to interact and to communicate.⁵ However, the inscription monuments were much more than just textual messages that communicated with an undifferentiated audience. These texts, displayed publicly in the *atrium Vestae*, were written after an interaction or communication had already occurred between an individual priestess and her dedicator. In addition to the Vestals and their dedicators, the inscriptions also communicated with every other person who read them. Together with statues or buildings, these inscription monuments formed artistic and visual entities that were observed and admired. They thus embodied a series of sequential interactions that stretched from the time before an honorary monument was even created to its afterlife as it continued to be viewed and remembered.⁶ Although the nature of the relationships between Vestals and their dedicators may be relatively obvious, we seldom have access to precise background information about them, such as the feelings that each person had towards the other, or details about the interaction that brought them together. Nevertheless, written texts, in the form of these honorific inscriptions, contain within themselves values, ideas and motives that can be analyzed through the concept of interaction. Together with the physical surroundings of the *Atrium Vestae* and visual elements such as the Vestals' statues and portraits, the inscriptions offer an interesting, yet challenging, source through which to study the Vestals' social influence over time.

When using epigraphical material, it soon becomes clear that the inscriptions rarely provide direct answers to the questions that most interest scholars. Although they serve as primary sources, their textual conventions and short-spoken formulations omit many real-life elements and characteristics. Furthermore, since the Vestals' monuments are honorific inscriptions, they necessarily contain many superlatives and standard laudatory phrases; as a consequence, they fail to convey any sense of the kind of persons the honoured priestesses actually were. The very nature of inscription texts thus pose a methodological problem: how much can these sources reveal about the priestesses' social influence? Furthermore, almost without exception the inscription viewpoint is that of the dedicator, not the Vestal herself.⁷ In that sense, the texts also fail to shed light on how the priestesses would have described their occupation and life in their own words. We likewise cannot learn through the inscriptions information about any possible mistakes in office holding, or about private self-sacrifices

⁵ In modern research, actions such as 'communicate' are difficult to define exactly. In modern socio-linguistic studies, for example, a verbal communication is defined as a complex process of expectations, interpretations and interactions between two or more participants. See Gumperz 1982, 4.

⁶ For a useful account of the many processes involved in viewing the inscriptions see Eastmond 2015, 3-4.

⁷ In inscription *CIL* VI 2138, a Vestal virgin has dedicated the monument to her chief Vestal, but the viewpoint of a priestess is very rare. In the other inscription, found elsewhere outside the *Atrium Vestae*, a Vestal has commemorated her father. This monument is excluded from the corpus of laudatory inscriptions.

made by the priestesses to hold their position. Still, the epigraphic monuments offer us a valuable source for studying the Vestals' social position, their relationships and their social influence. In spite of their conventional forms, the texts do offer us a glimpse into the ideas, motives, and appreciations felt by contemporary society (the dedicators) towards the Vestals.⁸

Inscriptions concerning Vestals do, of course, offer clear information about the status and social influence of a particular priestess. Another separate question is how and by whom the message was received. The level of literacy within the ancient population has troubled scholars seeking to understand the contemporary process of interpreting epigraphic evidence.⁹ Who were able to see, and more importantly to read, the inscriptions? What kind of artistic ensemble did the monuments form, and what was their purpose? Considering these questions, it becomes crucial to pay attention to the place and setting in which the inscriptions were situated. The places in which the Vestals were visible, and in which their possessions were situated, were made sacred and inviolable. This was certainly the case for the *Atrium Vestae*, where most of the Vestals' honorific inscriptions were located. Its particular character as a half-private, half-public place is discussed in the following chapters regarding the dilemma of who comprised the audience of these monuments. Furthermore, it appears that at least some of the inscriptions were produced as duplicates, a fact that increases their already complex nature.¹⁰ The *Atrium's* characterization and signification are challenging to estimate, since it was simultaneously a sacral, profane, and commercial site. As a consequence, the diverse functions of this peculiar place expand the scope of the audience of the Vestals' monuments. Above all, the *Atrium* was the priestesses' residence and home, and so it offers an important starting point for my examination. Thus, I argue that the inscriptions' function was two-fold: they were important for the Vestals' own community, and they served the purposes of other people. I study both of these functions here in detail.

When studying the Vestal priestesses' social status and role, the number and type of sources mentioning them and discussing their activities varies by century. The third century appears to be the most lucrative in terms of epigraphic evidence. In other words, there are only a few epigraphic texts (dealing with the Vestals) left to us from other centuries, both before and after the third century. The

⁸ The corpus of inscriptions dedicated to the Vestal virgins is introduced in Appendix I.

⁹ On the question of how the message was understood by contemporaries and their degree of literacy, see Bodel 2000, 16.

¹⁰ For the notion of duplicated inscriptions, see van Deman 1902, *CIL* VI 32414.

evident discontinuity concerning these sources may also insinuate that the practice of setting up inscription monuments was either somehow interrupted or a particularly third-century practice. However, the silence or absence of sources is an inadequate way to explain this situation. Since my purpose is not to study the Vestals' monuments from the art historical viewpoint, but rather to use them as sources to understand when and how the Vestals used their social influence, it is appropriate to briefly discuss the overall historical development of the Vestals' honorary monuments.

The earliest inscriptions dedicated to the Vestals virgins appeared in the first century CE, while the latest dates to the year 385. Thus, evidence of these monuments exists from four centuries. During the first century, inscriptions dedicated to the Vestals also appeared in Athens, where their male relatives held offices and acted to honour their Vestal relatives.¹¹ In Rome, the earliest inscriptions seem to have been located in the *Atrium Vestae* itself and are dated from the late first century or the early second century. Only a small number of inscriptions survive from the beginning of the second century. By contrast, there are numerous life-size statues preserved that represent Vestal virgins of various ages. It was typical practice to place an inscription text close to the statue to identify the person being portrayed and to explain the reason for setting up the monument.¹² The preserved second-century statues thus strongly suggest that there were once many more inscriptions from that period that are now lost. Their loss has perplexed scholars, and various speculations have been offered as to what happened to the supposed inscriptions. In other instances from the early third century, the statues or portraits are missing but the inscriptions are preserved.¹³ I assert here that although the priestesses were honored publicly throughout the imperial era, the practices through which this happened seem to have varied alongside cultural changes.

In addition to the Vestals' honorary inscriptions, I use other epigraphic evidence to examine the priestesses' social position, their economic activities and their extraordinary position among priestly officials in Roman society. As P. Horden and N. Purcell state in their study on Mediterranean cultures, the 'economic dimensions' of religious institutions are often overlooked.¹⁴ As the following

¹¹ Athenian honorary inscriptions date to as early as the first quarter of the first century. Their intriguing character and the involvement of their male relatives in the process of setting up the monuments in Athens make them useful comparatives for the third-century evidence. The Athenian inscriptions are studied thoroughly in Kajava M. 2001. On Vestal celebrations in Athens, see also Mekacher 2006, 152-153.

¹² Together with the inscriptions, the statues formed part of an artistic ensemble. See Lindner 2015; Mekacher 2006.

¹³ Unfortunately, preserved third-century statues can no longer be connected to inscriptions from the same period.

¹⁴ Horden – Purcell 2000, 429.

chapters demonstrate, however, sacral office holding and engagement in profitable business ventures often appear together. Regarding the Vestals' wealth, I analyse the inscriptions that refer to the Vestals as receivers of payments collected from penalties paid for grave disturbing. Seldom examined in earlier research, these epitaphs give us valuable information about the Vestals' responsibilities, how they increased their wealth, and why they were entrusted to collect payments.¹⁵ The Vestals' honorary inscriptions' use of certain epithets also facilitate a comparison of the Vestals' social position with other prominent persons and a consideration of the uniqueness of their status in third-century Rome.¹⁶

Because of the complex nature of the sources, it is important to follow a holistic approach to understand for what purposes the honorary monuments were set up, and how the Vestals' social influence was communicated through these monuments. The concept of "epigraphic habit" in the Roman world, introduced by R. MacMullen, helps us to understand how the habit of setting up inscriptions developed, and why it declined especially after the mid-third century.¹⁷ While discussing the epigraphic habit as it pertains to the Vestals' honorary monuments, however, it is also important to consider why dedications to this group continued throughout the century despite an alleged decline in the total number of epigraphic monuments across the same period. Further, it needs to be acknowledged that these inscriptions were the products of contemporary society, and despite their honorific and conventional nature they provide useful insight into how the priestesses were perceived by their contemporaries and how their social position and influence was considered by others. Since the inscriptions constitute a continuous corpus that survive from the beginning of the third century to the turn of the fourth century, they also offer evidence that allows us to examine the Vestals' office-holding across time. They likewise reveal cultural messages and changes in the nature of the interactions between the priestesses and their clients. Overall, the inscriptions offer us an opportunity to discover how Roman society and its religious system valued the Vestals during this critical era.

When considering the Vestal virgins individually, the particular prominence of some of these women in our sources allows us to examine their social position and influence more closely. The priestesses

¹⁵ For inscriptions referring to the Vestals as receivers of payments, see Mekacher 2006, 40-41.

¹⁶ I have gathered this data with the help of an online database of epigraphic material. See <http://www.manfredclauss.de/gb/index.html>. For the material, see especially the table on page 139.

¹⁷ MacMullen, 1982, 233-246. For further analyses and a critique of MacMullen's idea, see Beltrán-Llors 2015, 131-148; Meyer 1990, 74-96; Cherry 1995, 143-156.

who appear in more than one inscription are used here as cases to clarify the position of the Vestals more broadly.¹⁸ As we shall see, it was a *virgo Vestalis maxima* who appeared most often in the honorary monuments. Thus, one of the basic questions is how the chief Vestals achieved their position. Nevertheless, I also analyze the social position and influence of younger Vestals — the *virgines Vestales*.

Vestals in the Literary Sources

The decreased number of literary sources compared to other centuries complicates any analysis of continuity and change in the third century. Contemporary sources concerning the Vestals are fragmentary, and the literary genres that discuss them do not constitute a continuous corpus. In fact, it has been claimed that Vestal source material is so fragmentary that one cannot make any far-reaching conclusion about changes in the Vestal institution.¹⁹ However, I suggest that by basing one's study on a corpus of comprehensive source material and by examining specific questions, this problem can be avoided. Indeed, the lack of sources is not as dire as has been suggested: among the literary sources alone, we find references to Vestals from well over forty authors from the first century BCE to the fifth century CE. The real challenge lies in separating portrayals of the ideal Vestal from any writer's contemporaneous living priestess or a real historical person. Since no testimonies from Vestals survive, their own thoughts and opinions are unattainable for us; a scholar thus has to be extra-sensitive to understand the different types of sources and literary genres, and to identify the different motives that underlay how others discussed the Vestals.

In Roman historiography and in the long literary tradition, Vestal virgins appear as important heroines of the state who save society from falling into destruction. Heroic priestesses are found in the works of republican and early imperial writers, including Livy, Valerius Maximus, and Cicero, who described the actions of priestesses of their own times as well as the ideal Vestals of the Roman past. In contrast to their heroism, though, the priestesses were occasionally blamed for causing national disasters; such disasters apparently resulted when the Vestals betrayed their oath to stay virgins. The cultural memory of the Romans is a crucial element to keep in mind when studying legends about the

¹⁸ The early-third century *virgo Vestalis maxima* Terentia Flavola appears in several inscriptions and her family relations can be reconstructed relatively well. Another priestess who appears prominently in my discussion is Flavia Publicia from the mid-third century.

¹⁹ See Beard 1980, 12.

Vestals, but these sources (except for Cicero) typically fail to discuss any contemporary priestesses and their social importance. However, the sources describing legendary Vestals offer us a valuable base from which to understand Roman mentalities. For example, the legend of one of the first Vestals, Gaia Taracia, is found in the works of both Pliny the Elder from the first century and Aulus Gellius from the late second century. The Vestal Claudia also appears as an important and exemplary figure among authors of different periods.²⁰ The Vestals' popularity as exemplary figures seems to indicate that they suited the purposes of male writers, and that contemporary audiences understood their symbolic value. Even legendary priestesses, then, shed light on attitudes about third-century Vestals.

The Vestals' sacral character and various duties long occupied the minds of male writers interested in explaining the Roman past and analysing the origins of different cultural habits. The poet Ovid illustrated the priestesses' sacral duties throughout the religious calendar, while the philosopher and naturalist Pliny the Elder described the ancient origins of their sacral capacity. Other writers such as Seneca the Elder and Plutarch analysed cultural norms surrounding the Vestals, while the second-century jurist Gaius and the grammarian Aulus Gellius offered information about laws concerning the Vestal priesthood. Sources that discussed the legal elements of the cult of Vesta are likewise valuable for illuminating the changes that took place in the social position of the priestesses and their institution.²¹

In the late republican era and during the principate, the Vestals sometimes appear as a group, sometimes as individuals; in either case, their heroism and activities were portrayed as a part of historical events. Historians such as Tacitus and Suetonius from the early principate, or statesmen like Pliny the Younger and the fourth-century senator Q. Aurelius Symmachus, provide us with knowledge about the activities of individual priestesses who appear in connection with imperial politics and contemporary events. Although there is a great temporal distance between the authors used in this study, comparing their works is useful, even necessary, when considering the significance of historical memory for the Romans. By examining sources from the early imperial era, it becomes

²⁰ For Gaia Taracia, also called Fufetia, see Plin. *HN* 34.25.2; Gell. *NA* 7.7.2.1. For the case of the Vestal Claudia see Cic. *Cael.* 34; Val. Max 5.4.6; Suet. *Tib.* 2.4.

²¹ In the following pages, I shall discuss the translations of these historical works further as necessary and refer to the translations and commentaries I have used. Likewise, for Roman law, the following translations and commentaries have proved to be particularly useful for my study: Gordon W.M. – Robinson O.F. (translat.), *The Institutes of Gaius*. London 1988; Blume F.H. – Kearley T. (translat.), Frier B.W. et al. (ed.) *The Codex of Justinian 3 Volume Hardback Set: A New Annotated Translation with Paralleled Latin and Greek Text*. I-III vol. Cambridge 2016.

possible to determine whether older ideas concerning the Vestals were still present in third-century texts. Further, by analyzing fourth-century sources such as the correspondence of Q. Aurelius Symmachus, we are able to examine if the late-ancient changes among the Vestals, and their finances in particular, had parallel developments in earlier times.

Third-century literary evidence consists mainly of the works of the historians Cassius Dio and Herodian.²² While Cassius Dio and Herodian were eye-witnesses to early-third century society, the collection of the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (*SHA*) is later a production from the late fourth century, or early fifth century, written by an unknown author or authors.²³ For this study, the *Historia Augustae* is useful as far as the emperors' religious politics or their relationships with the Vestal virgins is discussed. Passages concerning the Vestals appear relatively infrequently and information about religious politics is often referred to by allusion, which has to be interpreted with care. Particularly the biography of the emperor Elagabalus has been useful for my work, although its factual evidence remains shallow. Overall, however, the *SHA* is a valuable source that sheds light on what was considered important enough to write about concerning the third-century emperors and the Vestal virgins.²⁴

Interactive Vestals – Communities and Companions

A key consideration in my work has been to view the Vestals as active members of society who had various ways to contribute and interact in reciprocal relationships with their contemporaries. The interaction between their sacred status and their activities – both daily business and annual celebrations – is the main focus of this research. Their wealth, their residence at the *Atrium Vestae*, and their other possessions are all important in so far as they reveal the nature of the Vestals' social influence. Although they were extraordinary given their sacral character and social status, however,

²² A recent and illustrative study about Cassius Dio is a collection of articles: Lange, C. H. – Madsen, J. M., (ed.), 2016. See also the classic study by Millar F., 1964. For Herodian and his historical work, see Marasco G., 1998, 2837-2927.

²³ For dating and analysing *SHA*, see, for example, Cameron 2011, 743

²⁴ For *Historia Augusta*, see a recent study of Savino E. (2017). He analyses thoroughly the earlier research and conclusions of the different scholars, who have discussed this perplexing source for several decades.

the priestesses were not isolated. Instead, they were attached to society. Examined in another way, the sacredness of the priestesses and their prominence impacted the society that surrounded them.²⁵

Processes of interaction take place within particular spatial and temporal contexts: the places where people assemble, and where relationships between friends, relatives or clients can bloom. In Roman culture, religious institutes and cultic gatherings reinforced social contacts between participants or between the emperor and his closest associates. Certain occasions offered people the possibility to build a relationship with the emperor, one that could result in the huge honour – reserved for a few – of being nominated as a friend of the emperor (*amicus Augusti*). One example of such an occasion was the annual gathering of the Arval Brothers who celebrated the emperor as their superior and honorary member. Their banquets and rituals took place over several days during which the participants lived, bathed in the sacral waters and banqueted together. Likewise, the worshippers of Mithra gathered in cult rooms, which encouraged them to socialize and enjoy a cultic meal together. The participants shared the cult's secrets and their commitment was reinforced by communal meals.²⁶ The places where the Vestals lived and took care of *sacra* were situated in the very core of Rome, in its political and religious center.²⁷ Their daily lives and office holding provided numerous occasions for them to spend time together and to meet their colleagues and friends. It is my special interest to discover who those citizens were, both men and women, who were distinguished as the priestesses' friends and socially as their equals.

The Vestals were members of several communities that are considered in this study as their families or family-like communities. The Vestals had no offspring of their own, and they were neither – according to the law – members of their biological families nor descendants of their fathers. Although family life as such was not intended for them, as it was for élite Roman women, the priestesses nevertheless maintained a relationship with their birth families and relatives. As such, their legal status clashed with their social reality. One important aspect of this study is to analyze how, on the one hand, the Vestals maintained relationships with their biological families, and, on the other hand,

²⁵ P. Horden and N. Purcell discuss the 'geography of religion', meaning the relationship between the sacral and a particular place. See Horden – Purcell 2000.

²⁶ For the annual rituals of the Arvals, see Scheid J., 1990. For reinforcement of *amicitia* in the cult places of Mithra, see Griffith, 2010, 64-77.

²⁷ House of Vestals, view towards eastern part of the building. The massive structures of Basilica of Maxentius stand in the background. See fig 2. in Appendix II.

why their ideological separation from their original families was necessary. This last mentioned question has often been taken for granted in earlier research, but my task is to uncover the reasons behind this legal requirement.

A Vestal virgin shared her life with other priestesses. Six priestesses of different ages held their offices at the same time and inhabited the same residence. Under the authority of the *virgo Vestalis maxima*, these women and girls formed a family-like community that included household servants and slaves. To describe this community more precisely, the term *domus* characterizes its practices and flexibility.²⁸ In this regard, I put forward the idea that the Vestals' family-like community, although a sacral community, actually functioned along the same lines as the ordinary Roman *domus* in which there were household staff, clients, and the practice of worshipping common ancestors. Indeed, the Vestals worshipped their own ancestresses, and this defined their identity and distinguished them from other citizens. The status of the central figure, the *virgo Vestalis maxima*, was superior to the others, and was authorized to teach the Vestal profession. In this regard, her role came close to the *mater familias* of the Roman family. Under her guidance, the younger priestesses, possibly as young as six to ten years of age, were tasked with sacral duties and learned the profession of a *virgo Vestalis*.

In addition to their original families and their family-like community of priestesses, I portray the Vestals as associate members of the imperial family. They took care of the state hearth, which was considered to be the one closest to the emperor. The privileges and social status of imperial women had their counterpart in the Vestals. The emperor, the *pontifex maximus*, was the only controlling force in the priestesses' lives. For example, his initiative was crucial when the pontifical college decided the fate of an errant Vestal. In this regard, the role of the *pontifex maximus* was similar to that of the *pater familias*. From these perspectives, it is interesting to study the interaction between the Vestals and the imperial family. Moreover, the emperor stood at the center of a system based on favoritism: he controlled communication, political as well as religious activities, and the career

²⁸ Here I use the term 'family-like' to avoid direct connotations to the concept of *familia*, which comprised a relatively small group of people: the *pater familias*, the *mater familias* and their children and sometimes other relatives and the household slaves and ex-slaves. Most importantly, the *familia* strongly emphasized the male lineage and relatives from the father's side. For a discussion of *familia* and *domus*, see Saller 1994, 84. The membership of a *domus*, by contrast, consisted of a larger group of relatives, slaves, and ex-slaves; it also included both living and deceased ancestors, sometimes even the whole *gens*. On the Roman family structure and its flexible nature, see among other Dixon 1992, 11; Rawson 1986, 8-9.

development of important state officials. The Vestals, importantly, represented one of the most respected cultic institutions of Rome; their symbolic value both was precious for imperial politics and legitimized the emperor's position. Together, these two parties — the Vestals and the emperor — represented very prominent and important establishments in Roman society. The impact of the so-called third century crisis thus becomes crucial in this study of how their relationships were formed during times of upheaval.

Themes and Concepts of the Study

This study is predicated on the idea that religion was an essential and all-present aspect of Roman society. Religious activity reinforced feelings of unity and brought the community together in a way that was important for the continuity of society. Thus, my study starts from the premise that religion was an instrument of power and social influence, and that it could be — and was — used to promote the imperial house's public image.²⁹ Whether or not contemporaries held particular religious beliefs, or had an idea that common people could be controlled through the maintenance of particular religious practices, are questions beyond the scope of this study.

Questions about female participation in public rituals and women's capacity to perform duties related to Roman religion have been central and much debated issues in the scholarship. It has been suggested that women were religiously incapable — they were particularly incapable to perform a sacrifice — and that their participation was always more or less subordinated to male supervision and they were, at their best, a necessary but marginal complement to men.³⁰ Over the past two decades, numerous studies have proved these views to be wholly inadequate. Whether it is a matter of women's capacity to participate in the *sacra*, or their cult activities in different historical periods, scholars have now rejected the paradigm that Roman women were marginal in religious life.³¹ I presume here women had their own important role in Roman religion, and that they were not marginalized. Rather than examining the Vestals' religious participation in certain celebrations, though, my study concerns their sacral capacity: I ask how their sacral office empowered them to achieve a prominent and influential

²⁹ For Roman religion and its significance in society, see Ando 2008.

³⁰ For the idea of women being religiously incapacitated, see Cazanove, 1987, 159-173. His idea was supported by Scheid, 1994, 377-408.

³¹ For women's religious activities see Hemelrijk 2005, and 2015; Mustakallio 2007, and Schulz 2006.

position in society. In other words, my objective is to study how the sacral office produced advantages and social benefits.

Power and the exercise of power can be defined as a type of interaction, although an unequal one, between two or more agents. Power did not reside only with the emperor: opportunities to use power for their own purposes also existed for the emperor's subjects.³² In the case of the Vestals, power was associated with their social influence in particular, but took numerous forms – political, religious, and economic. Each is analysed here as far as it is possible to do so. Roman women were in most cases dependent on their male relatives, such as husbands, fathers, or brothers; sometimes they had a tutor or guardian, a *tutela*, who supervised their activities. The Vestals, however, were legally liberated from male surveillance and *tutela*. This privilege empowered the priestesses to obtain an extraordinary social status that differed from any other citizens, male or female, groups or individuals.³³ I analyse if this independent status remained the same across different eras, and if all priestesses, from the youngest *virgo Vestalis* to the chief Vestal, equally possessed these privileges. Therefore, my study furthers understanding of when the priestesses achieved social influence and could use their advantageous position.

Roman society was strictly hierarchical. It is important to define what the term social status signifies in this study. In a sociological sense, the term refers to the social position or standing of an individual.³⁴ I argue here that defining the Vestals' social status must include the idea of their sacral character and capability to act in their office. If a priestess lost her virginity – and thus her capability to act in her office – she was no longer accepted either in her office or as a member of a community. Thus, a Vestal's social status was built on her sacral office and the privileges granted to her separated her from other citizens. Having the right kind of social origins and family were closely associated with the Vestals' social status. In Roman society, religious offices were often passed from a father to his son; this resulted in offices often being in the possession of certain families.³⁵ Likewise, the idea that noble birth and noble blood both entitled and obliged the élite to lead society and occupy the

³² On the achievement and use of power in Roman society, see Miles 2000, 36.

³³ For the Vestals' legal status, see Kroppenbergs 2010; Gardner 1986; Guizzi, 1968.

³⁴ For a dictionary definition see *OED* (revised 2nd edition 2005), 1728. In Roman society there were, however, opportunities to advance from one social status to another. The large class of freedmen indicates the flexibility of the social system. See, for example, Hopkins 1978, 108-109.

³⁵ On inheriting offices, see Hopkins 1978, 106.

highest offices was very much fixed in Roman thinking. When considering religion, participation also depended on social status; thus, capability to sacrifice and hold priestly offices was bound to the social origins of one's family.³⁶ The question of what kind of family background was needed to become a Vestal, and also how one could maintain one's office in third-century Rome, are central my discussion below.

Although it was possible to some degree to advance socially in Roman society, coming from lower origins created a stain on an individual's public reputation. The status of a former slave was not forgotten after manumission, and free-born status was an invaluable point of departure for an individual hoping to advance in society.³⁷ The requirement for the Vestals' to have impeccable and high-ranking backgrounds thus followed traditional Roman ideas. However, the struggle of status groups in the third century and the rise of the equestrian order, together with the earlier permissions granted for freedmens' daughters to apply to the office, might have increased the number of the non-senatorial Vestals. Based on epigraphic evidence and prosopographical studies, we are able to identify many of the third-century Vestals. Thus, below I analyse to what degree the priestesses social origins differed, and how their social origins seem to have affected their social influence.³⁸

The power structure of the emperor-centered system is important in my work, as its functions and changes directed the Vestals' activities. The meaning of power thus needs to be explained and its purpose here deserves more attention. Power is clarified in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events'.³⁹ This definition, together with the concept of social influence, describes the Vestals' power in this study. The Vestals' power and influence did not exist separate from their religious authority and sacral capacity. Therefore, the language used in the inscriptions to describe the Vestals' religious capability is studied carefully because it describes their religious character and therefore indicates their influence. Thus, my study starts from the assumption that Vestals' social influence was based on their religious authority and associated closely with their social activity. Overall, I explore the ways in

³⁶ For example, it was supposed that only patricians could make sacrifices to Jupiter, the main deity of the Capitulum triad. For discussion of the significance of noble blood and capability to act religiously, see Mustakallio 2013, 19–20.

³⁷ Alföldy 1988, 112.

³⁸ For prosopographic studies and discussion of the Vestals' social origins, see Raepsaet-Charlier, 1984, 253-270; Saqueté, 2000. For social changes in rank order during the third century, see Davenport, 2012, 89-123; Mennen, 2011.

³⁹ For a dictionary definition see *OED* (revised 2nd edition 2005), 1380.

which religion and religious office holding were used as instruments of social power and influence in Roman society.

It has been suggested that the male officials, *fictores virginum Vestalium*, ‘exercised great influence over the priestesses’ and also regulated interaction between the priestesses and their clients in third-century society.⁴⁰ Consequently, one of the objectives of this study is to analyze whether there is evidence that authorities other than the emperor, who in the capacity of *pontifex maximus* led cult life, supervised the Vestals. Thus, my discussion about their social influence also concerns whether they acted as independent agents, or whether their position was dictated by other people such as the *fictores*. The nature of their social relationships and the character of their independence can be studied in the inscriptions with the help of juridical sources. For my studies, the *Institutiones* by Gaius has been the most important legal text.⁴¹

Lastly, the question of the Vestals’ sexual status deserves attention. In earlier studies of the Vestals, their ambiguous gender status led to the interpretation that they were eternally fixed to be liminal, that they were able to represent the whole state and act as guarantors of its continuity. Thus, they were not merely virgins or matrons, but rather represented both categories *and* were suited to represent the male sex in Roman culture due to their extensive independence and privileges.⁴² Lately, however, this view of their sexual ambiguity has been challenged.⁴³ Here, though, it is more relevant to discuss the impact of their different ages on their office holding, leaving the question of their sexual status in the background. I argue that the different ages and stages of life — child to maiden/girl to mature woman — were needed in the Vestals’ organization and that their representation of different stages meant that the priestesses were not equal in terms of their social influence. Furthermore, not all Vestals necessarily shared the same sexual category; instead, they proceeded during their career from one category to the next. What did the different stages signify in the life a Vestal, what challenges were there, and how difficult was it to be in certain phases? These questions of age and competency are discussed throughout this study.

⁴⁰ Rüpke 2008, 12.

⁴¹ Gaius was a jurist from the mid-second century whose work was used as a handbook for interpreting the law from the 160s CE onward.

⁴² For a discussion of sexual status and ability to represent the entire Roman state, see Beard 1980 and Staples 1998.

⁴³ Gallia 2014, 222-240.

Instead of interpreting further their sexual status or re-considering it, my study assumes that the Vestals acted as mediators between citizens and ruler, and between the candidates for offices and the emperor. Thus, my question is, how were the Vestals, in their capacity as mediators, used as instruments of imperial power on the one hand, and as the source of benefits for their clients on the other?

1.3. Studying the Third Century

Many of the concepts and themes introduced above are closely connected to the third-century changes that took place in Roman society. These changes and the events that surrounded them need to be further elaborated. Above all, it is important to clarify how the different developments and themes of the third century are understood in this work, since scholars dispute many of the issues, including the very existence of a third-century crisis. Contemporary Romans seem to have been very much aware of the difficulties and challenges that their society faced from the turn of the century onwards. As the historian Cassius Dio put it when concluding his narrative of the end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius: “This matter must be our next topic; our history now descends from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust, as affairs did for the Romans of that day.”⁴⁴ Thus, the state was considered to have already fallen into disarray during the reign of the last Antonine emperor, Commodus, whose megalomaniac rule raised senatorial opposition.⁴⁵ Even though the last Severan emperor Severus Alexander had been called a *restitutor orbis* — restorer of the world — his assassination in 235 marked the beginning of decades of civil unrest, the increasing movement of Germanic tribes from the frontiers across the empire’s borders, cultural change, and economic disasters. In addition, a severe epidemic, known as the Plague of Cyprian, raged throughout the empire killing half or more of the population in some cities. Successive emperors were thus looked upon as *restitutores orbis*, as Romans sought to restore societal conditions to their former state and to ensure the empire’s continuity. Whether the Vestals, who were idealized as guarantors of the Roman state, were given a special role in this situation is critical to my analysis.

⁴⁴ Cass. Dio 72.36.4. “...περὶ οὗ ἤδη ρητέον, ἀπὸ χρυσοῦς τε βασιλείας εἰς σιδηρᾶν καὶ κατιωμένην τῶν τε πραγμάτων τοῖς τότε Ῥωμαίοις καὶ ἡμῖν νῦν καταπεσοῦσης τῆς ἱστορίας.” For discussions of the crisis among contemporary Romans, see, Alföldy G., 1974, 89-111.

⁴⁵ Cass. Dio 73.15.1. Dio considered him as “...a greater curse to the Romans than any pestilence or any crime.”

The age of the Nerva-Antonine dynasty (late-first century to late-second century) is considered to have been a period of prosperity and peace in the Roman Empire. The long period of relative peace, however, came to end when soldier-emperors took over and simultaneously struggled to keep their position and to repel external enemies. This type of insecurity seems to have been an unprecedented situation for the Romans, who were referring to the *Pax Romana* already in the first century.⁴⁶ By the mid-third century, however, several provinces had removed themselves from the emperor's control, and the uncertain political situation resulted in uneasiness in economic, commerce and social life. This development, which resulted in separatist actions in Gaul and eastern part of the empire cannot be explained by one or two main reasons alone; rather, the so-called crisis of the third century resulted from several interlinked changes.⁴⁷ Although the crisis struck across numerous aspects of society, the whole century was not in a continuous downfall; rather, it is possible to trace the emergence of a new political order, the tetrarch, which stabilized political and social conditions from the 280s onwards. The most critical period dates to the 250s and 260s; already in the 270s, the worst seems to have been over as the emperor Aurelian succeeded in putting an end to provincial separatist movements. Likewise, the crisis and economic decline were experienced on a different scale, depending on which part of the empire was in question.⁴⁸

Considering the historical written sources, it is important to distinguish between authors who discussed their own contemporary times and events, and those who were referring to the past and legendary history. The practices concerning the Vestals' office holding and social position developed over the course of centuries; during the imperial era, for example, the religious reform of the emperor Augustus was an important point of development both for the cult of Vesta and for other cults and religious posts, some of which were already abandoned before his restoring religious politics.⁴⁹ Considering the Vestals, it is often difficult to determine the exact date to which changes in their status or privileges can be traced. Many scholars have thus chosen to study the priestesses from a synchronic point of view. In other words, many scholars have chosen not to concentrate on certain

⁴⁶ Seneca the Younger was one of the first to use the term *pax Romana*. Sen. *Prov.* 4.14.

⁴⁷ For an analysis of the third-century changes, see Alföldy G., 1974, 89-111. For more recent studies and methodologies, see de Blois L., 2002, 204-217; Liebeschuetz W., 2007, 11-20. For stabilized conditions and the introduction of the cult of *Sol Invictus*, see Watson A., 1999. The study of J. Harries analyses the later part of the third century (and the fourth in particular), but analyzes the general development and impact of the third century. See Harries J., 2012, 1-24.

⁴⁸ For the differential impacts of the crises across geographic areas, see Hekster 2008, 35.

⁴⁹ For Augustan religious reform, see Ittai 2002.

historical periods of the cult's long history, looking at that history instead as an undifferentiated whole.⁵⁰

A characteristic of the third century is the rise of the equestrians who occupied offices earlier possessed solely by the senatorial rank, including the imperial throne. In terms of their wealth and prestige, only those in the senatorial rank exceeded the equestrians. Originally acting as the cavalry of Rome, the equestrian order took possession of numerous administration and court offices during the imperial era. Eligibility in the order required that a man be free-born, and that his wealth be worth at least 400,000 sesterces. Alternatively, an emperor could grant a man a favor and elevate him to this status. Already during the reign of the emperor Commodus, promotions took place more often, and continued to intensify during the third century as emperors became increasingly dependent on the army and military officials.⁵¹ Particular attention is therefore paid in this study to how social changes in this period affected the cult and the social origins of the priestesses, who traditionally had been selected from among the best families of the *senatores*.

Senatorial self-representation and the way that members of the senatorial rank dominated the public space have received scholars' attention, including the political and religious aspects of their dominance.⁵² Likewise, the public activities of senatorial women and their self-representations have been the subject of research.⁵³ As the Vestals were traditionally linked to the senatorial order, it is useful to pay attention to the religious activities and religious identities of the senators as a collective. The impact on the Vestals' *ordo* of the decline of the senatorial order and the rise of the equestrians are also woven into this study.

Although Christianity spread and increased in popularity during the third century alongside the growth of pagan monotheistic cults, such as those that worshipped the Sun god or Mithras, large-scale changes in religious culture are not relevant for this study. Nevertheless, religious changes —

⁵⁰ See, for example, Beard 1980, 12-27; Tacas 2008.

⁵¹ For the development of the equestrian order, see Brunt, 1983, 42-75; Davenport 2012, 89-123.

⁵² See, for example, Ewald. – Noreña (ed.), 2010 ; Eck, 2010; Niquet, 2000; Varhelyi, 2010.

⁵³ See von Hesberg-Tonn.,1983; Raepsaet-Charlier, 2005, 169-212.

including to the cult of Vesta — are discussed as they relate to imperial religious politics. A question of how the emperors manifested the traditional Roman state religion, is important for my analysis.⁵⁴

Changing dynamics within the social hierarchy, the apparent failure of dynastic continuity, and the emperor's lack of presence and religious leadership in the capital are characteristic developments of the third century.⁵⁵ The change in imperial power balance, and discontinuity in the emperorship, did not mean that religion was overthrown or that religious rites were neglected. Furthermore, the early fourth century Christian emperors continued to finance also the polytheistic cults and even participated in their cults.⁵⁶ Thus, decline and oblivion of the ancient cults was not probable in the third and fourth century. However, the third century was a restless period in Roman history, and existence of the state was uncertain. My aim is to analyze if the Vestals' opportunities to act publicly and practice their benevolence were limited by, or increased due to, the crises. What happened to the relationships between the Vestals and the ever-changing emperors? Did social discontinuity disadvantage the Vestals' influence?

Some individual emperors, such as Caracalla and Elagabalus, implemented very aggressive policies towards the Vestals.⁵⁷ Considering the priestesses' role in imperial propaganda, developments after the mid-third century have been largely ignored. The gradual disappearance of the Vestas from imperial coinage is a phenomenon that deserves to be analysed. Research that explores the religious politics of individual emperors will inform changes in Roman religion and the possible effect of these changes on the Vestals and their public role.⁵⁸

Recent studies have given more attention to the relationships between imperial women and the Vestals. A lack of first hand evidence, however, limits any estimation of how close they were, and

⁵⁴ For the increasing popularity of different monotheistic cults, see Mitchell – Van Nuffelen 2010, 10-11. True, there were conflicts between Christianity and the polytheistic religious tradition. However, it was perhaps more a question of imperial power politics – and conflicts between the individual supporters of the cults and religions – than disputes between the religions as such.

⁵⁵ On the third-century problematics, see Southern 2001; Potter 2004; Ando 2012.

⁵⁶ For maintaining the polytheistic cults by the Christian emperors, see the discussion by Cameron 2011, 33-34.

⁵⁷ For the third-century imperial cult, see Benoist, 2006, 27-64. For the emperor Caracalla, see Mennen, 2006, 253-267; Kemmers, 2010, 270-290. For Elagabalus and his religious politics, see Icks, 2006, 169-78.

⁵⁸ For the mid-century emperor Gallienus, see de Blois 1976. On the religious politics of the emperor Aurelian in the 270s, see Watson 1999.

how different dynasties affected their relationships. However, the sources do reveal the privileges they shared, as well as the religious rituals that they performed together; this can tell us how those relationships developed and were maintained. Numismatic evidence in particular offers information about the themes that were important to the empresses, and how they used the cult of Vesta to promote their dynasties.⁵⁹ The imperial women of the Severan dynasty set an example for the rest of the third century, and their relationships with the Vestals are particularly illuminating. The Severans imitated the practices of the Antonine dynasty, but several unparalleled features in their politics had a significant, complex, and unique effect on the cult of Vesta and its public role. Since it is possible to identify the individual Vestals who were in office during the Severan dynasty, along with their family backgrounds and reputation, their relationships with the imperial house, and with contemporaries in general, can likewise be inferred. I ask here if it was the Vestals' identity and family background that facilitated, or hindered, their connections with the imperial house, or whether it was instead the emperors and empresses who regulated the relationships.

The third-century Vestals lived in an imperial society that was changing rapidly when comparing, for example, to the peaceful age of Antonines. Contemporaries noticed significant social challenges. Constant warfare and conflicts in domestic policy interrupted dynastic continuity. This discontinuity is one of the most interesting phenomena of the third century to affect the cult of Vesta. What kinds of demands did the third-century emperors make on the Vestals? For what purposes did they need the priestesses in imperial propaganda? In other words, the cases I discuss below clarify how the relationships between the Vestals and the third-century imperial house were built. In addition to recurrent political instability, new religious cults were gaining a foothold that challenged the traditional Roman religion. By the end of the century, the pontifical order was recreated and even renamed. Although some of the changes in cultic life were rather short-lived, they were – as I shall suggest – remarkably important to the Vestals and to their cult. The main purpose of my research is thus to explore how the cult of Vesta had to transform itself to manage and survive through third-century change. Another way to look at this, is to ask what qualities the cult and priestesses possessed

⁵⁹ Although acknowledging that the Vestals and imperial women held a similar social status, Mekacher (2006) finds it difficult to determine the character of their relationships. On the basis of numismatic research, however, it has been surmised that the empresses' propaganda involved the cult of Vesta. On this, see Langford 2013; Rowan 2011, 241-273. Likewise, public art and evidence found from the *Atrium Vestae* have informed studies analyzing these women's relationships. For relations between the Vestals and imperial women, see Lindner 2015, 28-30.

that supported their ability to survive societal change without significant institutional change themselves.

1.4. Previous Research

Before I discuss the modern research tradition concerning the Vestal virgins, it is important to recognize that the priestesses already attracted the attention of early modern antiquarians and enthusiasts. This is not surprising, since there were abundant references to them in the ancient literature that was translated and studied with enthusiasm by humanist antiquarians. At that time, inscription material and the earliest statues of the priestesses were rediscovered, to the antiquarians' delight, but fake monuments were also produced in the general enthusiasm that developed for ancient culture.⁶⁰ The fact that their way of life resembled that of the Catholic nuns gave the Vestals a special place in the early scholarship.

Interest in the Vestals boomed once the Italian archeologists Rodolfo Lanciani and Giacomo Boni excavated the area around the *Atrium Vestae* in the *forum Romanum* in 1883 and found the inscriptions and statues of the Vestals (along with other archeological evidence).⁶¹ However, more recent archaeological studies, led by R. Scott in the 1990s, have defined more closely the developments and evolutions in the area and its connections to the surrounding building complexes. Based on existing archaeological evidence, it seems difficult to prove that the *Atrium Vestae* was intended for residential use. However, fragmentary evidence offers some conclusions about how the priestesses lived. The upper floor of the building is almost entirely destroyed, but the remaining portions of the building indicate that private housing spaces for the priestesses were situated there.⁶² Furthermore, the functions of the Vestals' honorary statues and their inscriptions have been discussed recently from the point of view of their social significance and their location in spaces that were half

⁶⁰ Enthusiastic antiquaries made the first excavations in the area of the *Atrium Vestae* and its surroundings, digging out a few inscriptions between 1497 and 1549 (*CILVI* 2127-2139; 2141; 2143; 2145). Most of these are now lost. Italian artist and antiquarian Pirro Ligorio (1513-1583) was one of the first antiquarians to develop a great interest in ancient monuments and sites. The Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) authored *De Vesta et Vestalibus Syntagma*; he also discussed briefly other cults that used fire as a central feature. This kind of comparative approach raises the value of his study. In addition to a comprehensive use of literary sources, he also relied on epigraphical material. Justus Lipsius *De Vesta et Vestalibus syntagma* (1621), a translation by Filip Vanhaecke (2006).

⁶¹ Lanciani, 1883, 434-487; Maes, 1883; Jordan, 1886; Lanciani, 1888; Van Deman, 1909.

⁶² For discussion of the Vestals' residence, see Scott 2009, 69-70.

public and half private.⁶³ The last major reconstruction of the *Atrium Vestae* site took place during the Severan dynasty, which adds further importance to focusing on the third century as an era of significance for the Vestals.

Early studies by G. Wissowa and C. Koch significantly influenced later explorations of the Vestals' role in Roman cult life and their religious tasks. Since these pioneering studies appeared, two major questions or research objectives have emerged: how punishment of immoral priestesses was to be interpreted, and what kind of cultural origins the cult actually had in the Roman context.⁶⁴ After the mid-twentieth century, research on the Vestals has gradually specialized, with more specific cultural and social-historical questions being asked and general works being deemed inadequate to explain all elements of the priestesses and the cult. Contemporary ideals of sex and gender, as well as the use of history for present-day political and social causes, have influenced both how modern researchers have treated the Vestals in their work, and on which qualities of the priestesses' multi-dimensional character they focus.⁶⁵ During the twentieth century, interdisciplinary views as well as the fragmentation of the scholarship have affected classical studies; for research on the Vestals, this has meant that the priestesses' social position, and their socio-economical and juridical position in particular, has been studied more profoundly and with more specialized methods.⁶⁶

With the help of prosopographical research, it is possible to analyse both the Vestals' relationships with their contemporaries and their family origins. Epigraphical materials, and sometimes literary sources as well, provide prosopographical information and details. Depending on the manner in which one counts the priestesses, it has been estimated that approximately one half to two thirds of the imperial Vestals can be identified; fifteen of these were active in the third century.⁶⁷ Prosopographical research also increases understanding of the Vestals' various relationships, thereby

⁶³ For studies discussing the development of the *Atrium Vestae*, see Boatwright, 2011; Trimble, 2011. For Vestals' living conditions when their residence was under construction, see Lindner 2015. Mekacher 2006; Lusnia, 2014.

⁶⁴ See Wissowa, 1912; Koch 1958. For more about the evolution of Vestal studies, see Mekacher 2006, 14-15.

⁶⁵ For works on the Vestals and the cult in the field of history studies, see Cancik-Lindemaier, 1996, 138-150.

⁶⁶ On the Vestals' juridical position see, Guizzi, 1968; Gardner, 1986; Sacchi, 2003, 317-359. On *incestum* among the Vestals and the related punishment see, Fraschetti, 1984, 97-128; Cornell, 1981, 27-37 ; Mustakallio, 1992, 56-62.

⁶⁷ For the number of imperial Vestals, see Raepset-Charlier 1985; Mekacher 2006, 115.

identifying them further. Providing new prosopographical data, however, is not an objective of this study.⁶⁸

My work proceeds here by analyzing how the Vestals' age, identity and social structures, such as *patria potestas*, affected their social influence. Considering what the Vestals represented and what was the origin of their institution, gender studies have offered new perspectives since the 1980s and 1990s to better understand these issues. M. Beard's work, for example, has set the question of the Vestals' sexual and social status into a new framework that considered the priestesses' dual or even triple sexual status.⁶⁹ Beard rejected the dual idea that the Vestals were either virgins or *matrones*, and chose instead to see them as both virginal and matronal. Furthermore, Beard argued that the Vestals also held male status, since they had the right to use *lictors* (official bodyguards) similar to those enjoyed by high-ranking (male) magistrates and officials. Towards the end of the 1990s, Beard analyzed her previous studies anew, concluding that scholars should consider the Romans' own ideas about virginity more seriously, rather than judging them from a modern point of view.⁷⁰ In 2007, K. Mustakallio proposed – with a synthetic approach based on the source material – that ‘the Vestals were supposedly considered to act in several roles: as *puella*, then *nupta* and finally *matrona*’.⁷¹ The young age of the newly recruited priestesses, and the fact that their career proceeded gradually through different stages, are narrated through several sources, both literary and epigraphic. This present study is sensitive to Mustakallio's idea that the female course of life was adapted to the Vestals' office holding. Thus, my assumptions are that their age had an important impact on their office holding and that their gender status — connected to their sacral office holding — was ambiguous and multi-dimensional.⁷²

⁶⁸ In addition to the *PIR* (*Prosopography Imperii Romani*) and *PLRE* (*Prosopography of Later Roman Empire*), the comprehensive study by Jörg Rüpke, *Fasti Sacerdotum (FS)* [2005], 2008 has proven to be useful, as it provides the bibliographical details of every person holding a sacral office in the city of Rome. Instead of the original German, I have relied on a translation. For prosopographical studies and research on the Vestals' families, see Raepsaet-Charlier, 1984, 253-270; Orlandi, 1995-1996, 359-371; Pigon, 1999, 206-213.

⁶⁹ Beard, 1980, 12-29. Until Beard's study appeared, there had been two opinions concerning the Vestals' sexual status in the Roman past: the priestesses either were the virginal daughters of the early kings of Rome, or they were the (married) wives of those kings. In twenty-first-century research, the origins of the Vestals and question about their sexual status and its impact have still been crucial starting points. R. L. Wildfang based her research on the fact that the Vestals were virgins, rather than having a complex status as both virgins and matrons. Wildfang 2006.

⁷⁰ Beard, 1995, 166-77.

⁷¹ For this conclusion and the historic changes in the Vestals' social position, see Mustakallio 2007, 185-203, especially 187. Her idea is based on the facts – provided by several sources – that of the Vestals' careers were divided into three stages and that the priestesses had to be children when they were recruited.

⁷² On the concept of gender in ancient cultures, see Foxhall, 2013, 2-23.

According to A. Staples, the Vestals symbolized the unity of the state because their special socio-sexual status enabled them to represent the entirety of Roman society.⁷³ She approaches the question of Vestals' family relations by examining their legal position in the family institution and by comparing their extraordinary status to other citizens, both male and female. The *patria potestas* was the very influential and characteristic feature of Roman family structure, and since every individual was controlled by it, Staples focused on how the Vestals were saved from the multiple effects of this masculine power. The question of *patria potestas* and its ineffectiveness must be taken a little bit further in considering why the priestesses had to be separated from their fathers' control, and what effects these circumstances had concerning the cult organization and its practices.⁷⁴ Thus, my research is based on the view that the Vestals' identity was somewhat blurred or multidimensional so that they could undertake different duties and roles in cult life and in society. Furthermore, the course of life or career of each priestess sits at the center of this analysis, and their special status is taken for granted. The question of the Vestals' age is another important aspect of my analysis of their social influence: the fact that the Vestals were taken into the cult at a very young age forces us to pay attention to studies that have explored the social role of children in Roman religion and society. Studies addressing the course of life, and especially children's role in public life, have thus been useful for my analysis.⁷⁵

Rather than concentrating on the Vestals' sexual status, it is more useful to consider the relationship between their identity as professional state priestesses and their social influence. I thus compare upper-class women, such as empresses, to the Vestals, as their status and privileges were so similar during the high empire. Studies discussing the public role of the empresses, as well as other women in public offices, such as the public priestesses, have informed my attempt to understand how these women and the Vestals were valued in Roman society.⁷⁶ Furthermore, I discuss other priests in the

⁷³ Staples A., 1998.

⁷⁴ Regarding the Vestals' sexual status, I accept the view that the priestesses had both virginal and maternal status. The Vestals' social status can be connected closely to other social groups of people, such as Roman upper class men, who were also liberated from their father's power. For *patria potestas* see, for example, Saller, 1994 102-132 and Lacey, 1986, 121-144.

⁷⁵ For different stages of life in the Roman world, see Eyben, 1972, 677-697; Harlow – Lawrence 2002; Mustakallio, 2011, 41-56; Parkin, 2003. For studies concentrating on children in public life, see Laes, 2004, 145-184; Mantle, 2002, 85-106; Prescendi, 2010, 73-93. For Roman children in general, see Rawson, 2003; Vuolanto, 2010, 133-151.

⁷⁶ Barret 2002; Levick, 2007; Langford, 2013. Hemelrijk, 2005, 309–317; Hänninen, 2016, 203 - 209.

Roman religious system, the *flamen Dialis* in particular, as close parallels of the Vestal virgins.⁷⁷ The Vestals' relationships to their biological families have been studied to reveal their social background. The question of their separation from their biological families has puzzled scholars, especially the moment when a girl became a priestess and had to leave her family.⁷⁸ My intention is to take recent discussions further. Therefore, I ask why separation was needed in the first place, how relationships were formed after a Vestal's consecration, and lastly, with whom from among their relatives did the Vestals continue to be associated during their career.

2. Foundations for the Vestals' Agency

This chapter deals with the Vestals' privileges and position, as defined by law. Even though my studies concentrate primarily on the third century, I analyze earlier developments and the cult's long tradition to uncover changes in their social position. Unlike previous scholarship, my task is to discover why it was necessary to separate the priestesses from their birth families, and for what purposes their privileges were designed regarding their religious office. I compare the Vestals' legal position with that of other priests; the *flamen Dialis* provide a particularly apt comparison, since their priestly capacity and legal position resembled to some degree that of the Vestals. The chapter begins with a discussion of the Vestals' social origins, set amidst an examination of the degree to which patrician and senatorial representation endured as third-century social change took place (i.e., the rise of the *equites* and its impact on the *ordo*). In connection with the Vestals' social origins, my aim is to examine which social orders were represented in the cult, and what that reveals about the priestesses' social value and influence. Next, my attention turns to the Vestals' numerous privileges and finances. These are important to study to discover how they achieved the preconditions of their influential position, and how they benefitted from their advantages. Further, I ask what motivated the families: why they were willing to give their daughters to the cult in the first place. Throughout this examination, I discuss how social relationships between the priestesses and their contemporaries functioned, and how the Vestals – despite their extraordinary social status and way of life – participated in Roman society. Lastly, I examine a less studied question about age requirements and advancement in the *ordoto* further analyze their religious capacity and social influence. In short, the

⁷⁷ On priests and priestesses in Roman cult life, see Boels, 1973, 77-100; Scheid 1990. For the pontifical priests, see Van Haepelen, 2002. On women in Roman cult life see, Schultz, 2006; her study discusses a different period but provides a good synthesis of the subject.

⁷⁸ Scardigli., 2003, 97-104; Mustakallio, 2007, 185-203; Gallia, 2015, 74-120; Mekacher, 2006.

analyses of this chapter seek to answer the questions of who the third century Vestals were, and how they were empowered to act in their office.

2.1. Best of the Best – the Importance of Ancestry

By the third century, the senatorial families' dominant position in Roman society was no longer self-evident, as they gave way to the equestrians who proceeded to hold many administrative and military offices. The old division between patricians and plebeians had become too rigid for third-century society – and those living in the imperial period in general. Instead, it is more useful to consider who belonged to the third-century élite, who was able to improve his/her social status, etc. In the end, the emperor was at the center of all decision making and status meant belonging to the group of the emperor's closest men (*comes*), to his supporters, or to the military, which was very important for the third-century emperors because of ongoing war campaigns and political conflicts.⁷⁹ This particular period provides an excellent context for analyzing changes in the Vestals' institution and their social position, since the rupture of the second century's stability transformed the social orders. The prerequisites for becoming a Vestal, listed by Aulus Gellius in the second century, reflected well the idea of a perfect family of *nobilitas*.⁸⁰ The Vestal's ideal family origins refer clearly to the *senatores*. Was this ideal of the Vestal's noble family origins only a requirement, but not a social reality?

Aulus Gellius's list of requirements related to the Vestals' family background appears in his *Noctes Atticae* amongst a broader discussion of the cultural habits of the Romans and their institutions. According to Gellius, the family of the future Vestal virgin should be of Italian origin and her father and mother should not have been enslaved nor should they have been involved with “shabby businesses” (*in negotiis sordidis*). These requirements refer to the landed property class, suggesting that the family had to be wealthy and Italic. Furthermore, neither the potential priestess nor her father could be emancipated, even if her father was living and the girl in the *potestas* of her grandfather.⁸¹ The non-emancipation of the father and daughter refers to a situation wherein the grandfather ruled

⁷⁹ On general changes in the third century, see Potter D. 2013 (2004). For the social rank order in the third century, see Mennen I., 2011. For changes to the equestrian order and its members' improved possibilities to gain social prominence, see Davenport, 2019.

⁸⁰ For the Vestals' social origins, see Raepsaet-Charlier 1985; Settiani 2000. For a more recent discussion of this subject, see Caldelli L. M., 2015, 596.

⁸¹ See Gell. *NA* 1.12.1-8. 1.12.4. *item quae ipsa aut cuius pater emancipatus sit, etiamsi vivo patre in avi potestate sit*. Gellius also wrote of the required 'personal' qualities of Vestals, meaning their bodily perfection, in passage 1.12.3.

the family; everything – both persons and property – remained under his control until he formally emancipated them. This typically happened by testament.⁸² This requirement could be understood as having an ideological as well as economic rationale.

Patricians were the most influential core of the senatorial order, and formed the power élite of the *senatores*. The term ‘aristocracy’ adequately explains the patricians’ function and prestige. Although its origins were presumed to be in the archaic Roman past, the patricians did not remain an unchanged group. By the third century CE, there were many new families that had attained this status. By contrast, many old patrician families had become extinct; although the title was hereditary for a long period, it was the emperor’s prerogative to elevate new patricians (*adlectio inter patricios*) in the place of older ones.⁸³ Even so, there existed an important concept of the existence of a full-blooded, unmixed race/group of people who stood out (above) in Roman society. According to Roman historical tradition, in archaic and republican Rome segregation between the patricians and plebeians had been rigid, and the pureness of blood was guarded by laws that forbade marriage between patricians and plebeians. Late-republican and early-principate writers and politicians such as Livy and Cicero further articulated this idea.⁸⁴ In religion, the most important priesthoods (*amplissima collegia*) were in the hands of the patricians, and there prevailed the idea that the nobility was only suitable social class capable of preserving the relationships with the gods. For the *senatores*, holding religious offices was not just a question of power: it was also (and especially) about prestige. Many priestly offices were lifelong appointments that permanently increased a holder’s honour and

⁸² Only the *pater familias* had control (*potestas*) over the family’s property. If his unemancipated children received money or property, their father controlled it. However, *peculium* was a system that provided property for a son; for example, he had the right to receive a payment of an army office. The legal form of any marriage determined whether a husband controlled his wife’s possessions. For more information about the *patria potestas* and its economic consequences, see Saller 1994, 118-119.

⁸³ The republican patrician is an entirely different concept than a third-century patrician. During late antiquity, it became an honorary title given, for example, to imperial officials for their excellent contribution to the state.

⁸⁴ Livy describes patricians reacting against propositions to accept intermarriages: the offspring of such marriages would not know whose blood flowed in his/her veins, they would not know what sacred rites to perform, and they would not be in harmony with themselves. For Livy’s comments on the question of intermarriages, which *Lex Canuleia* in 445 BCE had approved, see Livy 4.1.1-2 and especially 4.2.6; *Ut qui natus sit ignoret, cuius sanguinis, quorum sacrorum sit; dimidius patrum sit, dimidius plebis, ne secum quidem ipse concors*. Furthermore, Cicero’s discussion of a person’s background sums up the Roman ideas. He comments that a person was valued on grounds of from where he/she came (*natio*), and from which *patria*. Further, it was important to distinguish his/her blood relations (*cognatio*), who were his/her ancestors (*quibus maioribus*), to whom he/she was related (*quibus consanguineis*) and, lastly, what age-group he/she represented. See Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 1.35; *Atque hominum genus et in sexu consideratur, virile an muliebre sit, et in natione, patria, cognatione, aetate. Natione, Graius an barbarus; patria, Atheniensis an Lacedaemonius; cognatione, quibus maioribus, quibus consanguineis; aetate, puer an adulescens, natu grandior an senex*. On the division between patricians and plebeians, and the religious office holding and social orders, see Mustakallio 2013, 61; Raaflaub K. A. 2005; Beard, North & Price 1999, 64.

dignity.⁸⁵ The aspirations of the aristocratic élite and their expectations to possess honorable priesthoods reflected patrician culture and perhaps ideas about their identity. Thus, the ideas and situation described by Livy or Cicero reflect the late republican and early principate culture. However, my point in bringing forward these ideas is to emphasize that the lineage and social status remained important markers in the Roman social system. Therefore my discussion is sensitive to the ideal that a Vestal should represent the most distinguished families, but pushes the idea by suggesting that this ideal perhaps clashed with social reality during the third century.

The idea of an anonymous and self-sufficient individual who could seamlessly assimilate into the majority population was quite an unfamiliar idea to the Roman élite. Every person was essentially a representative of his/her family, and an individual's social status was fixed by his/her family origins. Furthermore, in the core of the family system was a question, when *patria potestas* prevailed and when the children were freed from it. Children's right to inherit from their father, and the ways in which the family fortune was divided and increased, were important issues that dictated the lives of members of the élite.⁸⁶ The scholarship offers several viewpoints of how the Vestals' family connections should be understood, and what emphasis should be given to their family origins or their connection to their families. Synthetic approaches, exploited for example by A. Gallia, leave room for studies that examine all the evidence, and consider the Vestals as members of their families rather than isolated exceptions.⁸⁷ It is thus evident that even if the Vestals were separated from their families during the inauguration ceremony, they were on no account anonymous or without familial

⁸⁵ Várhelyi 2010, 63. The situation continued to favour the patricians until the third century BCE, when the *lex Ogulnia* (300 BCE) allowed plebeians to aspire to the offices of the pontiffs and *augures*; after that, the patricians' monopoly over these religious offices was overthrown. In first century BCE, religious institutions saw more change when the *lex Domitia* altered the practice of priesthood recruitment (*pontifices*, *augures*, *XVviri*, *VIIviri*). From then on, priests were selected partly through a process of popular election, except the Arval Brethren, whose election remained a distinctive practice compared to other priesthoods. On the Arvals, see Scheid 1990

⁸⁶ Female citizens could be legally detached from strict family connections at the moment they married, depending on the form of their marriage. A woman's right to inherit also altered. This happened when a *cum manu* marriage took place, which established the wife as her husband's daughter. However, when a couple was married *sine manu*, a woman remained a member of her father's family and maintained her right to inherit from him. The social consequences of a marriage are a different matter. Emotional severance from the social bonds of a woman's biological family was not mandated by legal separation. On the different forms of Roman marriage, see Treggiari 1991. Legal relations were organized anew with adoption. However, as with marriage, all previous contacts were likely to remain between the adopted person and his/her biological family, leading to an extended family system. For Roman adoption and its consequences, see Lindsey 2009.

⁸⁷ For earlier discussions about the Vestals' family connections and also their non-existence, see Gallia 2015, 75-76.

background. In fact, they were quite stuck with their lineage and family name, which could be a great asset for them, or – as we shall see later – a dangerous disadvantage.⁸⁸

In imperial Rome, economic wealth and political – as well as religious – power went hand in hand, although the system allowed some social advancement and there was a room for an individual to improve his/her life. For a long time, members of the four major priesthoods of Rome, *pontifices*, *augures*, *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* and *septemviri epulones*, came from the wealthiest population, the patrician order. Within the pontifical college, the *rex/regina sacrorum* and the three major *flamines* were also required to be patricians. Later emperors used their censorial power to give patrician status to their favoured individuals, who then passed this status on to their descendants. In the early third century, families with patrician status still occupied these offices. This notion is based on prosopographical data and annual lists of the priestly organizations.⁸⁹ However, these families were not protected from the changes that took place in the third century, and we can question if their position remained as steady as it had been earlier.⁹⁰

The issue of a man's ability to achieve and maintain his position in the senatorial élite, whether he had a priestly office or not, is interesting but beyond the limits of this study. However, we can ask what patrician status signified, and to what extent the patricians/senators were represented within the Vestals. We can expect that the numerous changes faced by third-century Roman society more broadly also had consequences for and impacts on the cult of Vesta. The social origins of the majority of identifiable third-century priestesses are uncertain. As shown below in Table 1, there is a high probability that five of sixteen known priestesses came from senatorial families. Four of them held

⁸⁸ By contrast, family origins and social background was manifested publicly; this is particularly well demonstrated with the system of personal nomenclatura in which the central element was a hereditary family name. Third-century Vestals' names were composed according to the Roman tradition of using patronymics. This was an instrument to declare the family's position, and it was important to identify a daughter (*filia*) from her sisters or freedwomen. A family's different branches were also manifested by patronymics. Numisia L. f. Maximilla: *CIL* VI 32411; Flavia L. f. Publicia: *CIL* VI 32414; 32415. The similar naming formula is visible also in first- and second-century inscriptions: Vibidia daughter of Sextus Vibidius Virro: *IG Ed. min. III 1*, 3532; Iunia C. Silani f. Torquata: *CIL* VI 32403; 2128; Licinia Praetextata Crassi f.: *CIL* VI 32409. The naming conventions let us conclude that Roman fathers felt equal pride for their sons and daughters – particularly those who were accomplished publicly and brought honour to the family. For this idea, see Hallet 1984, 82.

⁸⁹ See the prosopographical data in Rüpke *FS* and the annual lists.

⁹⁰ See Inge Mennen's recent study of third-century senatorial power and status. Eighteen of the most influential senatorial families (*gentes*), which had at least three members holding one or more key positions, i.e. *consul ordinarius*, *praefectus urbi*, *proconsul Africae* and *proconsul Asiae*, emerged at this time. These were the Acilii (Glabriones et Aviolae), the Anicii, the Bruttii, the Caesonii, the Catii, the Claudii Pompeiani, the Claudii Severii, the Egnatii, the Fulvii Aemiliani, the Hedii Lolliani, the Marii, the Nummii, the Pollieni, the Pomponii, the Valerii, the Vettii and the Virii. Their offices were the culmination of the senatorial *cursus honorum*, and senatorial careers continued in many cases for at least two decades. Mennen 2011, 53. Although achieving priestly offices was a relevant aspect of the senatorial *cursus honorum* and elevated the families' socio-economical status, only a limited number of studies have explored them.

office during the reign of the Severan dynasty, or no later than 235 CE.⁹¹ For numerous Vestals, a senatorial background is not evident but cannot be excluded. There is one representative of the equestrian order, three with indefinite high-ranking social backgrounds, one with a lower social origin, and two uncertain cases.

Table 1. Social status and family background of third-century Vestals. The priestesses with uncertain social origins are marked with *, those priestesses with uncertain dating are marked in brackets.

| <i>Senatorial with certainty</i> | <i>Senatorial with high probability</i> | <i>Equestrian with certainty</i> | <i>Uncertain social origins, senatorial?</i> | <i>Non-Senatorial with certainty</i> |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Terentia Flavola | Coelia Claudiana | Vettenia Sabinilla | Aurelia Severa | Campia Severina |
| | Julia Aquilia Severa | | Flavia Publicia | |
| | Numisia Maximilla | | (Bellicia Modesta) | |
| | Pomponia Rufina | | Cannutia Crescentina | |
| | | | Clodia Laeta* | |
| | | | Flavia Mamilia | |
| | | | Octavia Honorata* | |
| | | | (Sossia Maxima) | |
| | | | Terentia Rufilla | |
| Total: 1 | 4 | 1 | 9 | 1 |

Sources: Paola Ruggeri (2015), Nina Mekacher (2006), C. Settiani (2000), M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier (1984).

As the table shows, only one priestess represented the senatorial élite with absolute certainty.⁹² The Vestal Terentia Flavola belonged to the patrician family *Hedii Lolliani*; her male relatives also achieved the most desirable senatorial and religious offices that were usually given to patricians.⁹³ Terentia participated in *ludi saeculares* in 204 CE and held the office of the *Virgo Vestalis maxima*

⁹¹ For the analysis, see Mekacher 2006, 116-117. In Jörg Rüpke's prosopographical study, Numisia Maximilla is proposed as plebeian, see Rüpke 2008, 817, no. 2548. Even if her family was plebeian in origin, it might have been promoted to senatorial status by the third century. The priestesses who held an office during the Severans were Julia Aquilia Severa, Numisia Maximilla, Pomponia Rufina, and Terentia Flavola.

⁹² For the list of patrician families, see note 88 above and Mennen 2011, 53. For the observation that there is, in fact, only one Vestal with patrician origins, see Ruggeri 2015, 167.

⁹³ Father *PIR*² H 42 Q. (Hedius) Rufus Lollianus *cons. suff.* 186 and augur; brothers Q. (Hedius) Lollianus Plautius Avitus *PIR*² H 36 *cons.* 209; (Hedius Lollianus) Terentius Gentianus *PIR*² H 37 *flamen Dialis* and *consul* 211.

after 209 CE. There was another élite Vestal, but her family was non-Italic: Julia Aquilia Severa was purportedly a member of the old regal family of Asia Minor.⁹⁴ If this indeed was the case, her non-Italic family origins were an exception to the rule that Vestals' fathers were obliged to have possessions and their residence (*domicilium*) in Italy.⁹⁵ During the early imperial era, it had been possible for aristocrats from the provinces to improve their social positions in the capital and to acquire promotions and high-ranking appointments. Therefore, it is possible that the old and traditional qualifications for the office of a Vestal had already changed too.

The table above illustrates the Vestals' social origins based on prosopographical research.⁹⁶ It is notable that the majority of those Vestals whose senatorial origins can be firmly established held their office in the early third century, i.e., during the Severan dynasty. Numisia Maximilla and Pomponia Rufina were most likely of senatorial origin.⁹⁷ However, senatorial representation changed after the Severan dynasty, or it is at least difficult to determine the status of the mid- and late-third century Vestals' families. At least one priestess had an equestrian background with certainty, namely Vettienia Sabinilla, whose father P. Aelius Dionysius was a *vir rationalis*. As a leader of the imperial financial administration, he had an office that was a one of the most distinguished ones in the *cursus* of the equestrians.⁹⁸ While the father of Vettienia Sabinilla was an equestrian, her mother's origin could have been even more distinguished. This can be concluded by analyzing the nomenclature of this Vestal, who was apparently named after her mother.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Mekacher 2006, 112; Settiani 2000, 454.

⁹⁵ Gell. 1.12.8. *Praetera Capito Ateius scriptum reliquit neque eius legendam filiam, qui domicilium in Italia non haberet, et excusandam eius, qui liberos tres haberet.*

⁹⁶ Raepsaet-Charlier (1984), Mekacher (2006), Rüpke (2008) and Saquete (2000) have produced thorough analyses of the Vestals' probable familial origins. I base my studies on their prosopographical research.

⁹⁷ The Vestals at the turn of the century and earlier than 209 CE (according Rüpke 2008): Numisia L. f. Maximilla (v.v.max.); Terentia Flavola (v.v.max. in 209 CE); Aurelia Severa; Cannutia Crescentia; Pomponia Rufina and Clodia Laeta.

⁹⁸ *CIL* VI 1587.

⁹⁹ The nomenclature of Vestal Vettienia Sabinilla does not follow the common habit, but there are indications that her name followed the maternal line. For analysing Vettienia Sabinilla's name see Nuorluoto 2017, 272-273. As Nuorluoto brings up, it has been suggested in the earlier research that Vettienia Sabinilla was adopted which explains her name. However, in my view, this seems improbable. A Vestal had to be *patrima matrimaque*; thus her both parents had to be alive. In Aulus Gellius we find the list of requirements for a Vestal. There are no indications that any other than a biological father was allowed to offer her daughter to the emperor. See Gell. *NA* 1.12.2-9. Adoption caused *capitis diminutio*, a change in the person's status, and a future Vestal had to be under her father's *potestas*. Thus, her status had to remain unchanged until the point she was chosen as a new priestess.

The case of Flavia Publicia reveals that there are different possibilities when determining the social background of a Vestal. Earlier research left unsettled what exactly her family's social origins might be. A senatorial background has been suggested, as her sister was *clarissima femina*, i.e., lady of the senatorial order.¹⁰⁰ However, it seems that the family may have been promoted from the equestrian order to senatorial rank, perhaps through the marriage. This elevation would also explain why Flavia Publicia received so many honorary inscriptions in Rome: her family's promotion was celebrated this way publicly.¹⁰¹ If this is correct, Flavia's case demonstrates that a practice dated to Augustan times, the granting of permission to equestrians to achieve the Vestal office, was still active in the third century.¹⁰² Assuming that the suggestion of her equestrian background is correct, her case represents a third-century development *par excellence*: the improvement of social status. Although there is a general consensus that the rise of the equestrian order took place during the third century, however, equestrian dominance in or "invasion" of the cult of Vesta cannot be concluded on the basis of this single chief Vestal.¹⁰³

Comparing the Vestals to other priesthoods might clarify their position. The *amplissima collegia* and *flamen Dialis* in particular had very similar practices to the Vestals' in terms of their cooptation and office holding. Although the lack of sources sets limits to large-scale comparisons, my examination detects similarities and differences between the Vestals and the other priesthoods. J. Rüpke's prosopographical study provides annual lists of the priests and probable dating of their terms in office; it has been a great help with the comparisons.¹⁰⁴ The number of priests holding an office at any given time varied depending on the priesthood; there was only one person in office of *flamen Dialis* or *rex sacrorum*, for example, while there were several Vestals or augures. Furthermore, an individual priest was appointed for life. To some extent, modern knowledge is bound to the quantity of available evidence.¹⁰⁵ Regarding the *flamen Dialis*, there are only two identifiable men who held office in third-

¹⁰⁰ Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 264; senatorial background can be reasonably suspected, see Mekacher 2006, 117.

¹⁰¹ Mayer i Olivé 2011, 156.

¹⁰² Cass. Dio 55.22.5. This passage discusses the Augustan era with a note that there were no freedmen's daughters among the Vestals, since all participants were from the equestrian order.

¹⁰³ Flavia Publicia's social origins are discussed further in the following chapters. An archeological finding from Sardinia in 2007 connects her and her family to this region, and insinuates that she had business in the island during her term as *virgo Vestalis maxima*.

¹⁰⁴ There are numerous studies about the social origins of the holders of priestly offices. However, the third century is seldom discussed as a whole (although the Severan dynasty itself is well studied). See Schumacher 1978 (on the most important priestly colleges in 69-235 CE), Scheid 1990 (on the Arval brethren), and Várhelyi 2010 (on the senatores and religion more generally).

¹⁰⁵ For example, we do not know why some priesthoods seem to have been more valued than the others, or why there is ample of evidence of the *virgines Vestae* but only few of other female priesthoods: the Salian virgins/priestesses are mentioned only by Festus from the second century.

century Rome, while evidence of the *rex sacrorum* is even scantier. However, if we take all the known *flamines* of imperial era into consideration, the patrician class can be demonstrated in all cases.¹⁰⁶ By contrast, among the Vestals the *senatores* are well-represented, but this is not as self-evident as the ideal – concerning a Vestal’s social origins as presented by Aulus Gellius – leads us to believe. Only one-third (five of sixteen) of the identifiable third-century priestesses had highly probably senatorial origins. The Vestal institution was thus homogeneous and flexible in that it accepted the priestesses from various social orders.

All of this points to the fact that social classes changed, and that the rise of the equestrians was a reality in the third century. As the patrician families lost their leading position, the emperors’ closest advisors and officials, and even the emperors themselves, could have equestrian origins. The nobility and the emperor did not necessarily share the same socio-economic status.¹⁰⁷ This change must not lead us to conclude that the *senatores*’ social power or social activities were in total decline. In fact, the nobility transformed along with the rest of society. During the later part of the third century, the title *vir clarissimus* was introduced and was applied equally to distinguished equestrians; the equestrian order itself was divided into several ranks with different status. An individual could accelerate his advancement with a senatorial or equestrian career; a person could also pass through the rank order without necessarily going through each of the expected steps.¹⁰⁸

2.2. Becoming Independent – Exemption from the *Patria Potestas*

As different as the Vestals’ familial origins could be, all Vestal candidates followed a similar procedure after they had been elected. This process, as well as the question of what motivated families to give up their daughters, is the focus of this section. The Vestals’ legal status was unique in Roman

¹⁰⁶ Earlier research by M. DiLuzio and J. Rüpke concluded that some of the priesthoods, which were traditionally senatorial, were either absorbed into others or extinguished all together. For example, this seems to be the case with the *rex sacrorum*: it has been proposed that the office of the *rex* and *regina sacrorum* decreased in prestige. For a discussion of the development of *rex sacrorum*, see DiLuzio 2016, 68; Rüpke 2008, 7. For the social origins of the *flamines*, see Rüpke 2008. Perhaps the fact that the *rex sacrorum* could not possess a military office caused potential candidates to avoid the office. The same prohibition against holding a military office concerned the *flamen Dialis*.

¹⁰⁷ The equestrians in imperial administration, such as Timesitheus under Gordianus III, rose to influential positions. Some emperors had equestrian origins, for example Maximinus Thrax and Philippus Arabs. On changes in the social origins of the third-century emperors, see Mennen 2011, 23-25.

¹⁰⁸ For the third-century changes in the equestrian order, see Davenport 2019.

society, beginning with the earliest priestesses who enjoyed a privileged legal position.¹⁰⁹ In imperial times, Roman jurists and cultural historians occasionally discussed the Vestals' legal status, but the origins of that status were apparently based on a very old tradition. The second-century jurist Gaius explained that boys were freed from *patria potestas* if they became priests of Jupiter, and the girls if they became Vestal virgins.¹¹⁰ In discussing the appointment of guardians for underage children, he referred to the regulation's ancient origins but specifically noted that the ancients had exempted Vestals, unlike all other women, from the authority of a guardian. This was ordered out of respect for them.¹¹¹ Another mid-second century author, Aulus Gellius, recorded in his *Noctes Atticae* both the Vestals' exceptional relationship with the *patria potestas*, and their liberation from it at the moment of becoming a priestess. Aulus Gellius stated that he received this information from the writings of the late republican/early Augustan legal scholar Marcus Antistius Labeo, instead of referring to the actual sections of the law.¹¹² The Vestals' freedom from *patria potestas* was discussed again in early third century by Domitius Ulpianus, one of the most influential jurists of the late imperial period whose works influenced the development of the *Corpus iuris civilis*. He simply repeated and reinforced the exceptional regulations that applied to the priestesses.¹¹³ Thus, it seems that even where the authors discussed the Vestals' legal status, neither its uniqueness, nor its very existence, was ever questioned or challenged. The Vestals' exemption from *patria potestas* through their inauguration ceremony and their capability to act without *tutela* were laws imposed by the ancestors and, as such (*mores maiorum*), they had to be respected.

Before becoming an independent person at the inauguration ceremony, a Vestal candidate had to be under *patria potestas*, but her father's status was also controlled. Gellius expressed this as follows: *item quae ipsa aut cuius pater emancipatus sit, etiamsi vivo patre in avi potestate sit.*¹¹⁴ This clause calls for further examination. In the background, we find the idea that a Vestal had to be free from the staining effects of death, articulated by the rule that she had to be *patrima* and *matrima* — both

¹⁰⁹ The early Vestals were granted a stipend and the privilege of inviolability. See Liv. 1.20.3.1. It is, in fact, difficult to determine whether the early Vestals enjoyed all the privileges enjoyed by later ones: economic support from the state, exemption from taxes, exemption from swearing an oath, *sacrosanctitas* and inviolability, *lictiores* as bodyguards, and special seats of honour in theatres. However, as we shall see, the sources allow us to estimate when changes were made in their privileged status.

¹¹⁰ Gai. *Inst.* 1.130.3.

¹¹¹ Gai. *Inst.* 1.144-5 *Veteres...voluerunt feminas, etsi perfectae aetatis sint, propter animi levitatem in tutela esse...exceptis virginibus Vestalibus, quas etiam veteres in honorem sacerdotii liberar esse voluerunt. Itaque etiam Lege XII Tabularum cautum est.*

¹¹² Gell. *NA* 1.12.4; 1.12.9. For this discussion, see also Mustakallio 2007, 185-203.

¹¹³ Ulp. 10.5.

¹¹⁴ Gell. *NA* 1.12.4

parents had to be still living.¹¹⁵ However, this was not enough: her father could not be emancipated while *his* father was still alive. This has been interpreted to mean that a Vestal would theoretically be an orphan if her father or she herself had been emancipated, a situation that would have of course been against the ideal of *patrima* and *matrima*.¹¹⁶ The Vestal's family was perhaps seen to be more ideal and special than others, and therefore more pleasing to the gods. In addition to this requirement of being free from stigmatic death, Tacitus reported, a parental divorce was considered to be a harmful situation in the family background of a Vestal candidate. The pontifical college preferred a girl whose parents had stayed together. Tacitus' rhetoric is interesting: he stated that a mother of the preferred candidate had stayed in the same marriage; in other words she was a once-married woman (*univira*). This could be merely a rhetorical choice. However, it strongly suggests that the mother of a Vestal candidate was also required to have an impeccable or ideal character.¹¹⁷ Thus, the idea of a perfect family background was taken seriously, and this ideal was put into practice, dictating that a Vestal candidate's family should embody no death, divorce, or emancipation.¹¹⁸ Rather, it was to be an unbroken and ideal family with living parents who were ready to deliver their daughter to the state.

Although a new Vestal had to represent the ideal as far as her familial ties and familial conditions were concerned, economic and financial issues closely defined her new status. Many Roman laws were made so that there would be no confusion concerning property ownership and inheritance. A Vestal's legal position was also carefully formulated so that economic considerations were taken into account.¹¹⁹ A new Vestal received a special *peculium* that secured her economic situation. This sum of money was two million sesterces during the emperor Tiberius. Thus, the considerable fortune was granted for a new Vestal.¹²⁰ Considering that an un-emancipated daughter could not make any decisions about her own business, and that her possible fortune was merged into her fathers' — that is, her father controlled her wealth — the Vestals had to become free of this condition in order to

¹¹⁵ For more information about the idea that death stigmatized a Vestal, see Mustakallio 2007, 188. For *patrima et matrima* see also DiLuzio 2016, 123-124. She rightly points out that the Vestals' situation was similar to that of the *camilli/camillae* or the *Salii*.

¹¹⁶ For this notion, see Gardner 1986, 22-23. Mekacher refers to Gardner, Mekacher 2006, 24, n. 122.

¹¹⁷ This incident happened during the reign of Emperor Tiberius; see Tac. Ann. 2.86. *Praelata est Pollionis filia, non ob aliud quam quod mater eius in eodem coniugio manebat; nam Agrippa discidio domum imminuerat.*

¹¹⁸ Also, A. Bätz discusses a 'unversehrt Familienstruktur' of a new Vestal. For an intact Vestal family, see also Bätz 2012, 74-75. K. Mustakallio discusses the ideal family having an unbroken past and structure; see Mustakallio 2007, 187.

¹¹⁹ Economic issues have received less attention than the Vestals' legal status. On the Vestals' legal status and exemption from the *patria potestas*, see for example Cancik-Lindemaier 1990, 1-16; Guizzi 1968; Sacchi, 2003, 317-359.

¹²⁰ Tac. Ann. 4.16. The *peculium* and its original signification will be discussed extensively in the next chapter. Here it is relevant to state that there were economic benefits for new Vestals who had been at this point without wealth of their own.

become independent. To protect the priestess and her *stipendium* from her fathers' right to have *potestas* over her wealth, the girls were not emancipated until the very moment that they were inaugurated. This ensured that her father/guardian could not claim the priestess's wealth or make decisions on her behalf.¹²¹

The *peculium/stipendium* was perhaps created in part to make the priesthood more lucrative; it also cut the Vestals' families off from any benefits. By the regulations and the odd procedure of emancipating a girl only during her inauguration ceremony, her family was prevented from making money either through her office or through the substantial reward given to the young priestesses. Thus, the *peculium* went straight to the priestess and not to her father or her wider family. However, the Vestal was free to donate her money as she wished. Although we have no direct evidence, we can assume that the priestesses helped their families financially and/or remembered them in their wills. In Roman culture, this kind of public maintenance for a priest/priestess was an extraordinary practice. Usually entering the priesthood could instead cause financial worries, such as when a priest was expected to pay for banquets and public projects.¹²² In this case, it seems that after the change in the daughter's socio-economical status, the Vestal's family could profit from the priesthood in the form of a gift or a legacy bequeathed by the daughter. However, as Gellius noted, if a Vestal happened to die intestate, her fortune went back to the state and not to her biological family members, as was common in Roman law.¹²³ The Vestals had the right to make a will and act without guardianship, though, and it was unlikely that they would die intestate, as A. Gallia points out.¹²⁴ Since the status of a Vestal was so unique, there seems to have been ongoing debate about their rights and legal status. On the grounds of filial duty, *pietas*, a Vestal's family perhaps had a right to expect donations and

¹²¹ All the possible wealth and money of an unemancipated child remained in his/her father's *potestas* until it ceased to be in force, after emancipation. For this discussion and extent of the *patria potestas* see Laes & Strubbe 2014, 152-53.

¹²² For the demands of the priestly office, see Hemelrijk 2016, 97.

¹²³ Gell. NA 1.12.18. *Praeterea in commentariis Labeonis, quae ad duodecim tabulas composuit, ita scriptum est: "Virgo Vestalis neque heres est cuiquam intestato, neque intestatae quisquam, sed bona eius in publicum redigi aiunt. Id quo iure fiat, quaeritur."* Furthermore, in the Commentaries on the Twelve Tables compiled by Labeo we find this passage: "A Vestal virgin is not heir to any intestate person, nor is anyone her heir, should she die without making a will, but her property, they say, reverts to the public treasury. The legal principle involved is an unsettled question."

¹²⁴ A. Gallia fittingly points out that the Vestals were likely to be anything but intestate when they passed away, since they had the right to act without a guardian. This increased their honorary position compared to other citizens. R.L. Wildfang concludes that as the state provided their *stipendium*, it was also the state which received their wealth, being their *locus familiae*. A. Bätz refers to Ulpian, who enumerates several degrees by which the estate of an intestate person is granted. Lastly Ulpian discusses (Ulp. 28.7) those cases in which there are no heirs: *...et si nemo sit, ad quem bonorum possessione pertinere possit, aut sit quidem, sed ius suum omiserit, populo bona deferuntur ex lege Iulia caducaria*. '...If there is no one entitled to the possession of the estate, or if anyone fails to exercise his right, the estate will pass to the people under the Lex Julia having reference to inheritances without ownership'. On the clause from Gellius, see Gallia 2015, 92-93 and also Bätz 2012, 109-110; Wildfang 2006, 65-67.

wealth from her, but her independent status protected her from the control and pressure of her relatives.

It has been suggested that the Vestals probably remained loyal to their birth families in particular. Since they had the right to make their own testaments, they likely preferred to leave their wealth to members of their birth family. Marriage to an ex-Vestal was inadvisable, leaving no other family to which the Vestals' could bequeath their wealth. This negative view (of marriage to former Vestals) perhaps had its origin in the idea that the Vestals' identity was first and foremost as daughters; as wives, a former Vestal's loyalty would continue to remain with her birth family, not to her husband or her husband's family. If she was expected to leave her wealth to her birth family, this natal loyalty would be detrimental to her marriage partner.¹²⁵ Thus, the priestesses' socio-legal position as *sui iuris* may have tempted their families to try to obtain a Vestal position for their daughters. It was a long-term office, practically life-long, but the possibility of ultimately benefitting from her position was lucrative.

The consequences of the Vestals' emancipation were thus economic. Normally, once a person was emancipated, he/she was removed from the family and lost the right to inherit (the father's) property. The effects of emancipation clearly were not all positive for the priestess.¹²⁶ By contrast, there might have been some incentive for a family to obtain a position for their daughter in the cult of Vesta, as it allowed them to keep the family fortune together: they were no longer obligated to give their daughter her (former) share or dowry money for a marriage. Emancipation during the Vestal's inauguration ceremony was therefore a way to secure a daughter's future, outside of the family's wealth. Giving a daughter to the cult of Vesta was comparable to giving a daughter to a *manus* marriage, in which she became a member and inheritor of her husband's family instead of her father's.¹²⁷ Most importantly, as a priestess she increased her family's social distinction. Through her role, her biological family had a chance to promote its social prominence, as epigraphic evidence shows us in the following chapters. By contrast, if we consider the grandfather's/father's role in this

¹²⁵ Although the sources refer to ex-Vestals, straight advice to not marry one is lacking. Few Vestals married after their period in office; on this, see Dion. Hal. 2.67.2; Plut. *Vit. Num.* 10.2. Hallet sees the Vestals as loyal members of their birth-families and discusses their role as daughters. Hallet 1984, 88. I would not place the Vestals tightly in this daughter-category, although this clearly was one of the roles the priestesses had. However, I shall discuss their variable social roles in following next chapters, noting that they had diverse relationships with many social groups.

¹²⁶ *OCD* s.v. *emancipatio*.

¹²⁷ On the *manus* marriage and division of inheritance, see Hallet 1984, 91-92.

process, it also seems that it was necessary, in some cases, to protect the Vestal's priesthood against a greedy *pater familias* who sought to profit from his (grand)daughter's *stipendium*.

A son was *sui iuris* after emancipation, meaning that he had the right to start to acquire property of his own, to manage his own business, and to bring up his own children within his own *potestas*. Since the *flamen Dialis* and the Vestals shared the same legal status, and they both went through a similar procedure when they were taken on as priests, it is interesting to compare their economic situations after their inauguration ceremony.¹²⁸ In one critical aspect, the *flamen Dialis* differed from a Vestal: he was not taken on as a priest at as early an age as the Vestals. Thus, it can be estimated that a *flamen* was freed from his father's power at approximately in the same age as he would have gained *sui iuris* status. Furthermore, while the Vestals received *peculium*, evidence of the economic situation of the *flamen Dialis* after inauguration into the priesthood is lacking. Since we do not know if the *flamen Dialis* received economic support similar to the Vestals (as compensation for the loss of his patrimony), it is reasonable to believe that male priests retained their *pater familias* capacity after emancipation and that further rewards were unnecessary.¹²⁹

Augustan legislation gave women who had three children with a man of citizen status the right to act without a guardian.¹³⁰ After Augustus, many emperors awarded this right automatically to their empresses and other female members of the imperial house. Freedom and independence promoted the honorary status of imperial women, but in the background of the legislation there was also the idea of encouraging citizens to have bigger families.¹³¹ A Roman woman thus gained more freedom and independence as she grew older and became a mother multiple times. In the early third century, the jurist Ulpian wrote about the *mater familias* and her financial and business independence as an analogy to the *pater familias*. In separating the *filia familias* from the *mater familias*, Ulpian created a legal category for an independent woman. Another important feature of a *mater familias* considerably resembled what was demanded of the Vestals: whether she had children or not, whether

¹²⁸ As Gellius states, they were both 'taken' by the *pontifex maximus*, as were the pontiffs, *augures* and other important priests. Thus, there was a special formula by which the inauguration was performed. Gell. *NA* 1.12.15.

¹²⁹ *Flamen Dialis* was obliged to enter in *confarreatio* marriages, which was the most traditional marriage of Roman culture. In this form of marriage, the wife and her property were under the control (*manus*) of a husband.

¹³⁰ Legislation also rewarded men who had three children: it allowed them to advance in their careers without going through all the required phases. Furthermore, *ius liberorum* removed inheritance restrictions from men who had three children. In some cases, the *ius* could be granted as a reward by an emperor (as in the case of the emperor Trajan for Pliny the Younger, who was childless).

¹³¹ Mekacher 2006, 27-28.

she was married or a widow, a *mater familias* was expected to have a good and impeccable character and reputation.¹³² Although the third century jurists did not discuss the Vestals together with the *matres familiae*, both were expected to meet similar prerequisites. Their independence and a good moral reputation perhaps cast them into parallel social categories.

Childrens' emancipation usually split up a family as descendants gained new legal status. To become Vestals, by contrast, young girls had to be still bound to their biological families and living under the *patria potestas* before their inauguration in the cult. Thus, an intact family with living parents and impeccable morality was a required of a new Vestal. Their new legal status benefitted both their biological families and the cult itself. On the one hand, an emancipated daughter who became a priestess was expected to stay loyal to her family and to act for its benefit; this aspect of their loyalty is analysed further in the next chapters. On the other, emancipation granted during the inauguration ceremony, and not any earlier, ensured that the priestess would have no financial ties with her original family. In a way, she was no longer a representative of her family, at least legally, which perhaps guaranteed that the priestess would be committed to the state and not to her family. Perhaps independence was thought to be a reward, meant to encourage the priestesses to dedicate themselves to the cult. However, their legal status was one thing; the way they acted in practice was another. In her much-debated article, M. Beard states that the Vestals' sexual status was fixed eternally in a state of liminality, their character forever ambiguous.¹³³ Considering their legal status, I suggest that this definition of liminality also holds true – partially at least. Vestals ceased to be official members of their families but in practice they channeled their capacity for the benefit of their birth families – as would any virtuous daughter or son of the ideal Roman family. Even if the priestesses were independent and their legal status gave them a basis on which to build social influence, their families also benefitted through their own increased social notability. In the end, Vestals were unable to completely escape their families' sphere of influence and expectations: they remained as daughters but without legally being members of their families.

Their legal position was the basis the Vestals' social influence. There were, however, other exceptional privileges — both economic and social — that further reinforced their position. These benefits are discussed next.

¹³² Ulp. (59 *ad edictum*) D. 50.16.46.1. Saller 1999, 194. Saller discusses how the terms such as *mater familias* is used and in which contexts.

¹³³ Beard 1980, 21.

2.3. The Vestals' Other Privileges

In her anthropological research, M. Beard proposed that the Vestals not only exceeded the limitations imposed on their sex, but that their legal status actually could be equated to the status of free Roman men. A. Staples took this thinking further, concluding that Vestals represented the Roman state (and population) as a whole.¹³⁴ Although this cultural-anthropological perspective increases our understanding of Roman practices and underlying mentalities, they alone do not explain the historical past and how an individual was regarded in society. As the research of M. Harlow and R. Lawrence demonstrate, it was age and life cycle that determined and controlled a person's possibilities and level of authority. Roman men, for example, had to achieve a certain age and/or social status before they were independent and could apply for an office.¹³⁵ More than simply sex, then, we must acknowledge the relevance of a person's life span and age. Which social groups, male or female, came close to the Vestals? Or did the Vestals occupy an anomalistic category, as past research has suggested? Other seldom-asked questions are also relevant here: why did the Vestals need their independence? How did they utilize their freedom?

The Vestals were granted many distinctions that can be categorized into different types, depending on their character. Their right to give testimony in court, *ius testimonii dicendi*, and their exemption from swearing an oath, *iusiurandum*, were privileges connected to public life and legal proceedings. Other privileges emphasized their public prominence: the right to travel by carriage in the city area and to have the *lictiores* precede them to clear the way were prerogatives that gave the Vestals a distinguished image. Similarly, special seats in theatres and at games enhanced their public value and promoted their status. During all public events, the Vestals appeared in their official, priestly, red-white-coloured clothing, which made them stick out from the crowd. They were inviolable, (*sacro*) *sanctitas*, and their secured position could not be offended as long as the priestesses kept their vow of chastity. Finally, the Vestals were entitled to free convicts they met accidentally in the street. This

¹³⁴ Mary Beard's article, a monumental classic in Vestal research, concludes that the Vestals were not just classified as virgins, but could also be considered equal to males. Beard, 1980, 12-27. Staples proposed that they represented the entire Roman state, male and female. See Staples 1998.

¹³⁵ For age, life-course and the achievement of rights in Roman society, especially the republican and early imperial periods, see Harlow & Lawrence 2002. In chapter eight, the authors discuss political offices and eligibility to apply for them. The recent study of C. Laes and J. Strubbe extends this examination of youth and eligibility for offices to third-century society. Laes C. – Strubbe J., 2014 (chapter 9 has been particularly helpful).

right of *clementia* was also an imperial virtue and it was profoundly intertwined with their sacred character (*sacro*)*sanctitas*.

I explore these privileges from two different viewpoints. First, I study the privileges in terms of how they supported the Vestals' work as professional priestesses. Second, I examine the privileges in connection with those of other individuals whose situation perhaps resembled that of the Vestals. This will help me to analyse how special and exclusive the Vestals' privileges actually were, and for what purposes the priestesses used their special status.

Capacity in Court - *Ius Testimonii Dicendi* and Exemption from Swearing an Oath

According to Roman law, women were not accepted as witnesses in court except in special cases.¹³⁶ Since women were in principle under the control of a *tutela*, they were not able to act independently. The limits of women's juridical capability were defined in the Law of the Twelve Tables, which was consulted every time this clause was revised or there were exceptions, such as was the case with the Vestals. Aulus Gellius records their special right to appear in court and to give testimony, *ius testimonii dicendi*. According to him, one of the early Vestals, Gaia Taracia, was bestowed with the honour to act independently in public.¹³⁷ As Gellius notes, Gaia Taracia had given land, *campus Tiberinus* (i.e. *campus Martius*), to the people and this earned her the special right and made her exceptional among all other women. Her legal status was affirmed in the *lex Horatia*.¹³⁸ In the historical narratives, we find Vestals who appeared in court when their relatives needed them to support their cases.¹³⁹ The latest evidence of a Vestal's presence in court is from the mid-first century,

¹³⁶ *Dig.* XXVIII 1.20.3; XXVIII 1.20.6

¹³⁷ Gell. *NA* 7.7.2. *Et Taraciam quidem virginem Vestae fuisse lex Horatia testis est, quae super ea ad populum lata. Qua lege ei plurimi honores fiunt, inter quos ius quoque testimonii dicendi tribuitur testabilisque ius omnium feminarum ut sit datur. Id verbum est legis ipsius Horatiae; contrarium est in duodecim tabulis scriptum: Inprobus intestabilis esto. Praeterea si quadraginta annos nata sacerdotio abire ac nubere voluisset, ius ei potestasque exaugurandi atque nubendi facta est munificentiae et beneficium gratia, quod campum Tiberinum sive Martium populo condonasset.* And the *lex Horatia* witnesses also that Taracia was a Vestal virgin, whom this same law raised above the people. She received many honours from this law, among which was included the right of giving evidence, and she alone of all women received this (right). Gellius refers directly to the *lex Horatia*; by contrast, in the Twelve Tables it is written: 'let an inferior person be unable to witness.'

¹³⁸ See Gell. 7.7.2. Plin. *HN* 34.25.2. Plutarch names her Tarquinia, see Plut. *Vit. Publ.* 8.4. On Taracia Gaia as a fictitious person in the regal period, see Rüpke (*FS*) 2008, 913. For discussion of her historicity, see Bätz 2011, 146-147.

¹³⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 3.66-69. Cic. *Font* 46-49. Kroppenberg 2010, 421. Kroppenberg uses the study of Stahlmann, 1997, 117.

when the Vestal Licinia Praetextata appeared in court with her mother and brothers to seek justice for their late father.¹⁴⁰

Gaia Taracia was a character of legendary history; there is neither any certainty that she was a real person nor any indication of when she might have lived. Due to the obscure background of the *ius testimonii dicendi* privilege, A. Bätz and N. Mekacher have questioned whether this privilege existed for the earliest priestesses, or whether it was a later addition. Either way, several historians and authors have discussed the Vestals' right to give evidence. As such, the privilege itself was not considered to be ahistorical, but its origins are blurred.¹⁴¹ Gaia Taracia seems to have been a certain *exemplum* by which the Vestals' position could be defined; as an archetype, perhaps her achievements and virtuousness were more important to remember than to determine exactly when she was in office. I thus presume that this privilege was considered to be archaic in its origins, and that it was seen as an essential privilege for individual Vestals, bound by the age and competency of a priestess.

The right of *ius testimonii dicendi* signified that the Vestals were regarded as *testabilis*: they were not only capable of giving evidence but also to make their own testament freely, without the consent of a *tutela*. A *testabilis* could also execute transactions and conduct business with full legal capacity. Earlier research has systematically discussed the Vestals' legal capacity, and several studies analyse how their legal status differed from that of other citizens.¹⁴² For what purposes did the priestesses use their special legal status? One way to answer this question is to examine what activities a person in this capacity could carry out. In addition to appearing in court, a *testabilis* could sell and/or transfer property classified as *res mancipi*, i.e., urban and rural estates in Italy, as well as certain animals (beasts of burden) and slaves.¹⁴³ Although the Vestals held religious offices and were dedicated to taking care of cultic duties, there were certain features of their sacral profession that required a capability to act freely and to manage cash and property. It has been attested that they owned landed property that was traditionally allotted for their purposes. An individual Vestal could also own

¹⁴⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 1.48.

¹⁴¹ For discussions of the origins of *ius testimonii dicendi* and its significance, see Mekacher 2006, 28-29; and Bätz 2011, 145-147.

¹⁴² The legal status of a Vestal has been at the center of several studies. See particularly Guizzi, 1968; Gardner, 1986; Sacchi, 2003, 317-359.

¹⁴³ The ownership of these items was transferred in the solemn act of selling *mancipatio* in the presence of five witnesses.

property outside the *urbs*.¹⁴⁴ The priestesses collected fines from those who were guilty of disturbing graves. The handsome amounts of cash were put in *arca virginum Vestalium*, the treasury of the Vestal virgins. Although the priestesses probably had particular personnel to collect these fines, it is plausible to assume that they needed to have adequate authority to manage this business in addition to their sacral responsibilities.¹⁴⁵ Considering these practical businesses, I propose that the Vestals were bestowed with full legal capacity because their official duties required them to have such capability. Thus, the status of full legal capacity was not merely given to them as a reward for their sacrifice to the state, but because their practical responsibilities required such a capacity.

In terms of the practicalities of *ius testimonii dicendi*, the information provided to us by Tacitus helps to reconstruct the likely execution of testimony procedures. He refers to a certain high-ranking lady named Urgulania, whose conduct provoked attention and criticism during the early empire. In addition to being a member of the senatorial élite, she was a friend of the emperor's mother Livia Augusta, who had an influential role in the Tiberian court. Tacitus informs us that Urgulania refused to appear in court to give her testimony, but instead requested that a *praetor* be sent to her house to conduct the interrogation. This was apparently unprecedented behaviour, since Tacitus makes a final remark that the Vestal virgins were, according to ancient custom, heard in the Forum and in court when they were summoned to give testimony.¹⁴⁶ This passage has caused confusion about Urgulania's identity. Since she had the right to give her testimony and even dictate how she wished to give it, earlier studies concluded that she was a Vestal or an ex-priestess who had resigned. However, it is impossible to reconstruct a Vestal career for her and make it fit her life-course, which can be reconstructed by prosopographical details. Although Tacitus was ambiguous and we can interpret his narrative with two different possibilities, based on prosopographical notions it is not reasonable to consider Urgulania as a Vestal/ex-Vestal.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ On Vestals as businesswomen and as landowners, see Wildfang 2006, 72; Mekacher 2006, 40-41. Financial issues and the wealth of the priestesses will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁵ Texts in numerous funerary monuments include a warning or a clause that money should be paid to the Vestal virgins if the monument is harmed in any way. See for example *CIL* VI 10848; 13618; 13822; 29934.

¹⁴⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 2.34. *Ceterum Urgulaniae potentia adeo nimia civitati erat ut testis in causa quadam, quae apud senatum tractabatur, venire dedignaretur: missus est praetor qui domi interrogaret, cum virgines Vestales in foro et iudicio audiri, quotiens testimonium dicerent, vetus mos fuerit.*

¹⁴⁷ With the help of prosopography, it becomes evident that the typical thirty year period as a Vestal priestess would have been impossible for her, since she had a son M. Plautius Silvanus, who was a consul around 2 BCE. Her grandson, also named M. Plautius Silvanus, was charged with murder; for this case, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.22.2. She was also the grandmother of Plautia Urgulanilla, the future wife of Emperor Claudius. Urgulania see *FOS* 619. Based on this information, I propose that it is highly unlikely that Urgulania had been a Vestal, although there is a narrow, theoretical possibility that she had been one. On her false identification as a Vestal, see Wildfang 2006, 203. For assumptions that Urgulania was a Vestal,

Urgulania's case can instead be treated as an example of the early imperial development that saw the Vestals' privileges extended to other privileged women, such as imperial women, aristocratic women, and those who had given birth to three (or more) children.¹⁴⁸ Like the Vestals, exemption from *tutela* gave these women the status of *testabilis*, meaning that they had full legal capacity. Tacitus's story clearly emphasized that the Vestals' hearing took place in public places, such as in a court or in the Forum, and not in private residences as happened in Urgulania's case. Thus, her example seems to reflect the wider morals of the early imperial period: Tacitus refers to the Vestals but sees that Urgulania exceeded even their privileges. This suggests perhaps that the priestesses were considered as standards for female behaviour that should have been respected.

Aulus Gellius discussed another privilege that reinforced the Vestals' legal competence: their exemption from the requirement to swear an oath (*iusiurandum*).¹⁴⁹ In general, public magistrates and officials could not assume their office until they had sworn an oath. Swearing an oath was almost a characteristic of Roman culture and applied to many different situations.¹⁵⁰ There were some gender-specific matters concerning the swearing of oaths; the emperor Claudius, for example, decreed that all women should swear in the name of the late empress Livia. Oaths could also be sworn in the name of a god or goddess, or an important person, such as a late empress. Oaths were taken very seriously, and were considered to be binding. However, there were exceptional cases and the emperor had the power to release a person from his or her oath.¹⁵¹

see Kroppenbergh 2010, 421-422. I consider the conclusions of Mary Beard to be correct; see Beard 1980, 17, especially her discussion and interpretation of Tacitus in n. 49. For further discussion of Urgulania's case and her relationship with the empress, see Barret 2002, 165-166.

¹⁴⁸ On emperors granting special rights to their female relatives, see Cass. Dio 49.38.1; 59.3.4; 60.22.2.

¹⁴⁹ Gell NA 10.15.31. *Verba praetoris ex edicto perpetuo de flamine Diali et de sacerdote Vestae adscripsi: "Sacerdotem Vestalem et flaminem Diale in omni mea iurisdictione iurare non cogam.* 'I have written down the words of the praetoro from the *edicta perpetua* about the *flamen Dialis* and the priest of Vesta: I may not compel the *flamen Dialis* or the Vestal priestess to swear an oath on anything on my jurisdiction.' The keyword here is *iurare*, 'to swear' and 'to take an oath'.

¹⁵⁰ For example, the parties involved in lawsuits swore in court, while both parties made a solemn oath at the end of business deals. Consuls swore an oath to act for the benefit for the city upon entering their office (see Dion. Hal. 5.1.3). Soldiers also swore a loyalty oath when they entered service.

¹⁵¹ On oaths in ancient Roman culture, see *OCD* s.v. oath. On women swearing an oath in the name of the empress Livia, see Cass. Dio 60.5.2. After his sister's (Drusilla) death, Gaius Caligula always took an oath in her name; see Suet. *Calig.* 24.2. On the emperor releasing a person from his/her oath, see Suet. *Tib.* 35.

The *flamen Dialis* was also exempted from making an oath. This made both priesthods exceptions among other Roman priests. Gellius mentions Vestals and *flamen Dialis* together in his reference to the solemn declaration of a *praetor* who promised that he would not compel them to take an oath. However, while only Gellius mentioned the Vestals' exemption from this act of swearing, there are more references to the *flamen Dialis*' privilege (which, as Gellius writes, actually forbade him from swearing oaths). There is, however, at least one example of a certain Valerius Flaccus, *flamen Dialis* in the second century BCE, who sidestepped this prohibition by having his brother take an oath on his behalf so that he could assume the office of an aedile.¹⁵² This incident reinforces the idea that swearing was an important element of official appointments.

Unlike the *flamen Dialis*, the Vestals did not pursue political careers, the priesthood being their sole obligation. Strangely though, they were not forbidden from swearing as was the *flamen Dialis*. Instead, Gellius notes that while the *praetor* did not compel them to take an oath, he also did not specifically declare that they could never swear one.¹⁵³ In fact, there was at least one occasion when the priestesses apparently did take an oath: if a Vestal met a convict in the street and this person was then to be discharged, she had to swear that the incident happened by accident and without any co-operation.¹⁵⁴ In my mind, this highly theoretical situation of discharging a convict – which is not recorded in the sources – alters the decision and the judicial power of a court. The Vestals' intervention in the capacity of religious officials was crucial for a convict, but ultimately required the priestesses' swearing.

R. L. Wildfang notes that the exemption from swearing an oath was primarily related to the sacral nature of the Vestals (and/or *flamen Dialis* too). As such, the exemption had religious significance that moved a priestess away from the profane world. A person holding a priestly office could not be bound by the customs of common individuals, since she/he was a representative of the divine deity.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Livy records that in the capacity of *flamen Dialis* Valerius Flaccus (2nd cent. BCE *flamen* of Jupiter) could not take the oath to observe the laws. Yet no magistrate was allowed to hold office for more than five days unless he had taken that oath. His brother taking the oath for him solved the problem. See Liv. 31.50.8-7. Thus, when it comes to the political career of a *flamen Dialis*, although his possibility of career advancement was evidently hindered by his priestly character there were means to avoid such situation. For *flamen Dialis* and oath-taking, see also Plut. *Mor. Quest Rom.* 44; Paul. Fest. 104 M, 92 L¹, 226 L² s.v. *iurare*. In this context, I wish to note briefly regarding *flamen Dialis* that their swearing practices seem to have changed during the imperial era. On this, see Cass. Dio 59.13.1.

¹⁵³ *RE* s.v. *iusiurandum*.

¹⁵⁴ Plut. *Vit. Num.* 10.5. Mekacher points out the occasions on which the priestesses swore; see Mekacher 2006, 29.

¹⁵⁵ Wildfang 2006, 69-70. Vanggaard suggests that the many prohibitions of the *flamen Dialis* existed in order to underline his sacral character, and thereby removed him away from the profane. See Vanggaard 1988, 90.

A priestess/priest was above all other citizens and this increased her/his sacral value. The exemption was also closely related to the idea that the priestesses/priests represented the state, or indeed were even its personification.¹⁵⁶ At the same time, swearing an oath was clearly and tightly connected to every-day business and commerce, as well as being a signal of a person's legal capacity. Therefore, I propose that in addition to religious reasons, the Vestals' exemption (but not ban from) from taking an oath was tied up with their public role and capacity to act independently. This suggestion is based upon the evidence that connects the Vestals with the activities of businesswomen, landowners, and benefactresses, all of whom had to be involved in public life in order to promote their careers and to transact business.¹⁵⁷ In order to perform their religious tasks, it was convenient that they were freed from conventional standards and obligations; their possibility of being active in public life, by contrast, was facilitated by the fact that they were not forbidden from taking oaths.

To conclude, both *ius testimonii dicendi* and the exemption from swearing an oath were connected to the Vestals' legal position as publicly notable women who were not under the control of *patria potestas* or *tutela*. Although the sources state that the Vestals received their freedom and their full legal capacity in compensation for life-long service, we have noticed that their status was created for practical purposes also. As we shall see in the next sections, the Vestals' activities as business women, as supervisors of monetary transactions, and as keepers of *arca virginum Vestalium* required full legal capacity. Their impressive status was further accentuated or empowered by the status of *sacrosanctitas*. This aspect shall be studied next.

Manifesting Inviolability – *Sacrosanctitas*

Epigraphical materials often used the term *sanctissima* – most holy one — to refer to their female receivers. The monuments are typically funerary inscriptions set up by husbands and children or other relatives. The third-century Vestals' honorary monuments also usually refer to them as *sanctissima*. Unlike ordinary citizens, though, the Vestals were honoured while they were still alive and holding an office.¹⁵⁸ The priestesses also were not only called *sanctissimae*, but the quality of *sacrosanctitas*

¹⁵⁶ Kroppenbergh 2010, 422.

¹⁵⁷ Several inscriptions refer to Vestals' beneficence; see *CIL* VI 2131; 2132; 2133; 32415. The Vestals economic activities are examined more closely below.

¹⁵⁸ *Sacrosanctitas* or *sanctitas* signifies inviolability and protection from any violations. Furthermore, *sanctitas* could be extended not only to people or certain groups but also to things and places (such as temples and their surroundings). It could also mean the capacity of moral purity and virtue. See Tac. *Ann.* 3.62 and Liv. 44.29.2. For Vestal inscriptions

actually defined their sacral character and separated them from rest of the population by increasing their social influence and prominence. My objective here is to analyse what *sacrosanctitas* signified for the priestesses, and how it was manifested publicly. I also discuss those situations when the Vestals' *sacrosanctitas* was violated; in this light, I analyse who had the right to interfere with a Vestal's inviolability, and how this was demonstrated in practice. Literary sources that discuss *sacrosanctitas* and its withdrawal date from the second (Pliny the Younger) to the late fourth centuries (*Historia Augusta*). The early-third-century Vestals' statues demonstrate the external *insignia* of their inviolability. A comparative approach is again at the centre of my discussion, as I analyse those individuals whose status could match the Vestals.

The *sacrosanctitas* of officials and magistrates was protected by law; it could be utilized politically, and was a useful instrument in securing a person's position.¹⁵⁹ Emperors promoted their own status to correspond to that of the Vestals and other officials. The honour of receiving *sacrosanctitas* was particularly important when it came to the status and public visibility of imperial women. The senate approved the proposal of *sacrosanctitas* for Livia and Octavia, which made them equal with the tribunes. At the same time, their status was reinforced by granting them the right to act without a guardian's consent (i.e., freed them from *tutela*).¹⁶⁰ These procedures identified imperial women with the Vestals.

But what did *sacrosanctitas* signify in practice for the Vestal virgins? First of all, it guarded their physical safety and inviolability, both of which were essential. *Lictores* ensured safe journeys for the Vestals, making them instantly recognizable in public places. Plutarch stated that anyone who went underneath a Vestal's litter as she was being carried in it was put to death.¹⁶¹ The Vestals could not be approached freely and their physical safety was protected carefully. Regarding the judicial system, we find further evidence from a *Historia Augusta* reference to third-century society and the censor's duty to supervise public morals and to punish those who strayed from the rules concerning good

mentioning *sanctitas* see: *CIL* VI 2131; 2133; 2134; 2135; 2136 (=32405); 2137; 2140;2141 (=32406); 32412; 32414; 32416; 32417; 32418; 32419; 32420; 32421.

¹⁵⁹ For the practices of early Roman society, see Liv. 4.3; 4.44. Augustus took charge of the office of tribune since the person holding that office had *sacrosanctitas*. All emperors after him assumed this office to guarantee their personal safety and to legitimize and support their position. On this, see, *res Gest.* 2.10., where Augustus says that he has the right of the tribune for life and therefore also the inviolability.

¹⁶⁰ Cass. Dio 49.38. They were also granted public statues or images, giving them remarkable public recognition. Imperial women after the Julio-Claudian era received public monuments. As I shall discuss in later chapters, the Vestals also began to be honoured with statues during the first and second centuries, while the *Aedes Vestae* was built as "the hall of fame" for priestesses and other remarkable women. Thus, public recognition of imperial women and the Vestals was connected in an interesting way.

¹⁶¹ Plut. *Vit. Num.* 10.3. The *lictors* and their involvement with the Vestals is discussed fully in the following chapters.

behaviour. The reference declared that the *virgo Vestalis maxima* was excluded from the censor's authority as long as she maintained her morals; that is, as long as she maintained her vow of chastity. The *praefectus urbis Romae*, the consuls, and the *rex sacrorum* — all of whom were usually selected from the patrician order — also maintained their *sanctitas* and so were excluded from the censor's sphere of control.¹⁶² In the Roman judicial system, upper class citizens (*honestiores*) were in better position in any case, while members of the lower classes (*humiliores*) were subjected to torture and harsh punishments for violating the moral code.¹⁶³ Thus, the persons listed in the *Historia Augusta* represented the upper class and were promoted to positions that allowed them to escape the censor's jurisdiction. It is relevant to notice, though, that the chief Vestal maintained her inviolable position only on the condition that she remained a virgin, *incorrupta*, and that only the chief Vestal and her status are mentioned in the *Historia Augusta*. The Vestals' inviolability and authority thus seem to have been firmly fixed to her and we cannot be sure if the same conditions that applied to the *virgo Vestalis maxima* were also valid for the other priestesses. Complete *sanctitas* might have been bound by a priestess's age and position; in any case, her absolute credibility, i.e., her virginity, was a necessary condition.

We cannot be sure if the censor originally had authority over unchaste Vestals as the *Historia Augusta* claims, or if this situation emerged only in the third century. The accounts of Plutarch and Valerius Maximus indicate that the *pontifex maximus* had control over and could violate the *sacrosanctitas* of the Vestals prior to and during the republican era. Both writers narrate events in which a Vestal committed a minor offence and had to face the *pontifex maximus*. In such cases, the *pontifex maximus* could punish the priestess with a whip. This happened in some dark place, behind a curtain, hiding the moment a priestess lost her inviolability from any witnesses.¹⁶⁴ This meant that she did not suffer

¹⁶² *SHA Val.* 6.6. ...*tu de nostro Palatio, tu de iudicibus, tu de praefectis eminentissimis iudicabis; excepto denique praefecto urbis Romae, exceptis consulibus ordinariis et sacrorum rege ac maxima virgine Vestalium (si tamen incorrupta permanebit) de omnibus sententias feres. Laborabunt autem illi, ut tibi placeant, de quibus non potes iudicare....*“you shall pass judgement on our Palace, our judges and our most eminent prefects; in short, except for the prefect of the city of Rome, except for the regular consuls, the king of the sacrifices, and the senior Vestal Virgin (as long, that is, as she remains unpolluted), you shall pronounce sentence on all. Even those on whom you may not pass judgement will strive to win your approval.” The censor was a high-ranking official who controlled public morals, taxation, the census, and public building projects. The late republican era was the golden age of the censors, whose power reached its culmination at that time. For successful men, the office of censor was a fulfillment of the *cursus honorum*. The passage in the *Historia Augusta* discusses how Emperor Decius revived the office of censor and after receiving the Senate's approval was about to offer it to the reluctant P. Licinius Valerianus (i.e. Valerian), who assumed the emperorship in 253 CE. On Decius, see Southern 2001, 74.

¹⁶³ The legal system which divided citizens into the *honestiores* and the *humiliores* was valid from the second century onwards.

¹⁶⁴ *Plut. Vit. Num.* 10.4; *Val. Max.* 1.1.6.2; *Liv.* 28.11.7.

her humiliation publicly. However, the *Historia Augusta* also refers clearly to more serious situations, such as when a priestess was found to be unchaste. In those cases, it was the pontifical college, under the *pontifex maximus*'s leadership, which examined the Vestal. The priestess's *sacrosanctitas* expired if she was found guilty, and the fillet or headband, which symbolized her inviolability, was stripped off her head. A large number of pontiffs were present and then passed a death sentence: the punishment for immorality was being buried alive at the Campus Sceleratus, near the Porta Collina.¹⁶⁵ During the Late Republic, this process changed somewhat and the secular court, rather than the pontifical college, examined the Vestals' cases. The secular court could not impose the severe and traditional penalty, but the guilty Vestals nevertheless suffered a death penalty by secular means. The Emperor Domitian (81–96 CE) then reintroduced the traditional penalty late in the first century.¹⁶⁶

Visual, external distinction was an essential part of *sanctitas*. The Vestals' dress, and the bright purple edges (*praetextata*) of their veils in particular, symbolized their sacral status.¹⁶⁷ The specific dress and the symbols of *sanctitas* had such a deep importance for the Vestals' public character that if they were found guilty in breaking their vow of chastity these symbols were taken away immediately. The ripping off of their priestly symbols – particularly the *vittae* (headbands) – also signalled the termination of their *sanctitas*. Those priestesses who left the *ordo* after their thirty years in office, by contrast, gave away their headbands.¹⁶⁸ The numerous Vestal statues from the second and third centuries all depict these headbands, even if the ways of representing them varied. Thus, the visual symbols of *sanctitas* remained important elements of the Vestals' official dress.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ For the cases see, for example, Liv. 4.44.11.1; 8.15.7.1. For the function of the pontifical college during the Vestals' *incestum* cases in the republican era, see Van Haepelen 2002, 187, 190-191 and Mustakallio 1992, 56-62 and 1997, 73-80. For imperial period, see Mustakallio 2007, 195-96.

¹⁶⁶ Baumann 2004, 71-72.

¹⁶⁷ For the Vestals' official dress and headpiece, see Fig. 3 in Appendix II. The Vestal wore a white dress that comprised a tunic, stole and the special waistband tied into the so-called Herculean knot. (On the Vestals' white dress, see Cass. Dio 1.6.4.) The cloth was white wool, and the veil (*flammeum*) was edged with a distinctive purple stripe (*praetextata*). A similar symbol appeared on the togas of senators and young boys. The priestess's hair was combed into a hairstyle called *senicrines*, 'six parts'. This was the privilege of Vestals and Roman brides on their wedding day. The *flammeum* was fastened with a brooch, *fibula*. The white and red fillets called *vittae* hung down from their headdresses. Their purpose was to indicate religious purity and warn people to behave in a certain way so that the Vestals' sacredness was not violated. See Mekacher 2006, 44-49; Wildfang 2000, 11-13. On the symbolic signification of the Vestals' dress, see Sebesta 1997, 532, 535, 538. White colored dresses were worn by mourning women as well. For more about mourning women in white clothes, see Plut. *Mor. Quaest. Rom.* 26. It is an interesting question to consider, whether the colour of the Vestals' dress had any connection with mourning or with weddings, but this idea cannot be discussed here further.

¹⁶⁸ On Vestals casting their fillets away, see Ov. *Fast.* 3.30; *Am.* 3.6.65. More information about the removal of the *vittae*-fillets can be found in Fantham 2008, 166. On Vestals giving up their fillets after choosing to leave the *ordo* at the end of their term in office, see Dion. Hal. 2.67.2.

¹⁶⁹ Flavian portraits offer distinctive examples of the different ways of presenting the headbands. See Mekacher 2006, 49. Here it can be further suggested that the Vestals 'uniform' varied by occasion or by sacral duty.

An incident, narrated by Pliny the Younger, further elaborates the meaning and importance of *sacrosanctitas* and reminds us how it was fixed to the priestesses' physical integrity. When Cornelia, *virgo Vestalis maxima*, faced her executioner after being found guilty of *incestum*, she took care to maintain her inviolability before the public, or at least she presented herself as *sancta*. As she was carried to the place of execution, she loudly protested the punishment, declaring that she was innocent. As the executioner was about to escort her to the underground chamber where she was to be left to die, Cornelia turned away and rejected the help of such an unclean person.¹⁷⁰ This example demonstrates how Cornelia held on to her *sanctitas*, although she was by then found to be *incesta* and as such had lost her status.¹⁷¹ Her traditional punishment showed the public how the priestess had lost her inviolability. The fact that the change in her status from a *sacrosancta* to an unchaste culprit happened publicly was one cause of social upset that Pliny described in his letter. In the third century, the Roman public witnessed once more Vestals' *incestum* cases. And again, contemporary sentiments were sceptical of the justification of the sentences, as the culprits, or at least one of them, was said to have protested the sentence in a loud voice.¹⁷² These protesting Vestals tried to persuade the public and create a positive posthumous memory in front of the audience that followed the public spectacle of live burial.

By contrast, if a Vestal maintained her chastity, her status was inviolable and she enjoyed the same veneration as the most eminent state-officials, such as the *praefectus urbis Romae*, the regular consuls, and *rex sacrorum*. It is notable that the city prefect and consul were the most desired offices among the *senatores*.¹⁷³ The *rex sacrorum* was also a venerated office, but its ranking in the third century is difficult to define since the sources do not refer to any social appreciation of it. Nevertheless, the *rex sacrorum* was considered to have surpassed the *pontifex maximus* in the priestly

¹⁷⁰ Plin. Ep. 11.9. Cornelia's case deeply shocked the public, and both contemporary and later opinion held that her execution was carried out in order to manifest the power of the emperor Domitian rather than for justified reasons.

¹⁷¹ In Plutarch's description of a Vestal's punishment, it is the *pontifex maximus* who takes culprit to the steps leading into the underground chamber. Thus, it seems that the *pontifex maximus* alone had a right to violate her *sacrosanctitas* during the execution process. Plut. *Vit. Num.* 10.7. In fact, it has been supposed among scholars that Plutarch was in Rome when the Vestal Cornelia was executed. Thus, he wrote down what he witnessed but excluded names and other historical details.

¹⁷² This third century case will be discussed later. Concerning *incestum* cases, the emperors' political use of the Vestals' public value was supposedly one very important motive for organizing a trial and the public spectacle of live burial.

¹⁷³ These offices were considered to be the peak of a senatorial career. See Mennen 2011, 53.

sacral hierarchy.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the chief Vestal at least was considered to have a similar inviolability as these high-ranking men. The Vestals' inviolable status was likewise similar to that of imperial women who had been granted this honour following the empress Livia. In addition, the priestesses seem to have shared the virtues reserved for the emperors, as we shall see in the next chapter.

In sum, *sanctitas* seems to have been an ambiguous element. On the one hand, *sanctitas* protected the Vestals and helped them to retain their inviolability. On the other hand, *sanctitas* was only on loan and it was put at the Vestals' disposal only for their period in office and only in exchange for their virginity.

Indulgent Vestals – Manifesting *Clementia*

While *sacrosanctitas* was tightly bound to the Vestals' chastity and their position before the law, *clementia* was a virtue that emphasized the Vestals' competence to use judicial power. It was, in a sense, a symbolization of supreme power. The quality of *clementia* — i.e., mercy and indulgence — was above all a male virtue often manifested by emperors through public art and propaganda. It was complex, though, and clearly marked gender specifications cannot always be defined: there are some cases in which women acted as symbols of clemency or are presented appealing to male figures in order to provoke their lenient sentiments.¹⁷⁵ Showing *clementia* was not, however, seen to be a particularly female characteristic. The Vestals made an exception to this, and their connection to *clementia* is apparent.¹⁷⁶ Their complex sexual status, and the fact that they superseded the traditional categories of male and female, underlies why they could show *clementia*, a “masculine” virtue.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ The last identifiable *rex sacrorum* comes from the early third century CE. Sextus Pompeius Festus writes that *rex* comes in the first place among the priests, for this see *ordo sacerdotum* Fest. 198.29.-200.4. Also Dionysius of Halicarnassus refers to religious superintendence of the *rex sacrorum*, see Dion Hal. 5.1.4.

¹⁷⁵ On the empress Livia suggesting that her husband show mercy, see Sen. *Clem.* 1.9.6. On female mercy, see see Milnor, 2011, 97-114.

¹⁷⁶ Dowling 2006, 14. One might conclude that Roman women are depicted as clement and lenient towards their slaves and children, but there actually are no examples of this. Clemency was generally considered to be a military virtue of the soldiers, which might explain its un-feminine character.

¹⁷⁷ For studies about the Vestals' sexual status, see among others Beard, 1980, 12-27; Mustakallio 1997, 56-62; Staples, 1998; Takács, 2008; Wildfang, 2006.

It appears that the Vestals communicated *clementia* in at least three different situations. First, they were able to get convicts released who were on the journey to their execution and unexpectedly met with a Vestal. Second, the priestesses appeared in public spectacles where they participated in judging competitors whose lives depended on the leniency of the spectators. Third, the Vestas were, at certain historic moments, appointed to negotiate peace and persuade hostile parties to clemency. Let us discuss each case, beginning with the first two as they seem to relate to cases which cannot be connected to any certain historic occasions but instead reflect the manner in which the priestesses could use the virtue of *clementia* individually.

Plutarch offers a full account of the Vestals' privileges and special qualities, giving the impression that all of the privileges had been granted by the ancient King Numa Pompilius who had arranged the cult and the Vestals in the first place. Regarding *clementia*, he mentions that if the priestesses accidentally met a criminal on his way to execution, his life would be spared if the Vestal swore that this encounter was accidental.¹⁷⁸ An incident from the early imperial period illustrates further the significance of the Vestals' clemency. When Emperor Augustus returned from the war against Cleopatra and Marcus Antonius, the Vestals, together with the senators and their wives, welcomed him in his triumph. On that day, perhaps because the Vestals were out on the town and among the people, all the convicts were pardoned. Further, Augustus seems to have used the Vestals' propagandistic value in his politics in order to wash away the stigma of the civil war.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, we can consider *clementia* as a long-standing virtue that the emperors perhaps adopted from the Vestals.

Clemency and leniency towards defeated opponents was very prominently present in the gladiatorial spectacles, in which the Vestals participated as honorary guests. The Vestals sat in special seats on the theatre's podium; other women usually had to settle for the seats of the upper auditorium. According to Suetonius, Augustus forbade women, except the Vestals, from enjoying the gladiator

¹⁷⁸ Plut. *Vit. Num.* 10.3. We cannot take Plutarch's words for granted when it comes to the dating of the privileges; rather, all of the privileges have to be studied individually and analyzed as to their origins. For example, the privilege of using the litter (for transportation) seems to have problematic dating and origins. On this, see Mekacher 2006, 29.

¹⁷⁹ On the Vestals welcoming the returning Augustus, see Cass Dio 51.19.2. On Augustus and his propaganda (including the idea that pardoning depended on the Vestals being out in public), see Barden Dowling 2006, 160-161. In Hellenistic Greece, it was usual to pardon convicts at public celebrations and holidays; however, this habit was rare in Rome. *Clementia* became the main part of the politics of Julius Caesar, who gladly appeared pardoning and sparing his enemies. See Konstan 2005, 337. As Caesar's successor and heir, Augustus adopted *clementia*. Augustan power-politics was noted by contemporary writers and artists.

games by ordering them to sit in the upper part of the theatre. Nero also allowed the Vestals to attend athletic games. These privileges put the Vestals into the company of other high-ranking individuals. First of all, their seats were close those of the *praetors*, whose most important task in society was to be in charge of the judicial system.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, imperial ladies were given permission to sit with the Vestals; this privilege was first given to Livia and then other Julio-Claudian emperors apparently gave their wives and female relatives the same right.¹⁸¹ Their honorary seats close to the arena and in the presence of state officials and imperial ladies emphasized the Vestals' public prominence. Of course, the image of the imperial ladies was also accentuated when they were seated together with the priestesses.

The Vestals' right to sit in special seats in the theatre and during the games has been interpreted as a special privilege and an exemption from the rules concerning women.¹⁸² It has also been suggested that they might have participated to honour some deity for whom the games were celebrated.¹⁸³ These suggestions undoubtedly clarify the Vestals' public role, but if we consider their virtue of *clementia*, their participation in the games earns a new justification. Therefore, I suggest that the Vestals' symbolic value as representatives of *clementia* was one of the reasons that their presence was particularly welcomed at the games. It is unknown what specific role they played at the games. For example, did they actually participate in judging (*pollicem vertere*) the gladiators or fighters? The late-fourth-century Christian writer Prudentius was aware of this habit as he describes the priestesses participating in games. One must keep in mind, that the social context and polemic atmosphere—where Prudentius and other early Christian authors wrote— influenced their ideas about the pagan priestesses. However, it is not probable that Prudentius fabricated all the elements in his description. The character and alleged corruption of the priestesses were his own interpretation, but the habits of the Vestals— their presence in games and their participation in judging— were probably actual during

¹⁸⁰ The *praetores* also wore togas with purple edges, *praetextata*.

¹⁸¹ Suet. *Aug.* 44.3.2; *Nero* 12.4.5. In Greece, the priestesses of Ceres participated in the athletic games. On imperial ladies and Vestals sitting together in the theatre, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.16.7; Dio 59.3.4; 60.22.2. There has been discussion about Augustan moral-politics concerning the theatrical spectacles: it has been suggested, that Augustus had wanted to keep women away from the best seats because then they would have seen bloody actions and morally suspicious scenes. This, in turn, would have threatened their feminine *pudicitia*. Furthermore, if matrons and girls sat amongst the men, they would have had an opportunity to flirt and fall into immoral relationships. For this discussion, see Dunkle 2008, 268–269; Futrell 2000, 161–162. Mekacher discusses whether all the empresses were given this right or if it was rather a Julio-Claudian trend. Mekacher 2006, 31.

¹⁸² Mekacher 2006, 30–31.

¹⁸³ Wildfang 2006, 30–31. This explanation seems plausible but is not explored further here.

his time.¹⁸⁴ Since the games originally had a sacral character, rather than being mere entertainment, the Vestals' participation can be explained by this context. Thus, their participation seems to have been required. Above all, their firm connection to *clementia* gave them a special symbolic value that might have been used to justify the judgments passed during the games.

When the Vestals pardoned the criminals whom they met accidentally, or participated in games empowered by *clementia*, these situations are described in the sources with no immediate historical context. However, there are occasions in which the Vestals' use of this virtue can be tied to exact historic moments. During power-struggles, the Vestals were called to be present and act as mediators between the hostile parties. On these occasions, it seems that the Vestals acted as symbols of *clementia*, or it was hoped at least that their presence would evoke the winning party's clemency towards the defeated one. In the third century, when Septimius Severus was winning in Ravenna and Didus Julianus's troops were moving back to Rome, Julianus proposed in the senate that Vestal virgins and priests should accompany the senate to meet Severus and his troops. They should have fillets (*infula*) in their outstretched arms as signs of pardon.¹⁸⁵ Considering the promotion of imperial virtues, J. Rantala has recently analyzed Severan politics and their emphasis on the message of an indulgent emperor.¹⁸⁶ This suited well the idea of *clementia*, which included the same characteristics of kindness and mildness as *indulgentia*. The Vestals' role in this is difficult to define, whether they were to celebrate the returning emperor or if they were rather expected to ask for pardon for defeated opponents. In any case, they symbolized the power and virtue of *clementia* meant to expel vengeful sentiments and to celebrate triumphs. In this instance then, the Vestals were representatives of peace and clemency.

¹⁸⁴ Prudent. *c. Symm* 2.1098–99; 1109–1113. Prudentius discusses the pagan priests, priestesses and cults with 'poetic imagination' as N. McLynn puts it. Considering the context of Prudentius, one must pay attention to his purposes, which were to criticize the polytheistic religion and its devotees. For this subject and interpreting Prudentius, see McLynn 1996, 317–18. In Prudentius' description the Vestals participate fiercely in encouraging the gladiators; they even called their favorite gladiator "pet" and expected him to fight furiously against his already deathly wounded and bleeding opponent. This concerned Prudentius, leaving him to wonder what was the true nature of these maidens. Thus, he presents the moral corruption of the pagan priestesses.

¹⁸⁵ *SHA Did.* 6.5. *Haec cum Iulianus videret, senatum rogavit ut virgines Vestales et ceteri sacerdotes cum senatu obviam exercitui Severi prodirent et praetentis infulis rogarent, inanem rem contra barbaros milites parans.* "When Julianus learned of these events, he came to the senate with a proposal that the Vestal Virgins and the priests, along with the senate itself, should go out to meet Severus' troops and entreat them with fillets held in outstretched hands — a futile step, surely, to take against soldiers of barbarian blood." During the civil war in 69 CE, Vitellius sent the Vestals to speak on his behalf to Vespasianus, who was about to defeat him. On this event, see Tac. *Hist.* 3.81.8; Cass. Dio 64.18.3.

¹⁸⁶ On numismatic evidence of Severan *indulgentia* and *clementia*, see Manders 2012, 246. On Severan *indulgentia* towards his subjects, see Rantala, 2017.

Both *sacrosanctitas* and *clementia* help us to define the grounds on which the Vestals' social influence was built. We can conclude that the Vestals' social value and status both exceeded that of common citizens and overlapped that of certain distinguished individuals. Due to their *sanctitas*, the Vestals escaped from the jurisdiction of censors as long as they maintained their chastity. They were promoted to a status close to that of the *praetors*, who were in charge of the judicial system, and shared seats with them in the theatre. Both the *praetors* and the Vestals were entitled to wear purple-edged garments, a signal of *sacrosanctitas*. This same special status was also given to imperial ladies, who gained public appreciation by appearing together with the sacral priestesses. In a sense, their qualities brought the Vestals close to the emperors. The fact is that both *sanctitas* and *clementia* were essentially imperial qualities that were celebrated in public propaganda. The Vestals were thus seen fit to represent these qualities and virtues in imperial propaganda. As important state officials, the Vestals also had public assistants to ensure their position. I discuss these guarantors of their wellbeing next.

Right to have *Lictores*

The Vestals' *sanctitas* was manifested impressively by having *lictors* accompany them whenever they were out in the city. We can imagine how the *lictors*, representatives of the state's authority, stood in the doorway or in the vestibule of the House of Vestals when the priestesses were at home. But whenever an individual Vestal or a group of them left the residence, a *lictor* accompanied each priestess with his *fasces* on his shoulder. Consequently, the *lictors* formed an essential part of the Vestals' public image and representation.¹⁸⁷ However, the *lictors* had also duties that were religious in nature. These activities resembled the Vestals' duty of preparing and storing the sacrificial product *mola salsa*. This interesting detail has been neglected in earlier studies, and now my purpose is to analyse whether the relationships between the Vestals and the *lictors* were more multi-layered than has been supposed.¹⁸⁸ Starting with the assumption that besides being merely their bodyguards, the

¹⁸⁷ Horster 2007, 334. Horster describes the *lictors* as a part of the Vestals' representation. This leads a modern researcher to imagine the public spectacle that the Vestals gave when they appeared in public. The Vestals' clothing and external symbols of the priesthood together with the privileged use of litters and carriages were perfect for making an impression on the public.

¹⁸⁸ Although they secured the public appearances of officials and had the right to use force, we should bear in mind that there also existed actual bodyguards (*custos*) and authorities specialised in coercive means outside the category of the *lictors*.

lictors also participated in sacral obligations — if not together with the priestesses then in some way resembling their duties — I examine how the Vestals' capacity and agency was supplemented by the *lictors*' functions.

Most free citizens or freedmen were eligible to hold the office of *lictor*, but there were certain requirements concerning their status. A *lictor* could be a former slave, but only one who had been manumitted before stepping into the post. In this respect, the *lictors* differed from other assistants of the priests (*apparitores*), who could (for the most part) be still slaves when practicing their profession.¹⁸⁹ There were, of course, detailed regulations about the sort of persons with whom the priests could be associated. For example, only a free person could take charge of the physical well-being of the *flamen Dialis*.¹⁹⁰ The requirements concerning the *lictors*' social origins become more understandable when we consider the special status and taboos of the priests and priestesses whom they assisted. To the Vestals as well as to the *flamen Dialis*, it was not unimportant who took care of their personal affairs and personal safety; this person had to represent a certain standard.

The *lictors* had significant capacity to exercise power and their symbolic value as state officials was considered great. By the command of the official they served, they had the right to arrest people or to serve summons on individuals. They were present at executions and manifested the supreme power of Rome and its officials. However, when and how the *lictors* manifested their symbolic power was highly regulated: for instance, inside the city walls, in the sacral city area, they were forbidden to carry axes in the *fascēs*. Furthermore, they had to show their subservience when they encountered certain individuals, by lowering the *fascēs* before them. The Vestal virgins were among those whom the *lictors* had to honour by this gesture, perhaps due to the priestesses' *sacrosanctitas*.¹⁹¹ The Vestals thus served the state and were subordinate to the jurisdiction of the *pontifex maximus*, but were beyond the laws and norms that concerned common citizens.

¹⁸⁹ The system of *apparitores* was developed to assist Roman officials and the priests. It was hierarchical and the requirements concerning their social origins varied. For example, the scribes, *scribae*, were always free citizens. For assistants, see Horster 2007.

¹⁹⁰ Gell. 10.15.11. Only a free person could cut the nails of the *flamen Dialis*.

¹⁹¹ Dion. Hal. 8.44. The *lictors* also lowered their *fascēs* at public meetings.

As with other privileges enjoyed by the Vestals, contradictory surviving information makes it difficult to confirm if the Vestals had *lictiores* from the beginning of their organization.¹⁹² First, an incident in the year 42 BCE, when an unrecognized individual Vestal was attacked as she was returning home late at night, led the triumvirate to suggest that Vestals should have *lictiores*. The senate approved the suggestion, and each Vestal had a one *lictor* from that moment forward.¹⁹³ Second, Plutarch set the origins of this privilege to archaic times, when King Numa established the *ordo* of the Vestals.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, in his second-century *De verborum significatorum* Festus notes that the *flamen Dialis* – with whom the Vestals shared many similarities in terms of privileges and requirements – was attended by a certain *Flaminius licitor* when he performed sacral rituals.¹⁹⁵ Lastly, public art from the first century confirms that the *lictiores* appeared next to the Vestals. However, while they were very recognizable as they carried the *fascēs*, the *lictiores*' function at these occasions cannot be determined.¹⁹⁶ In the sources, then, the *lictiores* were connected to the early Vestals, and to the republican Vestals at the latest; their function as Vestal bodyguards was certainly settled in 42 BCE by the *senatus consultum*.

Cassius Dio gives an exact date — 42 BCE — from which the priestesses were to have a *lictor* accompany them whenever they went out. Even if the early Vestals had *lictiores* at their disposal, it was thus only in 42 BCE that it was officially determined that they should take care of the priestesses's personal safety. There is complimentary support for this suggestion: Cicero repeatedly talked before 42 BCE about the Vestal virgins needing to be protected from the insults and rage of wicked men.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Mekacher 2006, 29.

¹⁹³ Cass. Dio. 47.19.4. Concerning this event, I would like to comment that one gets an impression from Cassius Dio's story that the Vestals did not always use their external priestly symbols and official "uniform". When off-duty, they could apparently dress as civilians instead of in the formal priestly gown; this meant that they could be mistakenly considered to be common citizens. In her dissertation, McDaniel (1995) suggests that perhaps the Vestals' official dress was not as distinctive as it has been supposed. See McDaniel 1995, 26, n. 78.

¹⁹⁴ Plut. *Vit. Num.* 10.3.

¹⁹⁵ Fest. s.v. *flaminium licitor*

¹⁹⁶ In the relief of *Ara Pacis Augustae*, the *lictor* is seen with the Vestal procession. The priestesses carry the equipment for sacrifices; as such, the relief refers to a religious occasion. Another relief from the era of Emperor Domitian, the so-called Cancellaria relief, illustrates the return of a triumphant emperor. Here, several *lictiores* are seen next to the Vestals.

¹⁹⁷ Cic. *Catil.* 4.12.6; *Dom.* 144.10. We should bear in mind that Cicero wrote his remarks about the insulted Vestals two decades before the incident that took place during the Second Triumvirate in 42 BCE. Cicero's references might be just a rethorical exaggeration. There are, however, other possibilities for the background of his remarks. He seems to emphasize that it was insufferable and morally below Roman standards that Vestals could find themselves in a situation in which their holy nature or physical safety was questioned. Even if this was not the case in real life, Cicero saw his opponents as capable of insulting even the Vestals, or he wanted to emphasize his opponents' malevolence by claiming that they were doing so. We can also conclude that insults against the Vestals and concern about their safety were perhaps a reality during the restless years of the late republican era. McDaniel (1995), when referring to the privilege to use *lictiores*, also emphasizes the context of the late republic when social order and general peace were threatened. See McDaniel 1995, 26 n.78. She does not, though, refer to Cicero's discussions about the Vestals' welfare.

In the late republic, then, there was already discussion about the Vestals' safety, and concern about their well-being was an important issue that appeared in the literature. It was these pre-existing concerns that led to the *lictors* becoming the guarantors of the priestesses' security and protection.

Examining the sources further extends our knowledge of the *lictors*' tasks. From Ovid we have an interesting reference concerning the cultic role of the *lictors*. He describes the *lictors* receiving the grain and salt – also called *februa*, used during the Roman festival of ritual purification.¹⁹⁸ This means that the *lictors* were associated with similar sacral products that were very important to the Vestals' role: the priestesses prepared the *mola salsa*, roasted grain and salt. A *lictor* seems to have been the keeper of the sacrificial products by which houses are cleansed, whereas the Vestals were keepers and producers of the *mola salsa*.¹⁹⁹ Earlier research has noted that Ovid very probably spoke about a *lictor* who had special sacral purposes, and not about a *lictor* who was merely the officials' assistant. In the context of the passage, which discusses the *pontifex*, *Rex Sacrorum* and *flamen*, all characters appear in the singular form. Thus, there seems to have been only one particular *lictor* who participated in this religious action.²⁰⁰ Whether this was *Flaminius licitor* is not evident, but in the passage both the *flamen* and his wife *flaminica* are mentioned, which in turn hints that in this ritual the *Flaminius licitor*'s presence was required.

On the bases of the many similarities between the *flamens* and the Vestals, I suggest that the *lictors* occasionally appeared in a sacral role as they accompanied the Vestals. However, this is not recorded in any sources. Both Vestals and the *lictors* were evidently linked with the sacrificial products made from roasted grain and salt, although the sources refer to this product with different terms (*februa* or *mola salsa*). Apparently, the *lictors* were responsible for keeping or storing the product during a certain religious ritual, while the Vestals had the monopoly of its production and storage. Thus, the sources show us that the *lictors* were linked with similar religious activities as the Vestals. Therefore I propose that their presence with the Vestals can be interpreted from this base also, and not solely from the presumption that they were the Vestals' bodyguards. In the capacity of bodyguards, the

¹⁹⁸ Ov. *Fast.* 2.19-28.

¹⁹⁹ It must be stated here, that Ovid discusses roasted grain and salt, the ingredients of *mola salsa*. See Ov. *Fast.* 2.24. and also Ov. *Fast.* 4.726 and Fest. 85.M.

²⁰⁰ Ovid's verse is examined in the work of B. Gladigow. As he states, the text has been challenging to interpret, and a certain part of it (*domibus certis*) has gained more interest and emendation attempts than the reference to the *lictors*' role, which has been largely ignored. Gladigow 1972, 303, n. 57. On interpretations of the text and role of the *lictors*, see Gladigow 1972, 303-305. As Gladigow puts it, there appears to be a 'priesterlichen Liktor'.

lictors were prominent symbols and guarantors of the Vestals' *sacrosanctitas* and therefore their function was to promote the Vestals' public prominence and social influence in the busy streets of Rome.

Right to Use Carriages

The city of Rome, and particularly the area within the *pomerium*, was the sacral territory of the Vestals. Livy states that there actually was no other home for the Vestals than the city of Rome.²⁰¹ It was in the *aedes Vestae* and other *loci religiosi* that their activities took place, and it was there that they fulfilled their religious obligations. Similar to the *flamens*, the Vestals were constantly on duty and concentrated on executing the *sacra pro populo*. This did not allow them to leave the city; at the very least, some of the priestesses always had to be on watch and take care of the eternal fire. Nevertheless, their sacral obligations did not tie the priestesses exclusively to *aedes Vestae*: they were obliged to travel from there to other sacral locations. As the table below shows, the Vestals' obligations were numerous, and this kept them occupied throughout the calendar year.

Table 2. Annual sacral celebrations in which the Vestals participated. (Sources: Mekacher (2006), Wildfang (2006), Salzman (1990)).

| Month | Occasion | Significance | Priestly Officials | Place |
|----------|--|---------------------|--|---|
| February | Parentalia 13 th to 21 st February | Honouring ancestors | <i>Virgo Vestalis maxima</i> | |
| March | New Year's celebrations | (Purification) | The Vestals, the <i>flamines</i> , <i>rex sacrorum</i> , <i>curiones</i> | Temple of Vesta, House of <i>rex sacrorum</i> and <i>flamines</i> and curia |

²⁰¹ Liv. 5.52. 13. *Vestalibus nempe una illa sedes est, ex qua eas nihil unquam praeterquam urbs capta mouit.* The Vestals surely have but that one dwelling-place, from which nothing ever caused them to remove (leave) but the capture of the City.

| | | | | |
|----------|---|--|--|--|
| April | Fordicidia | Purificatory, fecundity | <i>virgo Vestalis maxima</i> , Pontifices and curiones | Capitolium, Curia |
| | Parilia | Securing fertility, purificatory rites | The Vestals | |
| May | Argei 15 th May | Purificatory | Pontifex maximus, <i>pontifices</i> , praetors and flaminica Dialis | Bank of Tiber, <i>pons Sublicius</i> |
| June | Vestalia | | The Vestals, Matronae, Pontifices | Temple of Vesta |
| August | Consualia 21 st August | Completing harvest, preserving grain | The Vestals, <i>Pontifex maximus</i> , <i>flamen Quirinalis</i> | Circus maximus |
| | Opiconsivia 25 th August | | The Vestals, Pontifex maximus | <i>Sacellum</i> of Regia |
| October | Equus Octobris 15 th October | Purificatory rites | The Vestals prepare the <i>suffimen</i> | Campus Martius, Regia |
| December | Bona Dea | Celebrating Bona Dea, “good goddess”, for securing the wellbeing of people | The Vestals, Wife of the <i>Pontifex maximus</i> , women of nobility | Home of the pontifex maximus, i.e. the imperial palace |

Their mobile way of life and their apparent public visibility were, in fact, some of the main features of the Vestals' public image that separated them from others. Here, I explore further how the Vestals' honorary position was manifested in public life, and how the priestesses exploited their special right to use carriages. This privilege was occasionally given to imperial women as well, making it necessary to extend any analysis of the Vestals' function to examples of élite women. Even so, we must consider that the Vestals' privilege was justified, not merely a gift for their services to the state.

The transportation of people and goods in the city of Rome was strictly controlled as a matter of safety and practicality. Upper-class matrons, however, were permitted to travel in *carpentum* (two-wheeled chariots). This privilege was removed by the *lex Oppia*, but after heavy resistance it was reinstated in 195 BCE.²⁰² In addition to the *matronae*, the *carpentum* was, according to Roman tradition, a privilege of the priests. Livy mentions that King Numa arranged the *flamens* to honour the goddess *Fides* by ordering them to travel to her temple in Capitoline in two-wheel carriages.²⁰³ However, it should be mentioned here that the priests and priestesses travelled only occasionally in the carriages when they were making their way to sacral locations. In fact, some celebrations seem to have required that they arrived at rituals and celebrations by foot.²⁰⁴ For the Vestals, travelling in the carriages was also a practical solution, since they seem to have been responsible for transporting the sacral objects and sacrificial products of the *Aedes Vestae*. During the period of crisis, they were obliged to carry sacral objects safely away from the temple.²⁰⁵ In addition to the carriages, litters or sedan chairs were practical ways to move around from one place to other. As noted earlier, the Vestals' sacral nature, (*sacro*)*sanctitas*, was constantly guarded, and therefore it was declared that anyone who went under a Vestal's litter was to be put to death.²⁰⁶

The Vestals' privilege to use the vehicles is not particularly emphasized in the literary sources; instead, it is generally seen as a matter of practicality. However, there is epigraphical evidence that tells us that the Vestals seem to have been entitled to special treatment when it came to travel. These

²⁰² *Lex Oppia* was a response to the economic catastrophe caused by the Second Punic War in 215 BCE. Among other things, it restricted upper class women from possessing wealth and displaying it publicly.

²⁰³ Liv. 1.21.4. On the priests having the right to travel in carriages, see also Tac. *Ann.* 12.42.

²⁰⁴ Aulus Gellius mentions that the *flaminica Dialis* went to perform the rituals of Argei, the purificatory festival in May, by foot. See Gell. *NA* 10.15.

²⁰⁵ The Vestals had to carry sacral objects to safety during crises, such as war or fire. See Livy 5.40.7.2; Val. Max. 1.1.10.3; Cass. Dio 54.24.2.

²⁰⁶ Plut. *Vit. Num.* 10.3. This severe warning naturally protected the Vestals against any sort of attacker. Perhaps it was also prescribed for underlining their *sanctitas* and that the priestesses were not to be approached.

sources, the so-called *tabulae immunitatis*, are interpreted as permission to travel by ‘tax-free’ carriages and horses. The declaration was engraved on the bronze tablets, and scholars have argued that the tablets were attached to an individual Vestal’s property. These testimonies date to the second and mid-third century.²⁰⁷ For example, a plate from mid-third century tells us that the chief Vestal Flavia Publicia was exempted from taxation (*immunis*). The last line of the inscription refers to the kind of taxation in question: here it is declared that her yoke of oxen (*iugo*) was freed from tax.²⁰⁸ Such evidence about transportation is not attested to for other priests, such as the *flamens*. From the text of the fourth-century writer Prudentius, we learn that the Vestals – apparently of his own time – made their journeys in the luxurious and softly cushioned carriages called *pilentum*.²⁰⁹ Supposedly, making a journey in the *pilentum* was more comfortable than one in the sedan chair, which exposed a person to swaying and discomfort.²¹⁰

In any case, the Vestals’ right to move and travel in the city by carriage was extraordinary and a great distinction.²¹¹ Like private water plumbing, carriages were a symbol of high social status and wealth. In the historical tradition, Roman women were occasionally granted permission to travel by carriage, although it was also disputed that this was an unnecessary luxury. The distinction concerned those women who had acted particularly virtuously.²¹² Thus, I propose that this privilege was in a way a gender-specific distinction, and the Vestals probably acted as examples in this matter. During the early imperial era, permission to travel in carriages (*carpentum*) in the city was granted to imperial women, which promoted imperial women to the same social rank as the Vestals and enabled their public prominence to be manifested in a very visible and notable manner. The privilege was given

²⁰⁷ One cannot be certain what the exact function of the *tabellae immunitatis* was. Thus, in this connection I wish to emphasize that I have referred to the interpretation that the *tabellae* were attached to the carriages. This explanation seems plausible for me, but we do not have confirmation for this from the ancient sources. The *tabellae immunitatis* of the Vestals: Calpurnia Praetextata (beginning of the second century) *CIL* XIV, 4120; Flavia Publicia (mid-third century) *CIL* VI, 2147 = *CIL* XV 7126; *AE* 2010, 620; Sossia Maxima (date inaccurate?) *CIL* VI 2148.

²⁰⁸ *CIL* VI, 2147: *Flaviae / Publiciae / v(irgini) V(estali) / maximae / immunis / in iugo*

²⁰⁹ Prudent. *C. Symm.* III1086.

²¹⁰ Seneca the Younger, a first-century philosopher, describes his journey in a sedan chair and its uncomfortable qualities; see *Sen. Ep.* 55.1; 57.1.

²¹¹ Brännstedt 2015, 46.

²¹² In earlier days, Roman *matronae* were rewarded with the right to use carriages after they had committed a glorious deed, such as offering their valuable articles for a benefit of the state in 395 BCE. *Liv.* 5.25.9. Sextus Festus refers to *pilentum* as a sort of carriage that was used by *matronae*. On Roman matrons’ right to use carriages within the city area, see Pagnotta, M.A., *Carpentum*. ‘Privilegio del carroe modo sociale della matrona romana.’ *Studi classici*, 15. 1977-1978. *Annali della Facolta di lettere e filosofia*, 157-170. However, in 215 BCE, the *lex Oppia* proscribed that the luxury and property of Roman women had to be reduced. This raised strong opposition and the law was withdrawn in 195 BCE. *Liv.* 34.1.3. On the withdrawal of the *lex Oppia*, *Liv.* 34.1-8.

first to the empress Livia during the era of Tiberius.²¹³ It seems that this privilege had to be earned by individual empresses, and when the senate had granted this right, it was worthy of celebrating on coinage.²¹⁴ The latest emblems depicting carriages on imperial coinage are from the Antonine dynasty.²¹⁵ However, similar *tabula immunis* were engraved for the empress Julia Domna (c. 160 – 217), indicating that her vehicle was likewise exempted from taxes. In the inscription, engraved on a bronze tablet, there is the formulation *immunis itus* that refers to tax-free passage or movement.²¹⁶ Again, it is unclear whether the tablet was attached to carriages or another vehicle or even how it was displayed. However, the message of the inscription clearly shows that the empress had privileges concerning her vehicle and/or the transportation of passengers or goods. As a result, it can be concluded that the early-third century empress enjoyed the same privilege as the Vestals.

The women's right to use *carpentum* was under discussion during the Severan dynasty, when Julia Soemias, *Augusta* and mother of the emperor Elagabalus, wished to take a stand on women's right to travel by carriage.²¹⁷ This suggests that at this point it was not considered typical to ride in the carriages, but rather that it was a sign of luxury, high status, and seen a special privilege traditionally and automatically granted only to priests and priestesses. Permission thus was not self-evident for imperial women; rather, as numismatic and literary material evidence suggests, it was a distinction that had to be earned. Eventually, the granting of such permission was deemed worthy of celebration and remembrance. Tablets manifesting the exemption from taxes were another important declaration of social status and influence. Although it is not clear how they were displayed, we can assume that they held great importance and value in the social lives of their possessors.

²¹³ Livia was honoured with the right to travel in *carpentum*; see *RIC I² 97* 50-51. Direct written sources about this matter are lacking, but the date of the issued coin and its context let us understand that the empress received this honour.

²¹⁴ After Livia, other Julio-Claudian empresses were granted this same honour. In the case of the Empress Valeria Messalina, both a special seat in the theatre and the right to ride in carriages were granted. On this, see Cass Dio. 60.22.2. Agrippina minor, Messalina's successor, is said to have used the *carpentum* as she came to the Capitolium. Tacitus claimed that this increased appreciation towards the empress. Perhaps this was connected with the fact that the priests and priestesses usually used carriages and this produced positive associations among the people. For Agrippina minor, see Tac. *Ann.* 12.42.

²¹⁵ After the Julio-Claudian empresses (Livia, Messalina, Agrippina minor), women (Julia Titi, Domitilla minor) of the Flavian house were given the right to use carriages. This is evidenced through coinage bearing likenesses of Livia, Agrippina, Julia Titi, Domitilla minor, Sabina and Faustina minor. For *carpentum* and the empresses who had right to use them in the city, see *RE* band 3 1899, halbband 5-6, 1606-07.

²¹⁶ *CLI VI* 2149.

²¹⁷ *SHA Heliogab.* 4.4. It is said that she wished to discuss the regulations concerning luxury among women. The discussions are said to have taken place at a certain women's senate (*senaculum mulierum*) that was gathered in *colle Quirinali*. See *SHA Heliogab.* 3.4. See also Coarelli 1999, 265, s.v. *senaculum mulierum*.

During the passage from late antiquity, the Vestals are presented very much “in view”, with their luxurious way of travel witnessed by the crowd.²¹⁸ I conclude that the right to use carriages in the city area made the Vestals’ public position not only visible but, in certain respect, controlled and watched publicly as they made their journeys. They certainly could never travel *incognito*. As the right to travel in carriages was expanded to certain other female citizens, such as to *matronae* and the ladies of the imperial house, this gender-specific privilege emphasized the honorary position of these women. Here we see again how the privileges of the Vestals were expanded in a way that the social status of the priestesses and imperial women became comparable. In the case of imperial women, their position became more legitimized as their status came closer that of the Vestal virgins. While we have evidence indicating that imperial women’s right to use carriages was still being disputed in the early third century, however, this perpetual privilege of the Vestals seems to have remained uncontested and untouched.

2.4. Financial Independence and the Vestals’ Economic Activities

I consider the Vestals’ beneficence to have been at least partially economic in nature. Therefore, it is sensible to examine how the priestess got along financially and what sort of wealth they possessed. Evidence concerning the Vestals’ finances crosses several centuries. The sources are diverse in their quality, and range from literary to epigraphic; taken together with other evidence concerning socio-political life, they enable us to reconstruct the financial circumstances in which third-century Vestals likely lived. As I have done in other sections, here I compare the Vestals’ situation with that of other priestly colleges to determine whether their finances were organized along similar principles. Comparisons reveal the level of uniqueness of the priestesses’ economic status. It is also relevant to separate the economic circumstances of an individual Vestal from the economics of the entire college, as this allows us to assess how much the priestesses’ biological families were financially involved in the cult. This last aspect was very rarely considered in earlier Vestal research, although it has been implied recently. Therefore, my study and its viewpoint, which considers also their economic agency, offers a new perspective of the Vestals’ social activity and their motives to act in their sacral office. In the third century, when the Roman economy fell into crisis, one might think that the economic situation of the priestly colleges also fell in depression.

²¹⁸ Prudent. *C. Symm.* III1086.

It is relevant to first consider how the finances of the Roman priests were typically organized. Usually the priesthoods and their rituals were financed by public funds that were managed by professional treasurers, *virii rationales*. The funds came from the state treasury (*aerarium*), which consisted of imperial funds and the emperor's private wealth (*fiscus*), although the separation between the two is difficult to determine.²¹⁹ The office of a Roman priests/priestesses was not a salaried post. In other words, they did not earn their livelihoods as state officials; members of the priesthoods were already wealthy citizens, and the posts gave them more honor and social prestige than economic benefit.²²⁰ The Vestals made a conspicuous exception to this system. Although it is not correct to describe the position of these honorable women as salaried priestesses who had to earn their living, they were nevertheless religious professionals who received a handsome income from their office.

In general, it was usual for a priestly office to require financing from its holder, as it was his/her responsibility to arrange and pay for banquets and sacral celebrations of all kinds. Furthermore, the holder of the public office, whether priestly or political (*euergetism*), financially supported the organization of public spectacles. Priests were also reported to have offered lavish banquets upon entering their office; this is said to have cost considerable sums of money, even as much as one million sesterces, the sum required to be accepted into the rank of *senatores*. The newly elected members could also offer a celebration dinner to their older colleagues (*cena aditalis*).²²¹ Unfortunately, we have no evidence whether the Vestals offered banquets or if they were expected to participate financially in managing the rituals or celebrations of their office. However, a relief survives from the early imperial period depicting the six Vestals enjoying a banquet. The scene suggests not only that the Vestals also participated in banquets, but also that there was a communal and social aspect to their priestly gatherings.²²² Undoubtedly, the priests and priestesses were continually in contact with each other because of their profession. The nature of their meetings included the social aspect of companionship and collegiate friendship. On the basis of archeological evidence, we can suppose that functions of the rooms in the Vestals' residence permitted the priestesses to offer sacerdotal banquets

²¹⁹ On state funds and the imperial treasury, see Rüpke, *Fasti Sacerdotum* (teil 3) 2005, 1457; *RE* VI 12, 1909 s.v. *fiscus*, 2886.

²²⁰ Horster 2007, 331.

²²¹ On the extravagant inauguration meal, see *Sen. Ep.* 95.41. On new priests offering meals for senior members, see Várhelyi 2010, 75.

²²² On the communal aspect of the gatherings, see Várhelyi 2010, 77. For the relief of the banqueting Vestals, see Fig. 6 in Appendix II. For more information about the relief and its interpretations, see, for example, Mekacher 2006, 156.

for the numerous participants.²²³ My examination is tangled around these questions: How were the finances of the Vestals arranged? What happened during cultural and economic crises, such as the third-century crisis? As previous studies have suggested, was there compensation for the priestesses' lost patrimony? And what were the sources of their income, i.e., how did the priestesses act as business women?

Stipendium Publicum

The sources report in detail the personal allowance that the Vestal virgins received from the state. This *stipendium publicum* is most commonly mentioned in the literary sources, and authors from the early imperial period through to the late-fourth century CE paid attention to the amount, purpose and justification of this payment. Three authors, Livy, Tacitus and Suetonius, discussed the early developments and practices regarding the *stipendium* during the early imperial era. First-century historian Livy described the development of the Vestal *ordo*, noting that in order for the priestesses to dedicate themselves entirely to the cult, they received maintenance from the state. He called the payment a *stipendium publicum*, a payment or wage granted by the state. From his text, one gets the impression that the *stipendium* was given to the priestesses as a collective maintenance.²²⁴ Livy also gives the reason for the practice, which he associates already with the early period of the Vestal-college. His choice of words, *stipendium*, is interesting since it was also used to describe the soldiers' annual or monthly pay for service.²²⁵

Suetonius and Tacitus narrated the details surrounding the imperial Vestals' financing. In his discussion of how the emperor Augustus increased the number and importance of priests, while also promoting them financially, Suetonius used the word *commoda*, which refers to a reward or a gift rather than to a money wage.²²⁶ Again the Vestals are mentioned in the plural and the economic

²²³ In the western side of the House of Vestals there is a large rectangular room facing the central courtyard. This room has usually been identified as *triclinium*. See fig. 1 in Appendix II. For the functions of *Atrium Vestae*, see Mekacher 2006, 96-97.

²²⁴ Liv. 1.20.3.1; *His ut adsiduae templi antistites essent stipendium de publico statuit; virginitate aliisque caerimoniis venerabiles ac sanctas fecit*. "That they might be perpetual priestesses of the temple, he assigned them a stipend from the public treasury, and by the rule of virginity and other observances invested them with awe and sanctity."

²²⁵ Soldiers' pay is referred to as *stipendium*; see *SHA Alex. Sev.* 53.9. On studying Livy and other authors with the close-reading method, see Wildfang 2006, 71.

²²⁶ Suet. *Aug.* 31.3. *Sacerdotum et numerum et dignitatem sed et commoda auxit, praecipue Vestalium virginum*. "He increased the number and honour of the priests, and also their rewards, in particular those of the Vestal virgins."

situation of an individual priestess is left unmentioned. Tacitus's *Annales* testimony enlarges our views through his discussion of the events during the emperor Tiberius. After discussing reforms concerning the *flamen Dialis*, Tacitus noted that the sum of two million sesterces was given for a newly elected priestess named Cornelia so that the priests would perform their religious duties with more enthusiasm. Tacitus informs us that this sum was voted (*decretum*) for Cornelia when she stepped into the place of the Vestal Scantia (in 23 CE).²²⁷ In this context, it was also reported that the empress and the Vestals were to be seated next to each other at public spectacles. Thus, Tacitus offered information about how the finances of an individual Vestal were handled, and how her career began with economic care provided by the state.

Two million sesterces was twice the sum required to gain the status of senator, and the amount was greater than the largest known civic donation to public institutions during the second century CE. Although some occasional donations mentioned in the sources exceeded the payment given to Cornelia, the amount of two million was nevertheless substantial.²²⁸ It unfortunately cannot be determined if this donation was given as a one-time subsidy, or if all new members were given equally handsome payments. Even so, Cornelia's case from the first century is an example of the size of imperial donations to the cult, and it is possible that succeeding emperors followed the custom presented by the emperor Tiberius. Tacitus certainly reported that there was a motive to make the priestly offices more appealing. The association of the empress with the Vestals, such that they shared seats in the theatre, seems to have been part of this campaign.

The Vestal Cornelia's case has raised attention among scholars – not least because the exact sum of money is mentioned, which is exceptional when it comes to the Vestals' finances. A recent theory of J. Rüpke concerning the episode suggests that the imposing sum of money and the cult's supposed financial difficulties are connected. The difficulties resulted from the bankruptcy of a certain Vibidius Virro, father of the Vestal Vibidia, who seems to have been in office at that point when Cornelia

²²⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 4.16. *Utque glisceret dignatio sacerdotum atque ipsis promptior animus foret ad capessendas caerimonias decretum Corneliae virgini, quae in locum Scantiae capiebatur, sestertium viciens, et quotiens Augusta theatrum introisset ut sedes inter Vestalium consideret.* “And to enhance the dignity of the priests and to increase their readiness to perform the ritual of the various cults, two million sesterces were voted to the Virgin Cornelia, who was being appointed to succeed Scantia; and Augusta, as often as she entered the theatre, was to take her place among the Vestals.”

²²⁸ On the two million sesterces as either a donation or associated with a stipend, see Clark 2001, 261 and note 93. Two million sesterces was also the sum that Tiberius is said to have donated to the future emperor Claudius; on this, see Suet. *Claud.* 6.2. Cassius Dio mentioned that members of the imperial house and other wealthy persons were to pay ten million sesterces to participate in the cult of Jupiter organized by the emperor Caligula. Cass. 59.28.5.

received her money.²²⁹ Vibidia's father was faced with scandalous impoverishment around the year 17 CE, and this unhappy turn impacted the cult in which his daughter was participating.²³⁰ Thus, it is implied that the money was financial aid given to the cult collectively, although it was Cornelia who received it.

If this theory is plausible, we should logically presume that the Vestals' birth families were somehow responsible for financing the cult, together with the state. However, this meant that the Vestals were dependent on their families' financial situation even after their *co-optatio* and inauguration. This was not the case. On the contrary, the law prevented them from having the right to inherit from their relatives; economic relations between the Vestal and her birth family were broken off.²³¹ It is unlikely, then, that the financial impoverishment of a Vestal's father affected the cult in general, since the Vestals could not inherit from their parents, much less be dependent on them economically.²³² Furthermore, five years had passed between the impoverishment of Vibidia's father and the large payment to the Vestal Cornelia in 23 CE; if the two were linked, why did the emperor not intervene earlier in the Vestals' supposed financial difficulties?

The case of the Vestal Cornelia and her two million sesterces leaves the question open whether all Vestals were given the sum of money when they entered the office or if Cornelia was a special case. She came from the old and distinguished *gens Cornelia*, which had its own special customs and the members of which achieved many sacral offices as well as prominent political positions.²³³ I propose here that the various Vestals were not perhaps in equal position at all, but rather that their significance

²²⁹ Family relations can be verified from the Athenian inscription *CIA III1 875 = IG III1, 3532*. The inscription *CIL VI 28768* also refers to the family of Vibidia. Rüpke's suggestion, see Rüpke 2008, 630, no. 1299; 951, no. 3485.

²³⁰ For the proposition that the cult had financial difficulties because of the bankruptcy of the Vestal's father, see Rüpke 2005, 904 (in German) and also Rüpke 2008, 630, no. 1299. Indeed, the affair of the senator Vibidius Virro stirred up emotions in the court and senate. He had been accepted into the senate at the beginning of the century as a *homo novus* who had to consolidate his position and work harder to get accepted in the eyes of the old nobility. However, according to Tacitus, he was released from the order along with other senators who had squandered their money for luxurious and frivolous lifestyles. For the case, see Tac. *Ann.* 2.48. For more about Sex. Vibidius Virro, see Syme 1949, 17.

²³¹ Gell. *NA* 1.12.18. Furthermore, in the Commentaries on the Twelve Tables compiled by Labeo we find this passage: "A Vestal virgin is not heir to any intestate person, nor is anyone her heir, should she die without making a will, but her property, they say, reverts to the public treasury. The legal principle involved is an unsettled question. *Praeterea in commentariis Labeonis, quae ad duodecim tabulas composuit, ita scriptum est: "Virgo Vestalis neque heres est cuiquam intestato, neque intestatae quisquam, sed bona eius in publicum redigi aiunt. Id quo iure fiat, quaeritur.* My purpose is to study this testimony of Aulus Gellius more closely when I discuss further the Vestals' economic independence. At this point I have only examined the source of their income.

²³² For this view, see also Wildfang 2006, 70-72.

²³³ For example, members of the family were buried by inhumation, not by cremation which was traditionally the Roman custom before the second century CE.

in the *ordo* was determined by their family background, social prestige, and wealth. This was probable if the payment was donated only once for this particular Vestal, while the other priestesses – previous or succeeding – were not similarly honoured.²³⁴ Thus, a Vestal's family connections and the relationships between her family and the emperor might have resulted in extra favour for those priestesses who represented some particular family. This is predicated on the fact that the Vestals were separated financially, and otherwise too, from their families. It also considers the idea that the Vestals were anonymous once they left their families, which embeds a problematic interpretation of their status.²³⁵ Regarding the Roman system, which always underlined a person's familial background, family ties and name really mattered for the Vestals. In the end, when considering Tacitus's style and detailed notices, it can be assumed that he would have narrated other donations to other Vestals if there were such events. Cornelia's case is thus unique, and therefore I suggest that a donation of this size was a one-off case tied to the special status of the *Cornelii*.

Although the third-century historian Cassius Dio ignored Augustan developments concerning the priestesses' economic reward, he did refer to events of the first century, narrating that Augustus gave the residence of the *rex sacrorum* (that is *domus publica*) to the Vestal virgins for their use.²³⁶ In my view, this act also improved the financial well-being of the priestesses. Similarly, the Antonine emperors extended and decorated the *Aedes Vestae* considerably, which ideally also improved the economic status of the priestesses.²³⁷ Cassius Dio perhaps saw it fitting to emphasize Augustan improvements in the priestesses' residential area since it was a current issue in his own time.²³⁸ After the Severans, the economic crisis set the tone for the later third century. In the late-fourth century, there was also discussion of withdrawing the Vestals' economic support. These matters are examined next, including the impact of the economic crisis on their finances.

²³⁴ This idea of the Vestals' unequal position being connected to their family background arose during a conversation with Professor Katariina Mustakallio, whom I thank for her ideas and propositions.

²³⁵ The idea that the Vestals represented the cult and the state of Rome once they became priestesses – and not their birth families – was presented by Staples in *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins* (1998). Also, Wildfang considers the state as the *locus familiae* of the priestesses. See Wildfang 2006, 70-72. These two ideas are plausible as such, but they give only a one-sided interpretation of the Vestals' social position and the handling of their finances.

²³⁶ Cass. Dio 54.27.3. When Iulius Caesar was *pontifex maximus*, he still lived in the forum but Augustus did not want to move from his Palatine residence. The *domus publica* was separated only by a wall from the House of Vestals. In such circumstances, it was natural to attach the buildings together. *LTUR* s.v. *Aedes Vestae*.

²³⁷ Testimonies concerning the Julio-Claudian era give us permission to assume that the Vestals' financial issues were handled with care. We do not have contrary evidence to suppose differently. However, argumentation *ex silentio* is always a weak one and evidence proving some continuous practice concerning their finances is missing. We also do not have reason to suppose that the economic situation of the Vestas would have suffered or changed during the late first century and particularly the second century, a stable and prosperous time for the empire.

²³⁸ The Severans had to take care of massive reconstruction work after a destructive fire incident in 192 CE.

Vestals' Finances during the Times of Crisis

A question arises whether the unstable social development and unpredictable power-struggles for the imperial throne during the third century decreased the finances of the priestly colleges. Considering especially the college of the Arval brethren and interruption of their production of inscriptions, it was suggested in the earlier research that this was a sign of their fall into depression or that their activities were reduced. These conclusions were based on obvious changes from the earlier tradition, such as their habit of composing inscriptions after annual celebrations of Dea Dia. However, their value has since been reassessed and the alleged decline seen in a different light.²³⁹ In general, it is surprising how very few testimonies there are about the expenses and economic situation *per se* of the priestly colleges.²⁴⁰ In the case of the Vestals, we have to trace their third-century financial situation indirectly from epigraphic sources, and from the written texts of late antiquity. The fact that we have a continuous succession of chief Vestals from the third century, and that they all received honorary inscriptions, seems to indicate their well-established position in society. Their ability to act as patronesses also reveals that they had possessions and wealth. Whether this economic power was only their personal wealth, or whether their college also had communal funds, cannot be resolved undisputedly. Most likely the priestesses had both personal possessions and funds that were held collectively for their use so that they could pay various costs.²⁴¹

The Vestals' monetary issues are discussed again in the late fourth century, when Q. Aurelius Symmachus, the *pontifex maior*, Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and the Christian author Prudentius debated, or argued, whether the Vestals should have this prerogative at all. This time, the tone of the discussion was severe, and the entire existence of the Vestal-college was at stake. While the earlier historians (Livius, Suetonius and Tacitus) used different formulations when referring to the money that

²³⁹ Studies about the financial issues of the different priesthoods during the third century are relatively sparse. The case of the *fratres Arvales* is an illustrative example of how scholars blended the third-century crisis and the economic situation of priesthood. For a long time it was estimated that the Arval brethren fell into crisis in the mid-third century and that their cultic activities came to an end. As J. Scheid discusses, the interruption of their production of inscriptions after 241 CE and the alleged evidence of the cut to their yearly allowance in fragmentary inscriptions (*CIL VI 2114*) supposedly confirmed their complicated financial situation. Scheid refers here to the studies of Mommsen and Wissowa. However, new interpretations of the inscriptions have changed these conclusions. The *fratres Arvales* did not suffer from budgetary cuts or activity suppression, as Scheid demonstrates. For the finances of the Arval brethren and the distorted conclusions of their situation in the mid-third century, see analysis of Scheid 1990, 515-516.

²⁴⁰ For the advantages (including economic) of the priesthoods, see especially Paschoud 1967, 79-87; Bodei-Gigliani 1977, 39-43.

²⁴¹ For a thorough analysis of the Vestals' private and communal wealth, see Wildfang 2006, 70-72.

the Vestals received, the terminology now changed, and a modern reader must be careful in interpreting the meaning behind the fourth-century debate.²⁴² The debaters refer to *alimenta publica* (maintenance by the state, charity), *subsidia* (support, relief), *dona* (present, grant), and *pretia* (reward, money).²⁴³ Essentially, their debate over the financing concerned the fact that the Christian emperor had withdrawn the prerogatives of the cult and the priestesses, or was about to do so. In the capacity of *pontifex Vestae*, Symmachus was against this development, claiming that the prerogatives, which had been rendered for the Vestals from time immemorial, should be given to them in future too; otherwise, he claimed, the well-being and continuity of the state itself would be jeopardized.

Judging from their choice of words and the tone of the debate, it seems that the priestesses' financial prerogatives continued rather untouched at that point. Symmachus explicitly justified the Vestals' financial privileges by the fact that the ancestors (*lex parentum*) had decreed them. In my view, the debate itself is an indication that the Vestals' finances had remained in place until at this point, or at least that the state continued to take care of the priestesses. Even during the third century, when economic development declined, the cult was maintained so that the Vestals were able to act as *patronae*.²⁴⁴ The discussion between Symmachus and Ambrose gives the impression that the Vestals received funding from the state treasury in particular, and not from individual patrons. If individual supporters had arranged the cult's funding, the matter would hardly have concerned imperial and ecclesiastical officials, such as Ambrose, at all. Thus, I argue that from the early imperial era, and throughout the third century, the Vestals enjoyed state-provided maintenance, which then became threatened in the late fourth century. The economic decline of the third century crisis did not directly

²⁴² Although the Vestals were professional priestesses, it is complicated to see their economic compensation as a wage; it was rather a reward. Since Roman nobility did not think highly of paid labor, it is rather challenging to think of the Vestals' payment from this point of view. Thus, in order to understand the purpose of the payment, we must refrain from putting the Vestals' money into a modern framework by classifying the money as a salary or wage. For example, word *stipendium* itself is a carefully selected expression to describe the payment. It reminds one of a reward given to soldiers, and contains connotations of payments granted regularly for services to Rome. By contrast, the late-fourth century writer Ambrose called the Vestals' reward an *alimenta*, which refers to material assistance, such as food or even charity.

²⁴³ *alimenta publica*; Amb. *Ep.* 10.73.13; *pretia* Ambr. *De Virgin.* 1.4.15; *subsidia* Symm *Rel.* 3.7.11-15; *dona* Prudent. *C. Symm.* 2.1004. The bishop Ambrose, who was against rewarding the heathen virgins, wrote also about their *emolumentum*, which refers to an advantage and benefit; see Amb. *Ep.* 18.3. Symmachus saw the Vestals' money as a necessary payment, while Ambrose seemed to think that it was useless to give such reward to the materialistic virgins, since there existed more motivated virgins (in other words, Christian virgins). Although we are prevented from knowing exactly how the Vestals' economic circumstances were arranged in late antiquity, I suggest that Ambrose's choice of words, *alimenta* and *emolumentum*, give a hint of declining financial support that had shifted simply to merely funding obligatory needs and equipments. Alternatively, Ambrose may have wished to portray the priestesses themselves as an unnecessary expense who used the resources of the state.

²⁴⁴ The opponents complained about the Vestals' unnecessary advantages and blamed them for living in excessive luxury. Ambrosius specifically stated that the Vestals' lifestyle was not suitable for Christians. This, however, does not tell us about the Vestals' economic circumstances, or whether they enjoyed wealth and luxury in reality.

impact the priestesses' economic wellbeing; rather, it was a change in imperial politics that altered their situation. Next, my discussion proceeds to explore how their situation as persons separated from normal family connections left the Vestals in a vulnerable position.

Compensation for the Loss of Patrimony?

Gellius quoted jurist Labeo, who declared that a Vestal did not inherit and was not an heiress and, by the same token, no one inherited from her. And further, if they did not have a will their entire fortune went to the state (although he was uncertain which law applied).²⁴⁵ Already decades earlier, Cicero had discussed the *lex Voconia* and was concerned about the inability of women to inherit. He asked, why could a woman not have her own money, and further, if a Vestal could have an heir, why could her mother not have this right too?²⁴⁶ These sources acknowledge a Vestal's right to make a will and to administer her possessions. Cicero seemed to think of the Vestals as exemplars whose status could (or perhaps should) be adapted into larger usage. By contrast, Gellius emphasized the fact that a Vestal was not an heir and outside the usual family structure; in other words, she was an exception in Roman society.

The Vestals' loss of patrimony and their economic separation from their families have been interpreted in many ways. It seems that the procedure did not depend on priestesses' sacral purposes, or at least not entirely.²⁴⁷ However, the practice of returning their property to the state seems to have been the crucial issue for Labeo. It was only a later development in Roman law to return the priestesses' estates to the state.²⁴⁸ It was the legal clause or practices which Labeo addressed, not the Vestals' situation as such. Gellius did not specifically inform us why this practice was applied to the Vestals, but there are modern theories on the subject. The Vestals' extraordinary character outside the family institution seems to offer a foundation for scholars' explanations. As they were left in a vacuum and outside the family following their inauguration, says R. L. Wildfang, the state replaced the family and received the Vestals' inheritance instead.²⁴⁹ Likewise, the purpose of the Vestals'

²⁴⁵ Gell. NA 1.12.18. *Praeterea in commentariis Labeonis, quae ad duodecim tabulas composuit, ita scriptum est: "Virgo Vestalis neque heres est cuiquam intestato, neque intestatae quisquam, sed bona eius in publicum redigi aiunt. Id quo iure fiat, quaeritur."*

²⁴⁶ Cic. *Rep.* 3.17.10.

²⁴⁷ See Gardner 1986, 23-24.

²⁴⁸ Guizzi 1968, 166-67.

²⁴⁹ Wildfang 2006, 65-66.

reward has been discussed and its significance has given rise to several theories and propositions. M. Beard suggested, for example, that a newly elected priestess received money as a kind of a dowry, as if she was to be seen as the *pontifex maximus*'s bride.²⁵⁰ On the other hand, J. F. Gardner argued that even if the inauguration ceremony resembled Roman weddings in many ways, seeing the Vestals as brides of the emperor-*pontifex maximus* poses difficulties. Instead, the money should be rather seen as compensation for the loss of the Vestals' patrimony.²⁵¹ Livy contended that public maintenance was given to the Vestals so that they would be entirely free to take care of the *sacra*. No contemporary sources refer to ideas that the priestesses' reward was compensation for the loss of their patrimony, or that it was a symbolic dowry for a bride-like priestess. Instead, as we have seen, the discussion in late antiquity seems to emphasize that the money was given to the Vestals as compensation for their virginity.²⁵² On the grounds of this discussion, I consider that it was their extraordinary way of life, and their sacrifice in dedicating their lives to Vesta, that demanded compensation.

It is challenging to separate the causes and effects when studying closely the questions of why the Vestals were left without patrimony and how we should interpret the money they received. Perhaps the issue becomes more comprehensible when we consider their special status. A Vestal's status comprised her sacral character and the priestly profession, which were intertwined as one identity. The priestesses' separation from their birth-families thus had to be definitive for the sake of their identity as a Vestal. This, in turn, reveals how essential the cult of Vesta was for the Romans, in that they created an entirely separate category of professional priestesses for it. When considering financial issues, it seems as if there was a purpose in keeping the Vestals' families away from the Vestal institution and its finances. If the families had the opportunity to take charge of the cult's finances, this would have increased the possibility of their supremacy over the religious and political leader (*pontifex maximus*). As the priestesses acted without the *tutela* and had full legal capacity, they also managed their finances independently. To be more precise, financial reward from the state reinforced the Vestals' independent capacity and the function of the cult institution. In my view, discussions about the Vestals' finances and wealth, and in particular the late-antiquity disputes about

²⁵⁰ Beard 1980, 15.

²⁵¹ Gardner 1986, 24.

²⁵² On the Vestals' virginity and its value, see Ambr. *Ep.* 18.11–12. These late-antiquity discussions reflect the thoughts of early Christians who had their own agenda when discussing pagan religions. It is difficult to ascertain if theirs was a generally accepted idea – that the Vestals were entitled to compensation for their virginity – among non-Christian circles. However, we have seen how the defenders of traditional religion considered it absolutely necessary that the priestesses should receive their reward. Thus, public maintenance was profoundly entangled with the Vestals' professionalism and their office holding – and their virginity.

their state-provided maintenance, were connected to their independent status. A wealthy group of priestesses not under the control of family or husband was a potentially suspicious and dangerous group of female citizens. As we will see, they also gathered wealth in many forms and actively ran their own businesses. Thus, while the Vestals' identity as independent women and important cultic professionals evoked respect, it also generated some concern about these women who lived outside the normal family system.

Agri and Arca – Other Sources of Income

For the Roman nobility, estates were an important form of property. Fathers of candidate Vestals were required to own landed property in Italy.²⁵³ This requirement referred directly to the family's economic status and was probably intended as an insurance against the possibility that foreign families would attempt to place their daughters in the cult. There are strong indications that individual Vestals also occasionally had landed property outside the city of Rome.²⁵⁴ Since the Vestals' legal status put them in a position in which they were free to dispose of their property as they wished, and since they were considered to be reliable public figures, they had many excellent opportunities to increase their property holdings and to engage in business. Furthermore, they could also increase their personal wealth through heritages or donations. Although they were not legally entitled to inherit from their families, nothing hindered the priestesses from receiving legacy even from relatives.

Information also survives about the economics of the Vestals' college. In the early imperial period, the emperor Tiberius left money for the Vestals in his will; in this case, the Vestals were considered to be the collective inheritors of the deceased emperor.²⁵⁵ The possessions of an individual Vestal and those of the cult organization were therefore somewhat separate, and as such they are studied here as the separate issues. Above I presented the idea that the Vestals were not equal when it came to the

²⁵³ Gell. *NA* 1.12.8.

²⁵⁴ In the late republican era, a certain Licinia, *virgo Vestalis*, bargained for her suburban villa with Crassus, who did not give up until a pleasant villa was his. Her case is an example of the possessions of individual Vestals before the imperial era. For the Vestal Licinia, see Plut. *Vit. Crass.* 1.2.

²⁵⁵ Suet. *Tib.* 76.1.6. The *pontifex maximus*, together with the pontifical college, was indisputably the only authority supervising the Vestals. One could interpret the action of Emperor Tiberius as a father figure rewarding his family members. I prefer to refrain from calling the priestesses the emperor's daughters, wives or sisters, however, because doing so leads away from the topic under discussion. Nevertheless, the Vestals could be seen as associate members of the imperial family, since they watched over the imperial hearth. Thus, as the priestesses inherited from the emperor, their close ties with the imperial family were strengthened further.

granting of the state *stipendium*, and that a priestess's family background could raise her to a more respected position than the others. The same applies to their wealth and economic influence. Thus, my discussion starts with an assumption that the priestesses were not automatically wealthy in their private life, although the cult organization and the *stipendium* secured their economy.

Landed property generally appears in the sources where the possessions of the Vestal community are discussed together with the possessions of the priestly colleges. Siculus Flaccus, who was one of the land surveyors, described their possessions as follows: *The priestly colleges as well as the (Vestal) virgins possess the fields (agros) and they also possess the certain territories and certain areas, which are dedicated to the religious rites, and in which there are also the groves, and in some occasion also the shrines and temples. Sometimes these areas seem to be limitless/without boundaries but their boundaries are written inside them (inside the temples).*²⁵⁶ Other priests also had landed property, then. The second-century grammarian Sextus Festus, for example, noted that the *augures* had land in Veii where they occasionally retreated.²⁵⁷ These sources imply to the practice that the fortune of the different cults came from the landed property, which supplied income continuously. These estates were left to the temples, including the cult of Vesta, by a will, and in the course of the centuries, their fortune increased considerably.²⁵⁸

Another source from late antiquity clarifies further the Vestals' possessions and their state maintenance, giving us detailed information about different financial prerogatives and economic reliefs that the priestesses had previously enjoyed. Symmachus described in detail the Vestals' situation concerning inheritances, stressing in particular that they did not have the right to inherit property in land (farms or estates) *praedium*.²⁵⁹ He was referring to the wealth of the Vestals' families in particular, and to the fact that they were not able to inherit their fathers' landed property. In an earlier passage, he spoke about the property bequeathed to the Vestal virgins and ministers by the

²⁵⁶ It is not known when Siculus Flaccus wrote his texts about land surveying and the distribution of landed property, but it is estimated that he lived during the reign of the Emperors Trajan or Hadrian. Sic. Flacc. 162L: *Collegia sacerdotum itemque virgines habent agros et territoria quaedam etiam determinata et quaedam aliquibus sacris dedicata, in eis etiam lucos, in quibusdam etiam aedes templaque, quos agros quasue territoriorum formas aliquotiens comperimus extremis finibus comprehensas sine ulla mesurali linea, modum tamen inesse scriptum.*

²⁵⁷ Festus 204, 32L, s.v. *Obscus*. The late ancient historian Orosius wrote about the landed property of Roman priests, referring to all priestly colleges. See Oros. 5.18.27.

²⁵⁸ For property of the pagan cults, see Cameron 2011, 41.

²⁵⁹ Symm. *Relat.* 3.14 *Capiunt legata liberti, servis testamentorum iusta commoda non negantur, tantum nobiles virgines et fatalium sacrorum ministri excludentur praediis hereditate quaesitis?*

wills of dying persons.²⁶⁰ Thus, this implies that the Vestals did have this kind of property, despite the legal restrictions concerning their inheritance. However, it seems that the practice of receiving landed property by wills was changed during the time when Symmachus wrote about it in the late fourth century. The emperor, who Symmachus is addressing, narrowed down the Vestals' opportunities to increase their wealth.²⁶¹ It seems evident that the cultural changes – Christianization in particular – gradually eroded the priestesses' financial prerogatives.

In addition to landed property and donations, the priestesses also had other economic opportunities. There is some detailed information about a special money chest that they controlled together. *Arca virginium Vestalium* was a money fund or a chest in which the cash collected as penalties or fines was stored. The Vestals' *arca* is mentioned in first- through third-century inscription sources. A similar practice is found also with the pontifical college *arca pontificium*, which is mentioned in several inscriptions in the same era.²⁶² One of the latest mentions of the pontifical money treasury comes from Symmachus, who was in charge of the college.²⁶³ The priesthoods — such as *fratres Arvales*, *Laurentium Lavinatum* and *Seviri Augustales* — also had their own *arca* and are reported to have used their own money to pay for rituals.²⁶⁴ However, more often there is no detailed information about the purposes for which the money was used, and in some cases it is difficult to separate the money deposits of the different priesthoods from the state treasury. Furthermore, information about state finances in general is scanty for the third century, especially concerning the purposes for which the state treasury was used. One example comes from the late third century, when the emperor Aurelius (270-275) stated that he was ready to pay the costs of cultic rituals from the state treasury, *arca publica*.²⁶⁵

The *arca virginium Vestalium* is mentioned particularly in those inscriptions that discuss the penalties or fines assigned for disturbing graves. The pontifical *arca* or the *arca publicum* were occasionally mentioned in the same context.²⁶⁶ The *arca virginium Vestalium* appears more often in connection

²⁶⁰ Symm. *Relat.* 3.13. *Agros etiam virginibus et ministris deficientium voluntate legatos fiscus retentat.*

²⁶¹ For interpreting Symmachus, see Cameron 2011, 41-42.

²⁶² One of the latest testimonies of the finances of the *pontifices* comes from 382 CE; see *CIL* VI 2158.

²⁶³ Symm. *Ep.* 68. Letter to his brother Celsinus Titianus.

²⁶⁴ *CIL* VI 2028; *CIL* VI 2197; *Arca sevirium Augustalium*: *CIL* IX 4691; X 6677; XII 4354; XIV 367; V 4428.

²⁶⁵ *SHA Aurel.* 20.8. The emperor informed his *praefectus aerarii* about the matter.

²⁶⁶ The pontifical college was responsible for taking care of the burials and it also regulated activities in the burial grounds. The responsibility for collecting the fees for disturbing graves can be understood as belonging to this context. See Van Haepere 2002, 328-29.

with the pontifical treasury than separately. This might be the reason why it was suggested at one point that the Vestals' treasury was merged with that of the *pontifices*.²⁶⁷ However, inscriptions mentioning the Vestal virgins (*virginibus Vestalibus*) as the sole authority to receive the fees collected from offences do survive.²⁶⁸ Judging from this material, we can conclude that the Vestals were considered, at least occasionally, as officials who not only received the payments but also maintained the treasury in which the payments were stored. Special officials, *antescolarii virginum*, are mentioned in one inscription that also refers to the *pontifices*. The existence of special officials indicates the organized structure of the Vestals' activity as payment collectors.²⁶⁹

Unlike the pontiffs, the Vestals' role in this business concerning graves and graveyards is surprising and more difficult to connect to any of their other cultic duties. Nevertheless, the Vestals were considered to be the keepers of many sacred objects, including the Palladium from Troy, and storing and keeping sacral objects were their main responsibilities; perhaps graves fell in the same category.²⁷⁰ The priestesses certainly enjoyed high esteem among the population, and this made them reliable officials. Perhaps their responsibility for collecting the penalties/fines can be connected to their general role as the keepers of important objects. Taking care of matters connected to burial places was traditionally entrusted to the pontifical college to which the Vestals belonged. Epigraphical evidence gives the impression that the Vestals' money chest was mentioned more commonly in the first- and second-century inscriptions; by the third century, such references were rare. This development is showcased in the table below, in which I have gathered all the inscriptions mentioning the *arca virginium vestalium*, either alone or in connection to the *pontiffs*.²⁷¹ We can suppose that perhaps at some point during the third century their treasuries were merged into one, but unfortunately there is no information to confirm this.

²⁶⁷ T. Mommsen originally suggested that the *arca Virginium Vestalium* was merged into that of the pontiffs. See van Haepelen 2002, 328-29.

²⁶⁸ *CIL* VI 5175. Also *CIL* VI 27593; 29923; 29934 and *CIL* XIV 1644 from Ostia and *AE* 2004, 280 refer to the Vestal virgins as the sole authority to receive these fees.

²⁶⁹ For the *antescolarii virginum*, see *CIL* VI 14672.

²⁷⁰ For the Vestals' role as the keepers of the sacred objects see Wildfang 2006.

²⁷¹ See the table of inscriptions below.

Table 2. Epitaphs mentioning the Vestals as receivers of penalty fees.

| Inscription | Priestly Officials | Date | Receiver/Dedicator | Amount of money |
|---|--|---|---|----------------------|
| <i>CIL VI 5175</i> | <i>virginibus Vestalibus</i> | Julio-Claudian era to the 2 nd century | M. Cipro Trepto <i>filio pientissimo</i> /M. Cipi ^{us} Hermes | HS XX milia n(ummum) |
| <i>CIL VI 10848</i> | <i>Vestalibus et aerario populi Romani</i> | 2 nd to mid-3 rd century | Aelia Arsinoe, Aelius Hilarus, Aelius Timotheus Iunior, Publius Antonius Arsinous, Publius Antonius Marinus | HS L milia n(ummum) |
| <i>CIL VI 13618</i> | <i>Vestalibus et aerario populi Romani</i> | 2 nd century | L. Boionius Gentilis | HS XX milia n(ummum) |
| <i>CIL VI 13822</i> | <i>Vestalibus et aerario populi Romani</i> | 3 rd century | Caecilia Heliada | HS XX milia n(ummum) |
| <i>CIL VI 14672</i> | <i>pontificibus et antescolaris virginum</i> | second half of the 2 nd century | Cerellia Fortunata <i>coniugi carissimae</i> / M. Antonius Encolpus | HS L milia n(ummum) |
| <i>CIL VI 17965a</i> = <i>CIL VI 29935</i> | <i>pontificibus et virginibus</i> | mid-1 st to 3 rd century | Eu[t]y[chi]di <i>coniugi optimae</i> /C. Flavius[...] <i>ro[.]ulus</i> | HS XX milia n(ummum) |
| <i>CIL VI 26942</i> | <i>pontificibus et virginibus</i> | 1 st – 2 nd century | P. Sullius Zoticus, Sullia Nice | ? |
| <i>CIL VI 27593</i> | <i>virginibus</i> | 2 nd century | | |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| | | | Trebellia Tertia/Siliae L. | HS X milia n(ummum) |
| <i>CIL VI 29803</i> | <i>vir (---?) Vesta(---?)</i> | ? | Aprilis | ? |
| <i>CIL VI 29923</i> | <i>Vestalibus</i> | 2 nd century | Fragmentary | HS L milia n(ummum) |
| <i>CIL VI 29934</i> | <i>virginibus Vestalibus</i> | 2 nd century | Fragmentary | ? |
| <i>CIL XIV 1644</i> | <i>virginibus Vestalibus</i> | ? | Gn...lib(ertus) Successus | ? |
| <i>AE 1920, 107=AE 2004, 280</i> | <i>virginibus Vestalibus</i> | 2 nd century | Antistia Fortunata, Q. Minucius | HS XX milia n(ummum) |
| <i>AE 2004, 268</i> | <i>virginibus Vestalibus</i> | 3 rd century | Fragmentary | ? |
| <i>NSA-1933-518</i> | <i>virginibus Vestalibus</i> | Fragmentary | Fragmentary | ? |
| <i>AllRoma-05a, p 101</i> | <i>virginibus Vestalibus</i> | Fragmentary | Fragmentary | ? |

As the table demonstrates, fines for offending graveyards generally ranged from 20 000 to 50 000 sesterces.²⁷² Special professionals, the *antesolarii virginum*, actually collected the fines, indicating that collecting was organized work. It is difficult to estimate, though, how often these offences occurred, and how much money the Vestals received, for example, each year. Annual support from the state and income from landed property, by contrast, were regular sources of income. The Vestals had also one additional way to make money. At the beginning of the second century, when significant renovation work was carried out in the *Atrium Vestae*, small shopping stands were added to the building's flank.²⁷³ These small stands probably produced income from rents for the priestesses. Altogether, then, the Vestals received handsome annual income, although some sources of money were not as regular as others.

Tabellae Immunitatis – Exemption from Taxation

The Vestals handled great sums of money, and exemption from taxation increased their wealth even further. In Roman culture, tax exemption could be granted to individuals or entire towns and provinces.²⁷⁴ Priests' exemption from taxes was typically tied to special occasions. During the early republic, the *augures* and pontifical priests did not pay taxes in wartime, and when they continued to avoid doing so after a war was over their conduct caused angry opposition.²⁷⁵ This suggests that priests were not usually exempted from taxation, and raised opposition if they tried to behave as if they were. The Vestals' blanket exemption from this civic obligation thus appears to be a rather rare exception. In other words, exemption from taxes was not a regular privilege of Roman priests/priestesses. Whether the privilege was applied automatically to all Vestals at all times, thus deserves a closer look.

²⁷² For more about the payments, see Mekacher 2006, 41.

²⁷³ Mekacher 2006, 102; Scott 2009, 67, 69.

²⁷⁴ *RE* band. 9, halbband 17, 1914, 1134- 1136 s.v.*immunitas*. In the Roman world, taxation could have different forms, such as taxation of certain goods or land (*tributum*) or taxation per capitation (poll-tax), which caused opposition all around the empire. Those individuals freed from *tributum* included, for example, boys who were under the control of a guardian and women who were not in a situation of *patria potestas* or under the *manus* of their husbands. Retiring veterans were also freed from taxation. The poorest part of the population was exempted from *tributum*, which refers to personal taxation. The *munus* pl. *munera* (*munera personalia*) signifies service and duty performed out of obligation to the fatherland. Exemptions from this burdensome obligation (*munera personalia*) were also made for certain individuals, such as the *senatores* in Rome and for persons with three living children (across the rest of Italy the number of children was four, while in the provinces it was five). Although *munus* was voluntary, a person could be exempted from performing it and the obligations were avoided wherever possible.

²⁷⁵ Liv. 33.42.4.

The Vestals' situation concerning taxes is clearest from epigraphical evidence; literary evidence, by contrast, is silent on the matter. The priestesses' special prerogative of being *immunis* was declared on small tablets called *tabellae immunitatis* that were apparently attached to their possessions. These tablets were often made from bronze and were designed with dovetail handles on the side; generally these plates are called *tabula ansata* because of their form. Since the privilege of being tax-exempt apparently depended on the will of the *pontifex maximus*, we cannot conclude definitively whether a blanket privilege had been granted to all Vestals, or if it was granted separately to individual priestesses.²⁷⁶ The first *tabella* referring to the Vestals' tax exemption dates to the beginning of the second century. This bronze plate was found at the *ager Tusculanus* near Rome in the early eighteenth century.²⁷⁷ The tablet declared the privileges of Calpurnia Praetextata, who was *virgo Vestalis maxima* during the Trajanic period.²⁷⁸

Tablets also survive for at least two more Vestals, if not three. A plate labeling the possessions of the second-century Vestal Sossia Maxima was found also in early eighteenth century.²⁷⁹ There is, unfortunately, no indication of the kind of property to which the tablet was attached. Another uncertain case is the plate of Bellicia Modesta, who was either a second-century Vestal or from the Severan era.²⁸⁰ The practice of attaching a *tabulae immunitatis* to the Vestals' property continued to be the custom in the third century. The chief Vestal Flavia Publicia L. f. is mentioned in a bronze tablet declaring that she was exempted from taxation.²⁸¹ Her period of leadership falls into the mid-third century onwards. It seems probable that she was in power as late as the 270s.²⁸² New archeological discoveries have recently shed light on her economic activities as chief Vestal and her exemption from taxation. In 2007, researchers found a bronze *tabellae immunitatis* in Turrus Libisonis in northern Sardinia (modern Porto Torres). This buckle was apparently attached to Flavia Publicia's

²⁷⁶ See Santinelli, 1904 see esp. p. 75.

²⁷⁷ *CIL* VI 2146=*CIL* XIV 4120, 1= *CIL* XV 7127.

²⁷⁸ *FS* no. 1046. She was a niece of the previous chief Vestal Licinia Praetextata Crassi f., whose governance began most probably after 92 CE, following the execution of the Vestal Cornelia.

²⁷⁹ *FS* no. 3120. Her family origins remain unsettled; see Mekacher 2006, 117.

²⁸⁰ *CIL* VI 2148. It has been suspected that the bronze plate was a modern reproduction of an ancient model, but the accuracy of this speculation could not be proven.

²⁸¹ *CIL* VI 2147.

²⁸² The earliest firm evidence of Flavia Publicia as the leading Vestal comes from the year 247; see *CIL* VI 32414. She was venerated again in 257 (*CIL* VI 32416). In *CIL* VI 32404, the dating is uncertain (254, 255 or 257 CE), but it can be affirmed in the 250s in any case. Thanks to the dating in the inscriptions, we also know that the succeeding *virgo Vestalis maxima* (Coelia Claudiana) gained the leadership no later than 279 CE. However, it cannot be stated undisputedly that Flavia Publicia remained the *virgo Vestalis maxima* until this point.

small ship or boat.²⁸³ Recent studies have discussed the discovery's significance, and what it reveals about her life, family relations, and activities.²⁸⁴ What might the Sardinian discovery tell us about the social influence of this third century Vestal?

The social and economic situation in Sardinia followed the general developments seen elsewhere in the empire. After a prosperous and peaceful second century, social and political crisis hindered development.²⁸⁵ The mid-third century is generally considered to have been the most critical time for the empire until in the 270s, when the emperor Aurelian restored peace.²⁸⁶ Flavia Publicia's period in office (from the mid-third century to the 270s) very probably meant that her activities on the island of Sardinia took place during this particularly unstable era. The questions that remain concern the type of activities in which she was engaged on the island, and whether her small ship was used for business and trade or for amusement and leisure. Furthermore, regarding the Vestal's ship and its exemption from taxation, it is important to notice here that, according to Roman regulations, the *navicularii* and shipmasters were granted an exemption from taxes after five years of operation. Thus, the *immunitas* was applied to certain occupational groups that were useful and important to the state.²⁸⁷ The Vestal's small ship, provided that this *naucella* could be classified in the same category as *navicularii*, was exempted from taxes and so must have been operating already for at least five years. It is unknown if the exemption from taxes was allocated to the cargo, or to some other activity in which Flavia's ship participated. Either way, it demonstrated her privileged position, and increased her social influence and honorary position. No matter what purpose her *navicella* had, it was important that the Vestal's name and privilege was displayed publicly. Furthermore, considering the

²⁸³ *AE* 2010, 620. The plate includes a small image of a veiled female, who has the *vittae* hanging from her neck. Apparently this represents a Vestal. Have we here an image of Flavia Publicia herself?

²⁸⁴ Gasperetti, 2009, 266-277; Mayer i Olivé, 2011, 141-157.

²⁸⁵ After the turbulent first century, Sardinia's socio-political situation was apparently more favourable during the second-century *pax Romana*. However, epigraphical and archeological evidence suggests that during the late Severan era, there was a significant shift towards unrest and crisis. There is evidence, for example, of a military presence from the mid-third century until the end of the century. Uncovered coin hoards, which include coins minted by the emperors Gallienus (253-268), Claudius II (268-270) and Probus (276-282), imply unrest on the island. Those emperors seem to have tried to stabilize the situation in order to guarantee the transport of goods to the army. For the socio-political situation in Sardinia during the imperial era, see Rowland 2001, 94-102. Because of the uneasiness of the native Sardinians, Augustus had to remove the island from senatorial governance and take the area under close surveillance. This resulted in a heavier presence on the island of imperial troops; administrators were also military men rather than civilians. The same development occurred during the late first century, when Vespasian was compelled to reclassify Sardinia as the emperor's province, instead of senatorial. Gallienus ruled in the 260s and Claudius II and Probus in the 270s.

²⁸⁶ In the mid-third century, the in-migration of Germanic tribes, particularly in the west but occasionally in the east, caused troubles for the emperors. During the emperor Gallienus (253-268), the province of Gallia separated temporarily from the empire and Palmyra also detached from Rome's control until 273.

²⁸⁷ *RE IX*, halbband 17, 1914, 1136. The occupational groups gaining the *immunitas* included rhetoricians, philosophers, and doctors. After five years, craftsmen such as persons processing (olive) oil also gained an exemption from taxation.

practices of business and profit seeking, it was convenient to have tax-free status immediately, not after five years; whether this was the case with this particular ship is again unknown.

Prosopographical details might shed more light on Flavia Publicia's activities and motivations in Sardinia. In the mid-third century, a certain Lucius Flavius Honoratus was a *procurator et praefectus provinciae Sardiniae*, or procurator and governor of Sardinia. There was possibly some familial connection between this high-ranking official and the Vestal Flavia Publicia.²⁸⁸ Her father was apparently a certain Lucius Flavius, as indicated in the Vestal's own name that includes a patronymic: Flavia L. f. Publicia. However, we cannot postulate further whether Lucius Flavius Honoratus was her brother or some other male relative.²⁸⁹ Fragmentary inscriptions indicate that the *Flavii* have been active on the island long before third century.²⁹⁰ The familial connection presumed here might explain the presence of the Vestal's boat in Sardinia, as she had a connection to Sardinia through her family and relatives. Although she was not an inheritor of her family's wealth, nothing hindered her from doing business on the island, with or without help from members of her family.

The Sardinian *tabella immunitatis* reveals that individual Vestals operated within a larger sphere of activities than has been understood to this point. Or, even if there was a vague conception of the Vestals' activities outside Rome, there is now evidence that this actually was the case. Thus, although the Vestals were tied up with their sacral work in the *urbs Romae*, the full range of their activities was not limited to the city. The Vestals were constantly on duty, *diebus noctibusque*, and the honorary inscriptions manifest their ideal essence.²⁹¹ But this ideal and real-life practice formed an interesting conflict or dichotomy, when their broader career and activities are considered. The profession of chief Vestal did not exclude these women from society, nor were they obliged to confine themselves exclusively to religious duties. On the contrary, they benefited from their privileged status on a much larger scale.

²⁸⁸ For discussion of this matter, see Ruggeri 2015, 169.

²⁸⁹ On the use of the patronymic in Flavia Publicia's inscriptions, see *CIL* VI 32414 – 32416. For a prosopographical discussion, see Mayer i Olivé 2011, 155-156; he suggests that perhaps Lucius Flavius Honoratus was the Vestal's father or brother. The inscription dedicated by Flavia Publicia's sister Aemilia Rogatilla with her son Minucius Honoratus Marcellus Aemilianus, see *CIL* VI 32414. I suggest, that by this point her father was probably already deceased, so could not have been *procurator et praefectus provinciae Sardiniae*.

²⁹⁰ Gasparetti 2009, 274-275.

²⁹¹ *CIL* VI 32416.

This sub-chapter on the Vestals' finances and economic situation confirms that the priestesses could gather wealth, and that they used their privileged position to participate in business. However, the case of the Vestal Cornelia also shows that the priestesses likely did not hold equal positions; rather, their family origins impacted their status. Thanks to her family connections, Cornelia seems to have been in the emperor's favour and received from him a large sum of money as a stipend. In the third century, the Vestal Flavia Publicia manifested her exemption from taxation, and her case shows us how priestesses operated outside Rome taking care of their private business. The Vestals appear to have gathered great wealth, formed of annual income (rents and state support) and less regular income such as donations and fines from the graveyard violators. Thus, their economic position was secured and they had the means to make money. However, changes in the extent to which the state could support them are evident over time, and during the late fourth century state funding declined definitively, or at least this decline was being considered.

2.5. Collegial Ties between the Priestesses

Studying the Vestals both individually and collectively demonstrates that they formed a group of six women of different ages and different social backgrounds. The requirement that they be consecrated to the Vestal office between the ages of six to ten made the composition of their community extraordinary in the Roman religious system. Theoretically the daughters of senators, equestrians, or freedmen could be accepted as the priestesses of Vesta, and ongoing family connection between priestesses was prohibited. This meant that sisters could not be selected together as Vestals. The fact that their professionalism was achieved only gradually made the priestesses even more unequal at any given time. Some were apprentices while others were accomplished, and only one at a time could pursue the office of the chief Vestal, *virgo Vestalis maxima*. In this section, I discuss the question of their apparent inequality, mutual relationships, and conflicts. The internal balance of power in the third-century Vestal *ordo*, and the impact of changes in that balance on the public image of the cult of Vesta, are also explored. How was the Vestals' social influence established when they represented different age groups and had different family backgrounds?

The Vestals left no direct evidence concerning their personal feelings, occupation, restrictions and privileges, or what was it like to be separated from their families.²⁹² However, information about their mutual relationships, their closest friends, and family members can be extracted from several sources. The Vestals' own voice stands out in a few inscriptions that they dedicated to those closest to them.²⁹³ Evidence concerning the Vestals' communal ties and relationships is also found in sources that indicate the age and social origins of individual priestesses. Lastly, sources discussing the Vestals' legal position provide valuable information about their status, while literary evidence and narratives of legendary and heroic Vestals include references to their age, capacity to act in the office, and their relationships with each other. My discussion proceeds by using all this material that refers to the Vestals' mutual relationships.

Age Requirements

The parents of the young Vestal virgin Terentia Rufilla wrote in an inscription that “they experienced her great goodness and gentleness around them for a short time”.²⁹⁴ Did they express their sentiments when their child had left her childhood home and become a Vestal? On the basis of the inscription and its context, this seems apparent, as Vestals were taken into the cult at a very young age. In numismatic materials, children are depicted in front of the temple participating in *sacra*.²⁹⁵ Why were child priestesses needed in the first place? What did young age signify for the cult and the Vestals' *captio*?

According to Aulus Gellius, who gives us an account of the Vestals' qualifications, the priestesses had to be between six and ten years old when they were taken into the cult.²⁹⁶ Otherwise, no mention is made of the Vestals' age by other authors, in contrast to recommendations about when it was the

²⁹² In my view, sometimes questions for which there are no direct answers can open us to new perspectives. Considerations about what happened to retiring priestess are addressed in Gardner 1986, 25-26; for interesting subjects which are lacking evidence, see Lindner 2015, 3.

²⁹³ *CIL* VI 2138.

²⁹⁴ *CIL* VI 2135.

²⁹⁵ On children with adult priests and priestesses in front of the temple of Vesta, see *RIC* 249v. Caracalla AV Aureus. AD 21. A child among the adults can be interpreted to be *camilla* or *Camillus*, but at this point the emperor had just re-arranged the cult of Vesta and there were the several young priestesses appointed to the office. I believe that the children depicted on the coinage of Caracalla are young Vestals. The *Ara Pacis Augustae* is a good example of the child-Vestals depicted in public art.

²⁹⁶ Gell. *NA* 1.12.1. *Qui de virginie capienda scripserunt...minorem quam annos sex, maiorem quem annos decem natam, negaverunt capi fas esse* “Those who have written about the taking of a (Vestal) virgin, of whom Labeo Antistius wrote most diligently, deny that it is permitted to take a girl who is less than six years in age or greater than ten.”

right age to proceed in one's career, or when a man was at the right age to apply for certain offices.²⁹⁷ The ages of other priests and priestesses varied; for example, a priestess of Ceres had to be a woman of mature age, while *camilli* and *camillae* were young boys and girls who helped particularly the *flaminica Dialis* in her various sacral duties.²⁹⁸ Although there was discussion about the ages and the capacity of office holders, the exact norms or laws concerning the legal ages of the different priesthoods seem to be lacking except in the case of the Vestals.²⁹⁹

Since the Vestals had to be virgins, it is easy to comprehend that they were taken into the cult before the age of puberty and sexual maturation. Nevertheless, the demand of virginity does not fully explain why children were needed. By analysing further the ancient ideas of physical and mental ageing alongside legal and practical aspects of the priesthood, more probable reasons for the preference for child priestesses can be elucidated. Reaching sexual maturity was a natural process; but it was also a liminal stage in a young girl's life, one meant to be overcome. Girls were considered physically matured once they had their first menstruation, an event that was thought to have both healing power and destructive tendencies.³⁰⁰ The legal age to marry — to point at which a female person was legally considered to be an adult in the Roman world — was twelve for girls (although betrothal could take place earlier). This age was thus associated with both physical ageing and puberty and legal maturity. During the reign of Emperor Augustus, a law was passed ordering that marriage should take place two years after betrothal. Therefore a girl had to be at least ten years old on her betrothal.³⁰¹ The

²⁹⁷ *Lex Villia Annalis* (180 BC) established the minimum age of 27 for holding the quaestorship; for this and discussion about the right ages for office holding, see Laes, 2004.

²⁹⁸ In his article, Laes (see note above) concentrates on boys and their office holding. Female cult officials are discussed less systematically, often considered as a secondary question. However, female cult officials are studied, for example, by S. Undheim 2018 and V.M. Gaspar, 2012.

²⁹⁹ The Vestals had few counterparts or fellow priestesses in Roman cult life. Besides the *camilli* and *camillae* there were also the Salian virgins who were hired for a short period to assist the Salian priests. Almost nothing is known about these priestesses, but judging from their title, they were young and probably unmarried girls. We can find more fellow priestesses for the Vestals in the Greek world. When the age of the newly recruited Vestals is compared to the age of the priestesses in ancient Greece, there are similarities as well as differences. The girls and women had to be over the age of 8, 10, 12, 20 or 40, depending on which priesthood they sought. Often, young girls and women served the cult until they got married. Thus, changes in their stage of life restricted their office holding. However, the priestess of the Artemis Hymnia in Mantinea had to serve the goddess as a virgin for her entire life, making her closer to the Vestals. This requirement of lifelong virginity was, however, rare in the Greek world. For the Greek priestesses, see Dillon 2002, 75–76.

³⁰⁰ Gal. 17.2.288. Eyben 1970, 684. As ambivalent as menstruation was, it was acknowledged as necessity for life, for it was the material providing life for human generation. Despite its positive effects, the menstruating girl or woman could sometimes be considered as a risk to her environment: she could turn new wine sour, dry the seeds in the garden, or make the fruit fall off trees. See Plin. *HN* 7.64; 66.

³⁰¹ *Dig.* 28.1.5. For more about the age of marriage see, Gai. *Inst.* 1.19.6; Dio 54.16.7. For the legal age of marriage, see Rawson 2003, 142. For aristocratic customs concerning the arrangement of betrothals and the Augustan legislation, see Treggiari 1991, 153–154.

newly chosen Vestals were not yet at this age of twelve, but they escaped it narrowly; a girl could be admitted to the cult when she was ten years at the latest, at the same time she could otherwise be betrothed. Thus, the youngest Vestals were children, eligible to be betrothed, but not yet of the legal age to be married.

The maximum age of ten years for a Vestal candidate also offered other benefits concerning a girl's eligibility to become a priestess. The younger a candidate was, the more likely it was that she was still under her father's control (*patria potestas*) and not yet emancipated. Furthermore, her father still had to be under the *potestas* of his own father, if the latter was still alive.³⁰² The requirement that the future Vestal have her both parents still living (*patrima et matrima*) was more easily met when the applicant was still a child.³⁰³ As a result, the suitable candidate was a girl who had the legal status of a child, and who had not lost her father or mother. This way she was free from the stigma of death and loss.³⁰⁴

In addition to these legal grounds, another important aspect is to consider is the role of child priestesses in cultic practices. Columella, the first century author, wrote in his book on agriculture that sons and daughters had an important task in fetching and serving food from the household's pantry or storage room (*penus*).³⁰⁵ The storeroom of the temple of Vesta was also called a *penus*. In fact, all the most sacral and cultic objects were hidden and stored in this holy room, where no one, except the Vestals and the high priest, were allowed to enter.³⁰⁶ Therefore, I suggest that the *penus* of the *aedes Vestae* can be compared – with certain reservations – to that of the Roman house, *domus*. Just as the children of the Roman household were tasked with fetching goods from the *penus*, so too were the young Vestal virgins suitable for entering the *penus Vestae*. The agrarian way of life and the storage of grain were present in Roman cult life, and the young Vestals were needed for the same purposes that child members of Roman families served.

³⁰² Gell.NA 1.12.4.

³⁰³ Gell.NA 1.12.2. For a discussion about the age at which children lost their parents, see Harlow – Lawrence, 2002.

³⁰⁴ Being *patrima et matrima* signified that death had not touched and stained the girl. On this, see Mustakallio 2007, 187. The fact that a future priestess herself had survived in life this far was an important matter to consider in a culture that experienced high rates of infant mortality. By the age of ten, the dangers posed by the infectious diseases of infancy and childhood were less relevant.

³⁰⁵ Col. 12.4.3.

³⁰⁶ For more about the *penus Vestae* and its functions, see Wildfang 2006, 16-17.

For the Vestals, becoming a priestess was a drastic change because they left their childhood home behind once they were consecrated. They also had to begin the specialization process that would lead them to become professional priestesses. Due to their young age, they had probably little to say about whether they were content with the choice made about their future lifestyle.³⁰⁷ In the absence of evidence, we must turn instead to the vocation and consent of priestly officials of Roman cult life. Even these are only rarely addressed in the research. However, evidence does imply that religious office was considered to be a guarantee for an honorable way of life. In his early first century work, Valerius Maximus reports that a certain Valerius Flaccus, who lived in ruinous extravagance, was made a *flamen Dialis* against his will. From that point onwards, he mended his ways and used religion to cure his vices.³⁰⁸ This narrative suggests that religion could, at least theoretically, turn a person's course of life and that sacral and religious office was a remedy against vice and bad habits, even when the person in question had not aspired to a priestly career. One might argue that parents – gave away their daughters in order to secure a life of happiness for them.

In summary, there were social, legal, and cultic reasons for the recruitment of Vestals at an early age. By considering the suitable age of the future Vestal to be no more than ten years, the Romans escaped from the situation in which the girl would have been the suitable age to be engaged or even married. Given that the Vestals were surrounded by the severe requirement of virginity and being *patrima matrima*, it would have been morally suspicious if the future Vestal had previously been someone's fiancée and wife-to-be. Since a Vestal had to be separated from her birth family because of legal as well as economic reasons, the early age of entry guaranteed the successful separation process. One important reason to take child priestesses was the fact that the Vestals had several cultic duties that

³⁰⁷ The child Vestals were given to the cult by their parents. As such, their own opinion about the matter was very likely insignificant. On the consent of young priestesses, see Rüpke 1996, 254. See also Undheim 2018 and chapter 2 in her study. Questions about the voluntariness of the Vestals' virginity, their early age of recruitment, and their predestined term in office arose suspicions among the early fathers of the Christian church. Especially Ambrose and Prudentius questioned the Vestals' vocation and contentment with their priesthood. Ambr. *De virgin.* 1.4.15; Prudent. *C. Symm.* 2. 1066-1067. Their notions about the Vestals were part of the late antiquity discussion that defined the principles of the Christianity and made distinctions between a new state religion and the traditional polytheistic religion.

³⁰⁸ The story of Valerius Maximus is interesting not only because it gives us impressions of Roman ideas and mentalities, but also because it describes how the priests were elected and how they seemed to feel about it. This incident took place at the time of the Second Punic War. Valerius Flaccus was taken as *flamen* by the *pontifex maximus* P. Licinius against his will. Whether this was because of the war is not clear, but it is surprising that the consent of a candidate was not required. (For example, the consent of a marrying couple was required, at least in principle. Further, in sacral matters good omens were very important, and the consent of the sacrificial animals was carefully watched.) The role of P. Licinius is emphasized and it was apparently he who saw the office of a *flamen Dialis* as a remedy for the extravagant lifestyle of Valerius. P. Licinius appears also in other stories in the capacity of the *pontifex maximus* and he seems to have had an original and persistent style in executing his office. For P. Licinius and Valerius Flaccus, see Rüpke *FS* 2008, 768, no. 2235; no 3393. On Valerius Flaccus's reluctance to enter office, see Liv. 27.8.4-10; Val. Max. 6.9.3.

they had to learn over time. Thus, she was in the suitable age to learn, although her consent to enter to the priesthood was unlikely asked for or needed. Learning the Vestals' duties took several years and promotion to the next level of the priesthood was achieved only gradually. Next, I shall discuss further the priestesses' education, and their gradual promotion to *virgo Vestalis maxima*.

Training, Promotions and the Lifelong Office

Priestesses of different ages had different professional obligations. Their rank order, which was seldomly discussed in earlier research, was linked to some extent to the level they reached in their profession. The Vestals' professionalism developed as they were trained, similar to the broader structure of professionalization in ancient culture.³⁰⁹ The length of the Vestals' career as well as their education and gradual promotions are the focus of this section. I have examined the Vestals' career from the viewpoint both of a young apprentice and of a *virgo Vestalis maxima* who acted as a teacher. The Vestals' careers are often mentioned in third-century inscriptions, my primary source for this theme. This source material seems to conflict, however, with the written material: the literature indicates that Vestals were to stay in office for only thirty years, but the inscriptions suggest that in practice many of the third-century priestesses exceeded this time frame. My intention is to find out what this apparent contradiction between the ideal and practice signified.

Learnedness was a status symbol in itself, and noble families boasted about their educated children.³¹⁰ Education for a girl, and let alone the privileges and state-provided life of the Vestal priesthood, would have been attractive for the Vestals' birth families. Furthermore, the senatorial class shared a similar educational and cultural background, which assimilated them into a single, closed socio-economic circle. Within this group, managing to get a daughter accepted into the cult was a status symbol that further increased a family's social honour. For the Vestals themselves, their training for the priesthood was nothing like the ordinary education that upper-class children enjoyed. Unlike tutoring at home or at school, this education took several years, and contained many difficult elements

³⁰⁹ The structure of professionalization in ancient culture has been described as following: first, formal and supervised training was an important part of the process of qualification. Second, professionals had a certain monopoly to do things in their field. Lastly, organization and institutional control ensured that the practice was useful for the public. For the structure of professionalization, see Rüpke 1996, 255-256.

³¹⁰ For the idea that education and scholarly activities were part of noble status in Roman society, see Hemelrijk 1999, 7-8.

related to the sacral rituals. The girls had to commit themselves to spend thirty years of their lives in the cult. Considering that it was difficult to fulfil the requirements in the first place – right age, both parents alive and socio-economic standards – the Vestals' way of life was possible for only a very few.

The Vestals' age of recruitment was approximately the same as when Roman boys went to school. But those few girls who were taken into the cult did not participate in ordinary training.³¹¹ In her recent study F. Prescendi discussed how the Romans transmitted religious knowledge to the future through their children, by taking them to religious rituals and festivals in which they acted as agents and assistants. Technical skills and cultic secrets were taught to apprentices of certain priesthoods, such as the cult of Vesta.³¹² Since practical cult tasks were complex and difficult to learn, young apprentices were required who could spend many years gathering the necessary knowledge. It can also be assumed that young priestesses adopted the Vestal identity and requirements of the Vestal character more easily than adults.

There is general consensus that the life of a Vestal was divided into three phases. Dionysios of Halicarnassus and Plutarch wrote that Vestals spent the first ten years learning their duties. The next ten years they spent performing religious rituals and other duties, such as watching the sacred fire in the temple of Vesta. At the top of the hierarchy were the priestesses who trained others. Only during the last ten years of the Vestal's office could she be appointed to the office of the *virgo Vestalis maxima* and instruct the young priestesses. The philosopher and statesman Seneca discussed in a rather different context the phases of the Vestals' lives. He compared a man who was just about to withdraw from public life to the different phases of life of the Vestals. According to him, a retired man could dedicate himself to philosophical studies, just as the Vestals could dedicate themselves to teaching after studying and performing the sacral rites.³¹³ While Seneca failed to mention the length

³¹¹ Going to school and beginning one's education was the first step in a child's life to gain distinction and status. School also offered a new social environment. For the Roman education tradition, see for example Quintilian, who wrote about the suitable age for learning to read: age seven. Quint. 1.1.18. On the socializing elements of school, see Bloomer 1997, 60. Regarding the Vestals' training, there are many aspects that arouse our attention and interest. What did the priestesses learn during their ten-year apprenticeship? Can their educational process be compared to that of the boys of the nobility? Was their schooling concentrated on concrete and practical matters, or was it more intellectual and non-physical? The question of the works of men and women is also relevant when considering the tasks of the Vestals.

³¹² It is very probable that the pontiffs had preparatory education before they could act in the rituals. On the education of children in cult organizations, see Prescendi 2010, 90-91.

³¹³ Dion.Hal.2.67.2 ; Plut.Vit. Num. 10.1; mor. p. 795; Sen. Dial. 8.2.2.

of the priestesses' service, both Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch (writing in Greek) mentioned the three stages and particularly the division of the Vestals' service into ten-year periods. Since these two authors were Greek, one wonders if their foreign origins encouraged them to emphasize the division in order to be rhetorically more convincing and explicit.³¹⁴ Therefore, when discussing the Vestals' character, they expressed the matters in explicit terms so that the Greek audience could absorb the features of the Roman culture more easily. Furthermore, it was characteristic to divide things into different categories: in religious and mythological thinking, the number three was particularly popular. Perhaps the three phases of the Vestals' career represented the three phases of human life: childhood, adulthood and old age.³¹⁵ The Vestals' daily practices did sometimes require the work contribution of a young priestesses, sometimes that of the adults. Thus, the three phases of their career was perhaps so fundamentally important for the functioning of the cult that authors emphasized it as well.

The long career of a priestess and its different phases are further described in the third-century inscriptions dedicated to the chief Vestals. One example is found in an inscription for Flavia Publicia. The dedicators acknowledged the different phases of her career by expressing that she had shown pious and careful charge of the rites through all the grades of her priesthood (*per omnes gradus sacerdotii*). She received this inscription in 247 CE, apparently just after she had achieved the status of *virgo Vestalis maxima*.³¹⁶ She was similarly praised for 'reaching her status after getting through all the stages of the priesthood' in two other inscriptions a decade later, in the later 250s.³¹⁷ This suggests that third-century Vestals had to go through different phases during their career, just as the authors from the first and second centuries had described. Whether the Vestals' careers actually reflected ten-year cycles, as Plutarch and Dionysios of Halicarnassus claimed, is an open question. In Flavia Publicia's case, it can be cautiously estimated that her leadership took longer than the ideal ten years. One of her inscriptions can be dated to July 247, and another to September 257.³¹⁸ The next chief Vestal, Coelia Claudiana, started in her office in 279 at the latest, leaving a gap of almost two decades when no chief Vestal is known (it might have been Flavia Publicia herself).

³¹⁴ I want to thank Katariina Mustakallio and Ville Vuolanto for bringing into the discussion of the authors' motives and formulations the idea of rhetorical methods.

³¹⁵ In the following section there is further discussion about how the ideas of religious and mythological thinking were perhaps displayed in the Vestals' institution and its practices.

³¹⁶ *CIL* VI 32414. Jörg Rüpke convincingly supposes that Flavia Publicia was taken into the cult in 213 CE, after the four Vestals were executed. See Rüpke 2008, 685, no. 1652, especially note 6.

³¹⁷ *CIL* VI 2135; 32416.

³¹⁸ 247 AD, see *CIL* VI 32414 and 257 AD *CIL* VI 32416.

When further studying the case of Flavia Publicia's successor, i.e. Coelia Claudiana *virgo Vestalis maxima*, the reality of the third-century Vestal *ordo* becomes clearer. Coelia Claudiana's inscription declares that after twenty years as chief, she would hopefully succeed in holding her office for thirty years. In other words, the inscription celebrates her twentieth anniversary as *maxima*.³¹⁹ In another inscription dedicated to her by her sister, the wish is expressed that she would continue in her office for ages to come (*per tot saecula*).³²⁰ Perhaps her family member wished her office to continue so that she would benefit from the Vestals' favours as long as possible. This formulation can be interpreted as a rhetorical expression, but it contains the idea that the *virgo Vestalis maxima* could stay in her office for more than ten years. One reason that the chief Vestals stayed so long in their office in the third century could be social unrest and the unstable political situation. Emperors were often at the war front, and religious participation was secondary. Thus, a capable chief Vestal was preferably left to hold her office so that the cult's continuity and stability was guaranteed even though the political situation was changeable.³²¹ Next, my purpose is to study further the interesting figure of a *virgo Vestalis maxima*, her appearance and status, her duties, and relationships to the other priestesses.

Virgo Vestalis Maxima – Her Appearance, Duties and Authority

Modern scholars often interpret the ancient Roman priest or priestess as earthly representations of his/her deity.³²² Depictions of the goddess Vesta imitated the *mater familias*, which perhaps indicates that matronal status was important within the cultic institution. Statues identified as Vesta are presented, without exception, wearing the distinctive garment of *matronae*, the *stola*, which was a

³¹⁹ *CIL* VI 32420.

³²⁰ *CIL* VI 2139.

³²¹ At this point, the office of the chief Vestal lasted for life, or at least the priestess was quite old. For example, the last identifiable third-century chief Vestal served in the cult for at least 43 years, from 257 to 300 . Considering that she was six to ten years old when recruited, she was 49 to 53 years old in 300 AD. What happened to the aging Vestals is a challenging question, since the Roman sources do not discuss this subject. However, some discussions among the authors of late antiquity suggest that they retired and took on other roles. In this study, I discuss aging Vestals in the next section as they relate to the internal power balances of the *ordo*.

³²² I refer here to Jörg Rüpke, who discusses the ideas of Scheid and the anthropological studies of Minkowsky and James, Rüpke 1996, 254. Whether the priestesses represented their goddess, and thereby the *matronae*, has been under discussion for a long time, beginning with M. Beard's (1980) analysis of the Vestals' sexual status.

long, covering, sleeveless gown.³²³ Thus, the goddess Vesta was seen and represented, in spite of her virginal status, not as a young maiden or a girl, but rather as a respectable woman of mature age.

The Vestals' appearance may tell us more about their cultic and social position. Second- and early-third-century artistic and statuary material excavated from the *Atrium Vestae* allows for some estimation of age and priestly capacity. The age of some priestesses, for example, can be estimated based on facial and physiognomic features in portraits; in other words, whether they indicate a youthful look or a priestess of advanced age.³²⁴ The statues all represent the priestesses in their priestly insignia, but the appearance of each statue and portrait is unique. There was no common uniform for the Vestals, although their headdress allows them to stand out from representations of other persons. The headdress consisted of the hairdo (the so-called *sex (seni) crines*) and the *infulae*, which was a woollen fillet wrapped around the priestess's head.³²⁵ The appearance of *infulae* and the number of wrappings have suggested that perhaps the number of wrappings was connected to the priestess's rank and age: the young priestess wore fewer wrappings while the elderly Vestals' *infula* was twisted around several times. If the *infulae* was covered with a veil (*suffibulum*) or other garment (*palla*), this indicated that a Vestal was about to perform a sacrifice or that she had achieved the capacity to perform sacral rituals.³²⁶ Since Vestals' statues and portraits show that young looking priestesses already had the *infulae* wrapped five to six times around their heads, a priestess's youthful look cannot be used as a proxy for her (lower) status as an apprentice.³²⁷

The portrait of an elderly looking Vestal tells us that they perhaps were entitled to wear exclusive insignia that declared their status inside the cult organisation.³²⁸ Her facial features – wrinkles and low muscularity – indicate that this Vestal was already an elderly lady. In fact, when her portrait is compared to other known Vestal portraits, she seems to be the most senior judging by her facial

³²³ For Vestals' clothing, see Lindner 2015.

³²⁴ The studies of Mekacher (2006) and Lindner (2015) provide thorough analyses based on physiological features.

³²⁵ The number of wrappings varied from one to six, corresponding to the number of rolls in the *sex crines* hairdo. According to Servius, the *infulae* was wrapped so that it resembled a diadem and the ends of the fillets (*vittae*) were left to hang on the shoulders. The fillets were red and white Serv. *In Aen.* 10.538.

³²⁶ In her recent study, M. Lindner examined second-century Vestal portraits and statues, and noted what can be concluded from the variations and changes in their appearance. On the *infulae*, see Lindner 2015, 159, 161, including Table 2 on 160-161.

³²⁷ In first-century reliefs and other works of public art, the Vestals are depicted in similar costumes. Thus, it is their physical size and physiological features that suggests that they were of different ages and that they had different status in the *ordo*.

³²⁸ See Fig. 4 in Appendix II.

features. Around her head there is a crown — plausibly interpreted as laurel — which is a particularly striking ornament not seen in other Vestal portraits.³²⁹ Ears of grain would seem to be a more suitable decoration regarding their religious duties. Nevertheless, considering that this Vestal was at an advanced age, her religious professionalism and experience must have been high level; the laurel crown was perhaps recognition of her long career and authority.

A *Virgo Vestales maxima* had duties and rights not given to the other priestesses. One was that she taught the others, and this profoundly defined the relationships between her and the other priestesses. The schooling system for both priestly colleges and their assistant personnel (the *calatores*) was a very distinctive element of the Roman religious system. Contemporary authors paid particular attention to the practicalities and characteristics of the Vestals' education or training.³³⁰ Of interest was the question whether a Vestal was capable of learning to properly perform her religious tasks. In a story recorded by the first-century author Valerius Maximus, there is a young Vestal who accidentally let the sacred fire go out. The unnamed Vestal is referred to by the word *discipula*, meaning apprentice or pupil.³³¹ She was the student of the chief Vestal called Aemilia, but unfortunately the actual source and date of the incident remain unknown. In the story, both the *discipula* and the senior Vestal play an important role: while the young Vestal prays to the goddess, the chief Vestal performs a miracle by placing her linen cloth on the extinguished altar and rekindles the fire. Both Vestals escape punishment by securing their faith to Vesta.³³²

Although this narrative discusses the ideal and contains fictional features, guarding the sacral fire was a crucial matter in the Vestals' daily lives. It is also mentioned in the epigraphical evidence. Flavia

³²⁹ On the ornament being interpreted as a laurel, see Mekacher (2006) and Lindner (2015). Laurel was an important plant for the New Year's celebrations, when the temple of Vesta was decorated with fresh laurels. As a headpiece, laurel symbolized military success, but it was also worn on religious occasions. For the New Year's celebrations, see *Ov. Fast.* 3.135-145.

³³⁰ In addition to the priestly figures, there were also other cultic personnel, both professionals and slaves, who had their own training organisations. There was, for example, the *schola kalatorum pontificium* in the *forum Romanum*, where the assistants of the priests (*calatores*) apparently kept their headquarters. There was also an individual office for the *scribae*, *praecones* and *Librarii*, called *Schola Xanthi* in its modern name (there is archaeological evidence that supports the idea of the school). It is challenging to conclude for sure whether these *scholae* were in reality always intended as school buildings, rather than as offices and headquarters of the different professional staff. The priestly personnel had to struggle through the hierarchy to advance, just as the Vestals did. For example, the third-century *factores*, assistants or officials of the Vestals and pontifical priests, had a system that promoted them only gradually after they had been trainees (*discipuli*) and pupils (*alumni*); see *CIL* VI 1074; 32413; 32418. It is tempting to conclude that the system of the Vestals and other priesthoods set a model for the organisation of the assisting personnel.

³³¹ *Val. Max* 1.1.7.

³³² Interpreting Valerius Maximus and the story of Aemilia and her *discipula*, see Mueller 2002 49–50.

Mamilia, chief Vestal in the 240s, was honoured by her brother and two nephews who emphasized that she had been watchful in the administration or management of her duties (*pervigiles administratio*). The term *pervigil*, awake or (religiously) watchful, probably refers to watching over the eternal fire.³³³ The dedicators were also more frank with notions about the Vestal fire. Flavia Publicia, chief Vestal in the 250s, was praised for her outstanding service towards the sacral rites at the divine altars of all the gods (*divina altaria omnium deorum*) and eternal flames (*aeterni ignes*), which she had supervised both day and night (*diebus noctibusque*).³³⁴ In another dedication for the same chief Vestal, the eternal fire and watching it over is again expressed by the verb *pervigilare*.³³⁵ This sacral duty seems to have been important for all of the priestesses, beginners as well as chief Vestals.

The Vestals also celebrated the teaching skills of their *virgo Vestalis maxima* inside the *ordo*. The Vestal virgin Octavia Honorata dedicated a late-third-century inscription monument to her chief Vestal Coelia Claudiana to celebrate the latter's accomplishments as *virgo Vestalis maxima* and her abilities to teach.³³⁶ Honorata was evidently Coelia Claudiana's apprentice, for she says she was always impressed by her divine admonitions or advice (*divinis eius admonitionibus semper provecta*).³³⁷ The text begins by celebrating the sacral nature of the chief Vestal and her administration, and continues with a mention of the city and senate that approved Coelia Claudiana's work. Octavia Honorata was probably taken into the cult around 270 at the latest, and she was probably already an adult when she dedicated the inscription.³³⁸ The relationship between Octavia and the chief Vestal seem to reflect the broader relationship that existed between the pupil and the teacher: they were not equals although they served in the same organisation.

³³³ On notions about watchful administration referring to the eternal fire, see Mekacher 2006, 124. *CIL* VI 2133.

³³⁴ *CIL* VI 32416.

³³⁵ For an interpretation of the inscription and its clear reference to the eternal fire, see Mekacher 2006, 124.

³³⁶ *CIL* VI 2138. The inscription can be dated to 270-290 CE (see Mekacher 2006, 145).

³³⁷ The family background of Octavia Honorata remains vague. She might have been related to C. Octavius Pudens Caesius Honoratus, *peocurator Augusti* in Mauretania (198-211 CE). *PIR*² O 51.

³³⁸ About the career of Octavia Honorata, see Rüpke 2008, 818, no. 2556. Coelia Claudiana's term as *maxima* began either already in 260s or no later than 279 CE. She was celebrated for holding the office of *virgo Vestalis maxima* for twenty years (*CIL* VI 32420), which allows us to make conclusions about dating her term in office. She was still in her office in 286 when she received honorary monuments from the *sacerdotes sacrae urbis*. See the inscriptions *CIL* VI 2136 and 2137, and Rüpke 2008, 627, no.1281. Rüpke assumes that Octavia Honorata's monument was set up on the twentieth anniversary of Coelia's term as chief Vestal.

The teaching abilities and high morals of the chief Vestal were mentioned in the same context, as can be seen in an inscription for Flavia Publicia. Depending on how the text is translated, she was acknowledged for either ‘her praiseworthy teaching of morals/manners’ or ‘her praiseworthy moral discipline’ (*morum praedicabilem disciplinam*). Since the dedicator was a certain Quintus Veturius Memphius, her client and *fictor Vestalium* (servant), either alternative suits the context of the inscription. The client could have been impressed by her teaching abilities or by her ability to control her morals or that of the organization, to which the *fictores* also belonged.³³⁹ The same theme continued to be relevant a century later, when the pontiffs honored an unidentified Vestal for her extraordinary teaching (*doctrinae mirabilis*).³⁴⁰ Thus, the teaching *virgo Vestalis maxima* is continuously present in the third- and fourth-century inscriptions, suggesting that the role of teacher was a significant part of the identity of the third-century chief Vestals that dedicators wanted to emphasize. The senior Vestals had mastered the cult rituals and knew the necessary prayers; they were the channels through which religious knowledge was transferred to other priestesses.

The *virgo Vestalis maxima* was evidently an authoritative figure for the other priestesses, at least for young *virgines*. The hierarchical system that marked the cults of the state religion also existed within individual cults dedicated to other deities. For example, a member of *fratres Arvales* had to first be a *magister* before gaining the title of *promagister*.³⁴¹ However, while an Arval was put in charge as *magister* and led the rituals as soon as possible after his co-optation, a Vestal had to wait for decades to achieve a leading position. Thus, even though there were similarities between the different cult communities in terms of their hierarchical structures, they did not align as much as one might assume. There certainly were similarities regarding the title *maxima*, which was common among male Roman cultic communities. The most familiar title was that of *pontifex maximus*. The leading person of the *haruspices*, diviners of entrails, had the honorary title *maximus*. The same practice has been applied to the *augures*, but this seems to be based on a misunderstanding since there was no such office among them.³⁴² The headmaster of the *curiones*, the *curio maximus*, was likewise a highly esteemed post, and the title apparently signified either authority or the old age of the member.³⁴³ This may reflect Roman thinking in general, and the title *virgo Vestalis maxima* may have referred to one having the

³³⁹ Flavia Publicia *CIL* VI 32419.

³⁴⁰ *CIL* VI 32422.

³⁴¹ On the practices of the Arval brothers, see Scheid 1990.

³⁴² For a correction to the misunderstanding, see J. Linderski 1986, 2154, n. 26. Although there was no office of *augur maximus*, it is possible that they had a presiding officier.

³⁴³ For *curio maximus*, see *RE* 1901, band 4 – halbband 7+8, s.v. *curio*, 1836-1838.

greatest authority and who was at an advanced age compared to other members of the institution. The title '*maxima*' does not exist among other female priesthoods, which further stresses the special structure and uniqueness of the Vestal-*ordo*.³⁴⁴

When considering further what age signified for the priestesses' career development and their social influence, I return to the cycles of ten years. According to some contemporary authors (Plutarch among others), the Vestals moved from one stage to another in ten-year intervals. As such, the apprentices completed their first period in office when they were 16 to 20 years of age, and then moved on to perform a new set of duties for the next ten years. At last, a priestess could become a teacher and a *virgo Vestalis maxima* at the age of 26 to 30. This then marked the final milestone in their careers, after which point they had fulfilled their commitment to thirty years of service by the age of 36 to 40. By her thirties, then, a Vestal was potentially holding the most advantageous office and enjoying the influential position of *maxima*. This meant that the honorary position and increasing social influence were available already during the priestesses' adulthood; they did not have to wait until their old age. Male *curiones*, by contrast, faced a minimum age requirement of 50 years before they could be accepted to this priesthood (he also had to be free from bodily faults and disabilities). The honorary position of *curio* was thus reserved only for those men who were blessed with good health and healthy old age.³⁴⁵

A Vestal who had successfully ended her apprenticeship could benefit from the privileges bestowed upon her. She could benefit her family or clients, and if she gained the office of *maxima* she had the ultimate honorary position of the cult. Being in charge and acting as the most distinguished representative of the cult, she also had the best opportunities to approach the emperor and to use her influence for the benefit of others. From the point of view of her family members and clients, a

³⁴⁴ Regarding the other female group of priestess, the Salian virgins, nothing is known about their activities or whether they had a hierarchical order and a leading figure. Other priestesses, wives of the *flamines*, acted alongside their husbands.

³⁴⁵ The minimum age to achieve the office of a quaestor, the first step in the *cursus honorum*, was 30 years. For the patricians, it was a few years earlier. A man could achieve the office of a consul at the age of 42 (plebeians) or 40 (patricians). These regulations originated in the republic, and during the empire the rules were loosened so that younger men (and the emperors themselves and their favourites) could apply earlier to the offices. For example, men of 25 years of age could apply for the office of a quaestor during the principate. For more about the age regulations and the *cursus honorum*, see Parkin, 2003. On the *curiones*, see Dion. Hal. II 21. Depending on historical period, there are many different ideas about when old age started in the ancient world. In the early principate, the age of sixty was considered to be the beginning of the *senectus*. For this discussion, see Parkin 2003, 16-17.

connection to a *virgo Vestalis* potentially signified a long-term benefit and good prospects for the future.

Working together

The six priestesses appear in the visual evidence, in art and numismatics, as a coherent unit. The only differences between them are occasionally manifested by their physical size, which apparently refers to their different stages of life.³⁴⁶ In this section, my purpose is to show that the Vestals' participation in different duties and celebrations was organized by age groups. Their age also defined the pecking order among the priestesses. To determine more closely the internal hierarchy of the Vestals' order, I use sources such as statues that demonstrate which priestesses participated in which religious duties and celebrations, and whether this participation was age-dependent.

Many changes mark the cultic practices of the Vestals' institution over time. Both Plutarch and Dionysios of Halicarnassus noted this in their discussions of the different periods of Roman history. In the early period of the Roman Kingdom, there were only two Vestals at one time; their numbers were subsequently increased to four and then ultimately to six priestesses.³⁴⁷ The number of priestesses may have increased as more ritual duties were entrusted to them. For example, guarding the sacral fire required at least two priestesses worked in shifts. Fetching water from the *fons Camenae* was another daily ritual for the priestesses.³⁴⁸ In the background of the increasing number of the Vestals, was the (male) struggle of the social orders that resulted in the acceptance of plebeians to offices earlier reserved only for patricians. The number of Vestals was perhaps increased so that there would be room for plebeian applicants.

³⁴⁶ This is the current interpretation regarding the artistic evidence, in which the priestesses' physical size differs. In my opinion, this seems to be plausible explanation. On the other hand, it is possible that these visual representations reflect the rank order, i.e. that the largest figure is most important while the smaller ones are inferior. However, when there occasionally were the child-members in the cult of Vesta, it seems probable that the small figures represent these young priestesses.

³⁴⁷ For the number of Vestals, see Dion. Hal. 2.67.1; 3.67.2. Plut. *Vit. Num.* 10.1. For some reason, when referring to the Vestals, Ambrose wrote that there were seven. See Amb. *Ep.* 18.11; *Quantas tamen illis virgines praemia promissa fecerunt? Vix septem Vestales capiuntur puellae.* But for how many virgins have received the promised rewards? Hardly seven Vestals have seized [them].

³⁴⁸ Plut. *Vit. Num.* 13.2.

There were six priestesses in imperial times. For some tasks they worked in groups, for others they worked alone. As stated above, watching the sacred fire was a task that a priestess performed alone, while the daily fetching of water was carried out by one or perhaps two priestesses together. Sometimes during religious festivals the chief Vestal's role is emphasized. She probably was in charge during public performance of the sacrifice of *Parentalia*, a celebration usually held in private homes to honour deceased relatives. In the Roman family, it was the *pater familias*'s duty to venerate ancestors during the *Parentalia*, but in the public component of these celebrations this role seems to have been preserved for the chief Vestal. Whether she performed a sacrifice for the deceased Vestals – her predecessors – or for the ancestors of her birth family is a contested question.³⁴⁹ Probably it was the cult of Vesta that the chief Vestal celebrated with the ritual of *Parentalia*. My suggestion is based on the fact that the goddess Vesta was considered to be *Vesta mater* of Rome, and thus the ancestress.³⁵⁰ During the rituals of *Fordicidia*, the chief Vesta was again performing the most demanding rituals.³⁵¹ There has been discussion whether the *Fordicidia* was meant to secure the fertility of the land and population, or whether the rituals were undertaken for purificatory purposes.³⁵² In any case, my interpretation here is based on the notion presented by Ovid, that the Tellus, mother Earth, was celebrated at that time. Both Ovid and Dionysius of Halicarnassus discussed the Vesta and earth as being the same element, because they both can be connected to fire. Thus, for me *Fordicidia* appears as a celebration of fertility, and the chief Vestal's purpose was to confirm successful growth and abundance for the people and for the whole of nature.³⁵³ Both *Parentalia* and *Fordicidia* called for the presence of the chief Vestal. Her identity and religious professionalism made it possible to communicate with the goddess Vesta and ask for her blessing.

³⁴⁹ The calendar of Philocalus from the fourth century contains a note: *virgo Vestalis Parentat*. Although *Parentalia* was meant to honour deceased ancestors and was celebrated in private homes, this note signifies that there was also a set of public celebrations connected to the festival. The actions of the *virgo Vestalis* – which probably refers to the chief Vestal – have been connected to the legend of the early Vestal Tarpeia. Her heroic deeds are narrated by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (see Dion. Hal. 2.40.3). Plutarch also discusses the occasion when the priests and priestesses performed rituals in the place of execution. Plut. *Mor. Quaest. Rom.* 96. For a discussion and interpretations of *Parentalia*, see Van Haepere 2002, 71-72; Mekacher 2006, 64-65.

³⁵⁰ For the notion of *Vesta mater*, see Cic. *Har. Resp.* 12.5.

³⁵¹ Ov. *Fast.* IV 629-640. For the ceremonies carried out by the chief Vestal, see Mustakallio 2007, 188-189. In her article, Mustakallio emphasizes the role of the *virgo Vestalis maxima* as a key figure. However, I wish to emphasize here that the Vestals formed a community in which all members had their own roles; it was the occasion that determined who participated in the rituals. The chief Vestal was a natural leader, *ex officio*, but examination of each ritual itself will provide us with new information about participation and character of all the priestesses, not only the chief Vestal.

³⁵² On *Fordicidia* as a purificatory festival, see Wildfang 2006, 24-25. On it being primarily a celebration of fertility, see Takács 2008, 44. Additional analysis of *Fordicidia* is found in Mekacher 2006, 62; Van Haepere 2002, 361.

³⁵³ On Tellus being celebrated during *Fordicidia*, see Ov. *Fast.* VI 629-640. On the earth and Vesta being closely connected, see Ov. *Fast.* VI 269-70; Dion. Hal. 2.66.7.

The communal character of the Vestals' institution becomes evident when several priestesses had to work together. When *mola salsa* was prepared, for example, the three eldest priestesses, *tres maximae*, were required to complete this demanding and complex task. They first prepared and ground the grains of emmer wheat (*ador*), then they blended saltwater (*muries*) into the coarsely grounded flour. This mixture was used in many rituals.³⁵⁴ Baking the sacral product seems to have required teamwork, and the Vestals' *tres maximae* reflected political life, where the *triumviratus* was a power-sharing team of three officials.³⁵⁵

The team of three was not the only combination in which the Vestals worked but the two Vestals appear as a group in public celebrations. This practice is apparent regarding the festivities of the Secular Games, held to commemorate the end of one saeculum and beginning of the next.³⁵⁶ In 204 CE, the two eldest priestesses withdrew to undertake the rituals of *ludi saeculares* for three days and nights. This occasion reinforces the significance of the two eldest priestesses who shared some of the most distinguished duties and were the most esteemed and experienced members of the *ordo*. Only one of them was *maxima*, but perhaps the other was already regarded as her successor. Therefore she might have enjoyed priority over the other four priestesses. In 204 CE, the Vestals participating in the *ludi* were Numisia Maximilla, *virgo Vestalis maxima*, and her successor Terentia Flavola, who had her own very impressive career development, and who was – as I shall present in the following chapters – very close with the imperial family.³⁵⁷

In the early third century, the cult was in the hands of a chief Vestal who had to transfer her religious knowledge to child members.³⁵⁸ The children's participation in cultic duties was required from their

³⁵⁴ Serv. *Ecl.* 8.82. See also *RE XV* (1932), p. 2516-2517, s.v. *mola salsa*.

³⁵⁵ Teams of three appeared on many occasions. For example, in mythology there was of course the *Moirai*, the three women who determined length of life for each individual. The Capitoline triad, the three main deities – Jupiter, Juno and Minerva – was also very prominent in Roman culture.

³⁵⁶ However, as the pictorial motif of the statue base known as Ara Casali suggests, there may be other celebrations as well in which the two Vestals participated. On the left side of this early fourth century base there are two registers portraying a procession – participated by two Vestals. F. Albertson plausibly interprets that this scene represents the celebrations of October Horse (*Equus October*). During the celebrations the Vestals' duty was to gather the sacrificial products and store them to be used later on the *Fordicidia* on April. For interpreting and dating the Ara Casali, see Albertson 2012, 129-130, 139. Although presenting the two Vestals – instead of all six priestesses – can be an artistic choice, I suggest that the procession presents the practices during the celebrations of *Equus October*. The Vestals are carrying containers in which the sacrificial products, blood and ashes, were collected.

³⁵⁷ For the celebrations of the Severan *ludi* see *CIL VI* 32328-29.

³⁵⁸ The fact that the cult was occupied by so many young child-Vestals in the early third century resulted from the emperor's actions against the Vestals: he executed four priestesses in 212/213 for *incestum*. Thereafter, there was an election of four new priestesses who were between six and ten years of age.

ordination, and they had to be ready for public appearances in which all the priestesses were expected to be present.³⁵⁹ Although the child-priestesses had to wait for many years to achieve social influence, they began to acquire religious knowledge, which was a part of the Vestals' social capacity and influence, very early on. As a result, their childhood and teenage years were spent participating in public religious events that trained them to take care of their public office. The cult's organizational structure shows that Roman women were active participants despite their marital status and young age.³⁶⁰ Furthermore, the Vestals and children of *patrima matrimaque* cooperated together on some occasions, as Tacitus's testimony shows.³⁶¹ They shared the same religiously pure status and sometimes their joint performances on sacral occasions solely involved children, when the participating Vestals were recently recruited.³⁶² Other cult organizations also recruited their members at a young age.³⁶³ However, the Vestals were the only priesthood in which the members' age was specifically regulated: they had to be children as they began their priestly duties.

The fact was that there were girls and women of different ages in the cult, making the group of six priestesses heterogeneous, seems to have been a critical aspect of the cult's function and purpose. When the Vestal organisation is considered as a certain kind of household of women of different ages, we can put the priestesses in the roles of Roman women across their lifespans. In her article, K. Mustakallio suggested the idea that the Vestals represented the life-course of the Roman woman, who at first was a child priest (*puella*), then a bride (*nupta*) and at last an adult woman (*matrona*).³⁶⁴ As a

³⁵⁹ When analyzing the visual evidence, I noticed that young-looking priestesses are interpreted as wearing the *suffibulum*, which is a symbol of a person's readiness to perform a sacrifice. For example, this is evident in the Palermo relief (Julio-Claudian era) in which the Vestals appear as a group. In the relief there are the seated goddess Vesta and four Vestals visible with a togate male, who is possibly an emperor. The Vestals' individuality and age differences are emphasized. For this notion, see Lindner 2015, 104.

³⁶⁰ Regarding the Vestals' public appearances, other cults also required the presence of young girls and women. Attilio Mastrocinque's recent study examines in detail the cultic participation of women of different ages, and of unmarried girls in particular. See Mastrocinque 2014.

³⁶¹ Tacitus described the inauguration of a location for a new temple in 70 CE. The Vestal virgins, with the help of boys and girls whose mothers and fathers were still alive, purified the place by sprinkling water fetched from the fountains and streams. Tac. *Hist.* 4.53.8. '*dein virgines Vestales cum pueris puellisq[ue] patrimis matrimisque aqua e fontibus amnibusq[ue] hausta perluere*'

³⁶² There were also the children who assisted the adult priest/priestess with a special task. This is attested among the girls who assisted the *flaminica Dialis*, the wife of the *flamen Dialis*. They are called *flaminiae* or *sacerdotulae*. See Fest. 82. For young girls participating as assistants in the cult of Juno, see Dion Hal. 1.21.2.

³⁶³ Particularly members of the imperial family could gain membership of the priestly colleges while still in their youth. The age of recruitment could be very young, such as eight years, or at the age when a boy still wore his *toga praetextata*, which refers to an age less than fifteen. For example, the augures recruited full members who were still young. The future emperor Claudius was taken as an *augur* when he was approximately nineteen or in his early twenties, Rüpke *FS* 2008, 618, no. 1217. For the age of the children and their office holding, see Laes 2003, 149-150.

³⁶⁴ In addition to the discussion above, see Mustakallio's original idea that the Vestals purposefully represented different age groups. Mustakallio 2007, 187.

result, the teaching role of the chief Vestal can be compared with the role of the *mater familias* or *matrona* who educated her daughters and was responsible for teaching them about household duties.³⁶⁵ This habit of identifying the goddess to married women of the upper class created a sense of solidarity between the worshippers and the Vestals (although the latter's appearance did not imitate that of the married women, as they are not presented wearing *stola*). Despite the Vestals' virginal status, references to married women were obvious in the cult's image. Considering the figure of a chief Vestal, and the fact that occasionally child members predominantly occupied the organization, the image of a mother with her children emerges. Thus, in my view, the figure of a mother – *Virgo Vestalis maxima* – and her children – the young pupils – is characteristic of the institution. From another perspective, though, the Vestals formed a sisterhood that shared religious knowledge and the same prerogatives, and that served their cult as one for a long time period. Thus, the multiple identities, which were gained only gradually, can be associated with the Vestal virgins.

In summary, the Vestals' ageing and professionalization gave them more social influence, but an apprentice already began to have the religious knowledge that was the foundation for social recognition and honour. Religious duties were divided amongst the members so that certain priestesses participated in particular rituals; this enabled each Vestal to gain social esteem and public prominence through her participation and specialization. Other priesthoods generally gave honours to office holders without economic benefits, but the office of a Vestal was lucrative for its economic prospects; these were already available for young members of the cult. Without a question, it was a *virgo Vestalis maxima* who had the best opportunities and the longest time in which to exploit her office and status. When considering the life course of an individual priestess, she was in her late twenties or early thirties when she achieved this office. From the point of view of an individual and her relatives and clients, it took several years, if not decades, to benefit from the office of a Vestal. Chapter Three focuses on those individuals and groups who profited from the Vestals' high status and benefits of their office.

³⁶⁵ The *pontifex maximus* had supreme authority over all Vestals, but it is likely that the chief Vestal was an active person among the priestesses. In the third century in particular, when the *pontifex maximus* was often absent and hardly visited Rome, the chief Vestals' responsibility and power gained more weight. This discussion needs to be developed still further, particularly concerning questions such as: Was she responsible only for cultic matters or did she have some kind of authority or control over the other priestesses? What about comparisons with the *mater familias*? The idea of the matronly character of the chief Vestal is not a new one in itself. See, for example, Beard 1982, 14-15; Tacács 2008; 83-84.

In this chapter (2), the Vestals' privileged status and the dynamics of their organization has been analyzed so that their relationships with society could be estimated and analysed further in the subsequent chapters. Regarding their social status, their separation from their families and their removal away from a sphere of *patria potestas* was very crucial for their independence and for the cult's functioning in general. If the Vestals continued to have legal bonds with their biological families, their fathers could have taken their daughters away from the cult, endangering the functioning of the rituals. By cutting out the priestesses' right to the patrimony and to the protection of their family, they became anomalies in Roman society. Their fathers no longer had an influence on their lives when *patria potestas* no longer worked upon a daughter. Likewise, it was important, that the fathers had no opportunity to interfere with the cult's finances of the cult or to gain compensation. Any profit that the biological family could achieve came through a daughter who had the right to make decisions about her finances and property. The opportunity to make money by giving a daughter to the cult was theoretical, but the fact that family ties continued to exist between the Vestals and their birth families renders it plausible that the priestesses donated money or property to their relatives or bequeathed them their personal belongings. The fathers were probably not in a position to gain financial advantage from their daughters' office holding; beneficiaries were more often the younger members of the family (as is shown in the next chapters). Social prestige and an honorary position in contemporary society were, by contrast, immediately available for the parents of a Vestal. Gaining a position in the Vestals' *ordo* indicated that the family had fulfilled all requirements and that it was, above all, approved by the emperor, since he ultimately decided who would become a priestess of Vesta.

In addition to the privileges connected to their independent status, other benefits enjoyed by the priestesses were closely connected to their office holding and sacral duties. Regarding their privileges, my analysis starts from the point of view of their practical importance. The purpose of the numerous privileges was to ensure that the sacral duties were executed successfully and that the gods were worshipped so that the *pax deorum* prevailed. Thus, the benefits of the office were not simply a compensation or reward to the priestesses for giving their best years to serving the cult. Occasionally, the Vestals' honorary position or their privileges were part of a larger context when they were involved in imperial politics. The *clementia* and *sacrosanctitas* were qualities associated only with the highest officials of the state. On the occasions when clemency and *sanctitas*, inviolability, were needed, the Vestals were ordered to appear in public as symbolic signals of these qualities. Theoretically, the priestesses could use characteristics for private purposes — this is recorded to have

happened — but in imperial times they were instruments of peace or political negotiations by the imperial power. Instead of exclusively representing the cult or themselves, the Vestals represented the emperor or some other person of high status, such as imperial women or the *senatores*. Thus, they were occasionally detached from office holding so that they could be at the disposal of important state officials.

The Vestals' exclusiveness crystallized in their main obligation: they were the sole persons to guard the sacred fire, a crucial symbol of the continuity of the Roman state. Their knowledge or competence could not be replaced. This quality helped their cult to survive through the centuries, always adjusting to Roman society. There also existed a certain structure in their career development, and the Vestals held a monopoly over certain religious activities, such as the production of the *mola salsa* that was used for sacrificial purposes. In order to achieve their priestly identity and professionalism, the Vestals had to go through a special training.³⁶⁶ However, the Vestals' education was an exception among Roman women, for they lived most of their lives in the public eye and practiced the occupation of a professional priestess. Their public image and their high status can be compared with those of imperial women, especially with the status of the empress. Consequently, their high status and secured maintenance by the state appeared as attractive benefits for the Vestals' families. In spite of the legal separation, parents were motivated to expect that a Vestal would produce benefits for the family at large, and possibly for a long period of time. Next, I examine what and how the families, and other groups of people, benefitted from the Vestals, and what was the purpose of interactions between them. Thus, my aim is to uncover how they used their influential position, and what kind of benevolence the priestesses were capable of producing.

3. Interaction between the Vestals and their Devotees

Third-century inscriptions honoring the Vestal virgins form an exceptionally continuous corpus of honorary monuments that give insight into whether the priestesses had multiple social roles, or whether it was solely their profession through which their social position and public image were

³⁶⁶ An example from the Greek world is the poetess Sappho's circle, which shows how a community of women formed an educational centre or school for young girls. Through Sappho, education was offered to young maidens, and the poetess sometimes took them as the subjects of her works.

understood. My analysis here assumes that the priestesses participated in or belonged to three different communities or “families.” The most obvious of these was sacral community that comprised the six priestesses, who were women and girls of various ages. The extent to which they were associated with other priests (or priestesses), which would have extended this familial community, is one of my research objectives in this chapter. In addition to the familial community of religious officials, the Vestals remained more or less close to their birth families, even though they were legally separated from them and were not – according to law – members of their biological families or heirs of their fathers. Despite legalities, a link between the priestesses and their biological family members existed; another of my aims here is to uncover with whom the priestesses communicated and how their relationships were manifested publicly. Thirdly, I analyze the Vestals as associate members of the imperial family, since they were associated with imperial women and shared many privileges and honours with them. This theme is more fully considered in Chapter Four, but here I examine connections with imperial officials.

To explain the purpose and meaning of the inscriptions on the priestesses’ honorary monuments, it is first necessary to study the places where they were set up, namely in the *Atrium Vestae*, and to assess how such places served to strengthen the public image and value of the Vestal virgins.³⁶⁷ By considering what other monuments were placed in the House of Vestals, and who was allowed to enter there, I hope to reconstruct what was communicated through the monuments. Thus, studying the place itself will help us to understand the motives behind the action of setting up a public monument in third-century society. After discussing the functions of the *Atrium Vestae*, the epigraphical evidence is systematically analyzed and contextualized to determine whether the Vestals’ monuments were distinctive when compared to those of other third-century female recipients, and what kinds of changes in honoring conventions can be detected over time. To tie these various strands together, I discuss interactions between the Vestals and their dedicators, and the significance of the third-century Vestals as benefactresses and as members of their “families,” whether biological or cultic.

³⁶⁷ I use the term *honorary monument* to refer to the statues together with their honorary inscription. It is highly unlikely that the inscriptions existed without any kind of statue or portrait of the honored person. Thus, the honorary inscription was itself part of some larger artistic context. For more about honorary monuments as artistic ensembles, see J. Trimble, 2011.

3.1. From Sacral to Commercial - The Functions of the *Atrium Vestae*

When writing about the dangerous times of the republican era, Livy described the importance of the Vestals' residence and their attachment to it as follows: *For the Vestal virgins there is certainly only that official residence, where they ever move themselves besides if the City is captured.*³⁶⁸ Aulus Gellius likewise noted that as soon as a new priestess was brought into the *Atrium Vestae* and handed over to the pontiffs, her father's control ceased to exist, and the priestess gained the right to make a will.³⁶⁹ Thus, the House of Vestals was linked very strongly to the priestesses from the moment of their inauguration process. During the reign of the emperors, fire disasters occasionally disturbed the priestesses' lives and the subsequent reconstructions took time; this possibly prevented them from living in their official residence. However, the House of Vestals also certainly had functions other than offering a roof over the priestesses and their personnel. These functions and development of the area are discussed in this chapter. When we know the functions of the *Atrium Vestae*, we are able to reconstruct why it was a suitable place to set up the inscriptions.

The House of Vestals was situated in an area of tremendous significance in Roman history and culture. From the earliest days of the Roman republic, the area around the *Forum Romanum* and Palatium were preferred housing locations of the aristocratic class. The surroundings were considered sacred, and the prestige of aristocratic houses increased when they could associate their homes to the monuments and temples of the area. Private and public spaces, and religious and political buildings, thus existed together in the most important *forum* of the city.³⁷⁰ In the imperial era, the élite's houses were still located around the *forum* and their public prominence was manifested by their street-side decorations (which raised public attention and sometimes even disapproval).³⁷¹ The imperial palace

³⁶⁸ Liv. 5.52.13 *Vestalibus nempe una illa sedes est, ex qua eas nihil unquam praeterquam urbs capta mouit*'

³⁶⁹ Gell. NA 1.12.9: *Virgo autem Vestalis, simul est capta atque in atrium Vestae deducta et pontificibus tradita est, eo statim tempore sine emancipatione ac sine capitis minutione e patris potestate exit et ius testamenti faciendi adipiscitur.* If we take the words of Aulus Gellius at face value, the place itself had an impact on turning a priestess into a *sui iuris*. He seems to emphasize that particular moment (*eo statim tempore*), when a girl came into the *Atrium Vestae*, and saw it as a turning point in the life of a girl becoming a *virgo Vestalis*. As I shall demonstrate in this chapter, the *atrium Vestae* had many particularities. Thus, if there indeed prevailed an idea that the place had such a profound effect on the priestesses, and turned them into *sui iuris*, this would correlate with its sacral and peculiar character.

³⁷⁰ For example, the remains of the house of M. Aemilius Scaurus, whose grandfather helped to save the sacral objects from the temple of Vesta, were likely situated in the *forum*. Cicero, in his speech *Pro Scauro* (46-48), invited the listeners to remember Scaurus' achievements related to the many temples and places near his house. For the prestigious surroundings of the *forum Romanum*, see Hales 53, 2013. For an analysis of the private and public in the *forum Romanum*, see Russell A. 2015.

³⁷¹ The aristocratic houses and their decorations raised public attention on some special occasions. See, for example, Tac. *Ann.* 3.9.3.

area in the Palatine was expanded by different emperors. The dominating position of Palatine over the *forum* perhaps reflected the prevailing social system in which the emperor supervised the élite and state officials, such as the priests and the priestesses. During the principate, direct access to the House of Vestals was built from the palace, connecting the residences and likely strengthening the relationships between the imperial house and the cult of Vesta. Now that they practically lived as members of the imperial building complex, the Vestals' role as guardians of the state hearth was manifested even more prominently.

The House of Vestals was first and foremost the residence of the priestesses and the place where they practiced their profession.³⁷² Similar to the residences of other priests, such as the *flamen Dialis* or the Arval brethren, the Vestals' house had a prevailing sacral function. The sacred objects and sacrificial products stored in the house further emphasized its sanctity. As it is seen in figure 1. (see App. II) the temple of Vesta stood in immediate vicinity of the Vestals' residence.³⁷³ In the Roman world, it was unusual for priests/priestesses to live in what was essentially the deity's sanctuary. In this aspect, the third-century Vestal virgins resembled the *sacerdos Solis*, the priest of the Sun god.³⁷⁴ It has been suggested, however, that the building's function as their residence is not self-evident. The apparent lack of hygienic services and washing facilities supports this proposition. However, the lack of archaeological evidence may be due to the fact that the building complex and its interior were re-organized and re-built over the course of centuries.³⁷⁵ Literary evidence, by contrast, points to the early third-century Vestals living in the *Atrium*. According to the third-century historian Herodian, the Vestal Aquilia Severa was taken away from the women's residential quarters when she was made the wife of the emperor Elagabalus.³⁷⁶

³⁷² Mekacher 2006, 101-102. For the plan of the imperial House of Vestals and its remains today, see fig. 1-2.

³⁷³ The home of the *flamen Dialis* was called *flaminia* and restrictions regulated the priest's everyday life in his house. On this, see Gell. *NA* 10.15.8. The Arvals arranged annual celebrations in the home of the leading Arval. When the banquets were over, the sacred objects, *olla terrea* (jars made of unbaked earth), were stored in the house of the leading priest. This extended the sacral character of his home as if it was a sanctuary. For the practices of the Arvals, see Scheid 1990, 176.

³⁷⁴ The official residence (*domus publica*) of the *pontifex maximus* was situated next to the *Atrium Vestae*. In practice, the high priest lived in his private urban home, and from Emperor Augustus's reign, the emperor (i.e. *pontifex maximus*) stayed in his imperial palace. The *domus publica* was then given for the use of the Vestal virgins.

³⁷⁵ The residence was built on two levels, and the priestesses' private housing was apparently on the second floor, which is now lost. For an archeological survey of the place, see Scott 2009, 70-71.

³⁷⁶ Herod. 5.6.2.

Although the *Atrium Vestae* was publicly known, access to the temple area, and presumably also to the House of Vestals, was restricted. During the daytime, it was open to all worshippers, but during the night it was forbidden for men to enter to the area.³⁷⁷ This seems to have been an important restriction concerning the Vestals' good reputation and chastity. As the prohibition did not apply to daylight hours, it is probable that men were just as able as female visitors to actually see and examine the area, and the monuments in particular. In terms of restrictions concerning the temple itself, there was one special occasion on which female visitors were exclusively welcomed to the area. This was during *Vestalia*, the cult's main festival in June, when the temple was opened for *matrones* to pay a visit.³⁷⁸ This privilege seems to have been connected strictly to the festivities and may have emphasized the goddess's special character, including her approval of the company of women and her requirement that virgins take care of her worshipping.³⁷⁹ Considering that the temple itself and its courtyard were rather limited spaces, it is difficult to estimate what kind of assembling was possible. Perhaps the women waited to visit the temple in small groups. Alternatively, as numismatic evidence suggests, the gatherings may have taken place in front of the temple where the portable altar could be placed.³⁸⁰ Other parts of the area were possibly built to compensate for the inconvenience caused by the temple's limited space. Thus, the monumental courtyard of the *Atrium Vestae* could accommodate more people and this made the monuments of the Vestals more accessible, even if the temple itself was not.

Like many other sanctuaries, the Vestals' residence and the temple formed a place where refugees and persecuted people could find shelter. Once a person entered the place of refuge, for example the *asylum* in the Capitolium, he/she was safe from enemies. Cases from both the republican and imperial eras indicate that the *Atrium Vestae* was a place of refuge.³⁸¹ Either the *Atrium* was considered inviolable and so it protected those needing a shelter, or the priestesses' *sanctitas* ensured that their

³⁷⁷ Dion. Hal. 2.67.1.

³⁷⁸ In addition to the restriction against men visiting the temple area at night, there was also a restriction concerning the temple's innermost rooms. Only the Vestals and the *pontifex maximus* could enter there.

³⁷⁹ On Vesta not tolerating men and requiring virgins to take care of the *sacra*, see Ov. *Fast.* 6.288-294. The sanctuary of Vesta was not the only place to which admittance was specified by gender. Worshipping of *Bona Dea* included conditions for male worshippers: they were not allowed to go to the temple to pay their respects. Permission was granted only if the goddess had summoned them.

³⁸⁰ This is suggested by motifs on imperial coinage. See, for example, *RIC* 586 aureus for Julia Domna. IULIA AUGUSTA, draped bust/ VESTA MATER, Six Vestal, three on the left (one holding a *simpulum*) and three on the right (one holding a *patera*) sacrificing over an altar before the Temple of Vesta.

³⁸¹ Cicero's wife Terentia stayed with the Vestals after running away from creditors; one of the Vestals' slaves gave shelter to L. Calpurnius Piso, who was adopted by the emperor Galba as his successor. For the case of Terentia, see Cic. *Fam.* 14.2.9; for the case of Piso, see Tac. *Hist.* 1.43.6.

wellbeing could not be insulted and the people around them were safe as well. The *Atrium*'s occasional use as a shelter for political refugees or high-ranking citizens linked it with politics and the use of power. The Vestals' own inviolability, the character of their residence as a safe haven, and the fact that entering the temple area was regulated (at least at nighttime), gave the *Atrium Vestae* its special character.³⁸² The palace was associated with high-class security and its sacral character kept intruders away so that the temple of Vesta, the priestesses, and the valuable, sacred objects it contained could be kept inviolable.

On the one hand, there was limited access to the House of Vestals; on the other hand, it was situated in a very central spot of the city; this was an excellent place to gain public visibility. As Pliny the Younger noted: '*Setting up a statue in the Roman forum is as great an honour as receiving one;*' with these words it is understandable why the place itself motivated dedicators.³⁸³ Even so, the character of the *Atrium* was ambiguous. It was accessible, and yet out of reach. The *Atrium* was not reserved for only one particular function, and this can be seen as a strength and an advantage that increased its attractiveness. E. Hemelrijk's recent research concludes that the public space in the city of Rome was occupied by the imperial house, and therefore there was less space for the members of the élite to build monuments and receive public prominence.³⁸⁴ Thus, the *Atrium Vestae* provided an opportunity to gain public recognition and visibility in a city that was for the most part a display area of the members of the imperial house. The fact that the *Atrium* had a long history and a place in common cultural memory only increased its value further.³⁸⁵

In addition to the Vestals themselves, many other persons received honorary monuments in the House of Vestals. The largest group of other honorees is comprised of members of the imperial house, which undoubtedly lifted the social importance of the place. Emperors and the empresses received honorary monuments that were found in the southern *porticus* of the *Atrium Vestae*. These monuments were not necessarily found *in situ*, having been forgotten over the course of the centuries in the rooms of

³⁸² In this connection, I want to emphasize also the special character of the temple of Vesta.

³⁸³ Plin. *Ep.* 1.17; *Neque enim magis decorum et insigne est statuam in foro populi Romani habere quam ponere.* E. Hemelrijk has studied the reciprocal relationships between dedicators and honorees. The quotation from Pliny reflects well Roman sentiments regarding this subject. On Pliny and the dedicators' motives, see Hemelrijk 2015, 138, including note 94 on the same page.

³⁸⁴ Hemelrijk 2015, 339-340.

³⁸⁵ The long history of the temple of Vesta and *atrium* is acknowledged. See Dion. Hal. 2.65.5; Plut. *Vit. Num.* 11.1. In Livy there are numerous passages that discuss historical events related to the temple, such as when it was nearly destroyed by fire, or when it was attacked by enemies who stole the sacral objects. See Livy 26.27.4.1; 26.27.14.1; 28.11.6-7.

the *Atrium*. Thus, we cannot be certain where exactly the imperial monuments were placed in the *Atrium*.³⁸⁶ Archaeological findings reveal certain similarities between the *Atrium Vestae* and other places as sites of imperial monuments. Portraits of the emperor seem to have been placed inside the offices of state institutions, such as the working place of the *vigiles*. The Arval brothers also furnished their office outside the city with the emperors' portrait busts.³⁸⁷

Among the inscriptions found in the *Atrium Vestae*, several state officials as well as different occupational groups appear as donators of the monuments.³⁸⁸ The most ancient, preserved inscription dates from the first century BCE, and discusses the *fasti* of the augurs.³⁸⁹ This provokes an idea that the Vestals kept or stored the calendar or *fasti*, i.e., the list of religious festivals, in their residence. The residence certainly had good facilities that could be used to store important objects, since it was divided into many different wings profiled with different functions. In the written sources of the same period as the *fasti augurales*, the Vestals are noted as being entrusted with several important documents, such as the testaments of high-level officials.³⁹⁰ This suggests that they were familiar with keeping important documents in general, and doing so was included in their job description. Their close association with the pontifical college, which traditionally took care of the calendars, may explain why the *fasti* were trusted to the Vestal virgins.

In sum, as a place the *Forum Romanum* was unparalleled in the capital or in any city of the empire. This was the place where private space and private aspirations to emphasize ones' socio-political value confronted public functions and activities. The Vestals' house was perhaps one of the best examples of a space where private and public functions and purposes overlapped. The house was not only their residence, but also served as a refuge for those in need. Although the temple of Vesta was the main sanctuary of the cult, it also functioned as an archive for the collective *fasti* or the storage of the important documents of private citizens. Thus, the *Atrium Vestae* was intended for collective use, not only for the private residence of the priestesses. However, limited access to the *Atrium Vestae*,

³⁸⁶ There is consensus that the monuments were originally situated in the *Atrium*'s portico. See Lindner 2015, 62-63. This is also my presupposition.

³⁸⁷ Portraits of the emperor Caracalla found in the office of the *vigiles* (in Ostia) are similar to the portraits found in the *Atrium*. On the emperors' statue in the sanctuary of the Arvals, see Scheid 1990, 159.

³⁸⁸ Most of the imperial monuments are dedicated to members of the Severan dynasty. These third-century donators are discussed in Chapter Four.

³⁸⁹ *CIL VI* 32318.

³⁹⁰ On the keeping of testaments of important citizens and other documents, see Suet. *Iul.* 83.1.4; *Aug.* 101.1; Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.2; Cass. Dio 48.12.2; 48.371; 48.46.2; 56.32.1.

and restrictions regarding its space, raise the question why dedicators chose the place for their monuments.³⁹¹ Throughout the third century, the *Atrium* remained a popular place to house the Vestals' honorary inscriptions. Further, if we consider the House of Vestals as an extension of the imperial residence, or that their connection was at least very intense, then setting up the monuments there was practically the same as getting access to the imperial palace and to the emperor. Thus, imperial presence was very prominent in the *Atrium* and it was ultimately the emperor who supervised all activities in the forum and in the *Atrium Vestae*.

3.2. Imperial Propaganda and the *Atrium Vestae*

The *Atrium Vestae* and the temple of Vesta were situated in the immediate vicinity of the Palatine hill, from where the imperial palace complex dominated the entire *Forum Romanum*. Numerous emperors engaged in major reconstructive and decorative works or extensions of the sacral area of Vesta – either after fires, when reconstructions were necessary, or following their own political agenda — which included religious propaganda that emphasized the goddess.³⁹² After the fire incident in 192 CE, the Severans carried out the seventh set of reconstructions. This was also the last restoration, according to modern archaeology.³⁹³

Building and decorating the Vestal house and sanctuary was a very prominent way to support the cult, but there were other ways to associate with it and its priestesses. The Julio–Claudian dynasty set an example for later religious politics and specifically for the role of the *pontifex maximus*, first presented by Emperor Augustus and then more or less adopted by later emperors. To reinforce the relationship between his household and the cult of Vesta, Augustus built a shrine for the goddess in his Palatine palace. Recent studies consider this Palatium *ara* to have been a replica (*simulacrum*) of a much-older original.³⁹⁴ The Julio-Claudians thus created a new connection between the imperial house and

³⁹¹ Earlier research concluded that the House of Vestals did not share the same degree of publicity as the imperial forums, where the monuments of the senators stood. One reason why the place was full of dedications is related to the identity of dedicators, who were persons of priestly offices and close family members or clients. For this discussion, see Niquet 2000, 189.

³⁹² The developments of the House of Vestals from the imperial era onward have been studied since Rodolfo Lanciani carried out the first excavations in the 1880s. For the history of archaeological studies at the *Aedes Vestae/Atrium Vestae*, see Lindner (2015); for the latest archaeological survey at the site, see Scott (2009). The republican House of Vestals was apparently a smaller scale building and its orientation differed from the building complex seen today in the *Forum*.

³⁹³ For the activities of the Severan house in the *Atrium Vestae*, see Lichtenberger 2011, 283.

³⁹⁴ The shrine of Vesta in Palatium seems to have been a specifically first-century practice. The shrine's later use or even existence cannot be confirmed, although it is assumed that the Palatine shrine was depicted on Flavian coinage. For the

the House of Vestals, not just architecturally but also personally: the imperial couple became patrons of the cult, and the Vestals' residence was created as an extension of the imperial palace. This activity is not surprising, considering first- and second-century imperial propaganda. The emperor and his family were connected to the city of Rome, and this association was reinforced a further link to the hearth of Vesta, which was the center of the entire state. Over time, however, the emphasis changed and imperial attention was directed away from the capital under the pressure of foreign enemies. The city of Rome lost its absolute importance gradually – already during the late second century, but in early third century at the latest. The new idea emerged that the capital was situated wherever the emperor was located, and this generated a series of new practices.³⁹⁵ How did this affect the cult of Vesta, and the priestesses, whose sphere of influence was traditionally restricted inside the city's walls? To what extent did the *Atrium Vestae* and the priestesses remain part of the imperial propaganda when the *Urbis Romae* lost its meaning?

The cult of Vesta had enjoyed imperial attention since the Julio-Claudian era. However, the old order and stable political situation was changing, and this generated a new, unparalleled twist in the cult's public image. Imperial women and their instrumental role in politics was crucial in maintaining the prominence of the Vestals and their cult. The Julio-Claudians and the Flavians had elevated their empresses – and other imperial women – as part of public image of imperial power. However, imperial women of the second and early third century gained a new value and importance in the public eye, even taking Vesta as a part of their own image during the Antonine and Severan dynasties. Particularly Vesta's maternal qualities, her being a progenitrix of Rome, were adopted by the empresses and the emblem of *Vesta Mater* appeared on imperial coinage. Regarding the epithet *Mater*, I suppose here that it was not just an honorary title reserved for certain goddesses, but rather emphasized specifically the character of Vesta as a mother of the Roman state. This mother-quality was connected to the empresses, whose own motherly image was articulated in various ways.³⁹⁶ From

ancient origins of sanctuary of Vesta, see Carandini 2005, 16-19. For Palatine shrine for Vesta, see Degrassi 1955 145-154. For analyzing the scholarly discussion of Palatine shrine, see Coarelli 2012, 409-412. For numismatic evidence, see Cappelli 1986, 57-69. For more on this subject, see also Scott 1996, 126 s.v. *Vesta, Aedes*.

³⁹⁵ The emperor Marcus Aurelius was forced to fight against migrants from Germania in the mid-second century, for instance. An idea that "Rome" is where the emperor is can be traced to Herodian from the third century; see Herod. 1.6.5. He associates this statement with the advisor of the emperor Commodus (sole rule 180-192). For the change in Rome becoming a symbolic capital, see Hope 2000, 90-91.

³⁹⁶ On Vesta as a mother of Rome, see Cic. Har. Resp. 12.5. According to the founding legend of Rome, Rhea Silvia, mother of Romulus and Remus, was a Vestal virgin. Likewise, in the Augustan literature, a link between Vesta and Augustus was created so that the emperor himself was descended from Vesta. There have also been different views expressed in the research, some of which disregard the goddess' role as an ancestress and suggest that the epithet 'mother' designates the matrons, rather than the mothers; for this view, see Wildfang 2006, 7.

the Antonines onwards, the empresses were elevated as mothers of the war camps (*mater castrorum*). Further, they received titles such as mothers of the senate (*mater senatus*) and state (*mater patriae*). Their basic role as mothers of the new emperors – which of course was tremendously important – was no longer sufficient for expressing their authority. The empresses of the Antonines and Severans thus enlarged their maternal power over the state and public; the cult of Vesta, with Vesta herself being an ultimate *mater Romae*, became a useful political instrument.³⁹⁷

The sanctuary of Vesta was an age-old religious center, and now it became a place for public appearances, a place of commerce, and a center where imperial women could propagate their public image. Numerous life-size statues of female figures – who do not represent the priestesses – were set up in the *Atrium Vestae* from the second century onwards. On the grounds of this visual evidence, the idea that these statues represent imperial women who took on the role of *patronae* of the cult of Vesta has been plausibly suggested.³⁹⁸ This statuary activity can be linked to the building program initiated by the emperor Trajan. His politics were firmly connected to maintaining the capital's corn supply; for this reason, the goddess Vesta was emphasized as a goddess of food storage, and her importance as a keeper of important objects, such as corn, as well as her status as a guarantor of the city's safety was celebrated on imperial coinage. In keeping with this new prominence, the Vestals' house was enlarged and small shopping stands or stores were added to the flank of the building complex, making its functions more secular and commercial than ever before.³⁹⁹ Vesta also continued to be present on the coinage of subsequent emperors, such as Antoninus Pius, as did the themes of corn supply connected to Vesta.⁴⁰⁰ However, from this era (second century), we lack life-size statues of the priestesses themselves, not to mention their honorary inscriptions. However, numerous busts and statue heads representing the Vestals survive. Their physical appearance – the style of their headpieces and their facial features for example – follows that of the imperial women Pompeia Plotina and Vibia Sabina.⁴⁰¹ Thus, the Vestal honoring practices presumably began already during the second

³⁹⁷ The empress Livia received the impressive title *mater genetrix orbis*, as an inscription from the Tiberian era indicates. *CIL* II, 2038.

³⁹⁸ Lindner 2015, 71.

³⁹⁹ Although there is no single literary source that refers to this massive enterprise, the archeological, numismatic and epigraphic evidence speak in favor of the Trajanic era. However, some of the work was perhaps initiated as early as the reign of the emperor Domitian. On the changes carried out by the emperor Trajan, see Mekacher 2006, 102; Scott 2009, 67, 69. See also Bloch, 1968.

⁴⁰⁰ Rowan 2013, 237.

⁴⁰¹ For an interpretation of the Vestals' statues and portraits, see Lindner (2015) and Mekacher (2006).

century, when imperial women took the sanctuary of Vesta as their place to manifest their own public image.

Consequently, when we think of the visual representations of the goddess Vesta from the Antonine era and later, the goddess appears, in my view, as a mother figure who feeds the population. Not only was Vesta a domestic goddess, but she was also a patron of bakers and millers who celebrated the *Vestalia* (a main cultic festival) in June. Thus, the cult was associated with food production, especially corn and bread. This was a very relevant topic during the Antonine era, and corn supply is present in the votive and honorary monuments set up in the *Atrium Vestae* and its vicinity. First, a certain Gaius Pupius Firminus, who belonged to the guild of bakers and was its treasurer, dedicated a votive gift for Vesta. The cylindrical measure of corn, bread and ears of corn are depicted in the relief. Her appearance with food products reinforces my idea that Vesta was perceived as a nurturing mother figure.⁴⁰² The image of a seated goddess, who has corn or bread as her attributes, also appeared in the second-century votive monuments outside the city of Rome.⁴⁰³ In addition to this ‘Vesta and food supply’ theme, other honorary monuments are preserved from the second century, but the monuments associated with the corn and food supply manifest the most important issues of imperial politics that continued to be emphasized during the third century.⁴⁰⁴ As we shall see on the following pages, the third-century Vestals and cult were connected to religious officials called the *fictores* who were originally the bakers of sacrificial cakes. The appearance of these *fictores* indicated that the connections between corn, baking and the cult were strong, and they continued to be prominent in the third century.

Although the capital began to lose its centrality in imperial propaganda, the cult of Vesta sustained its position because it communicated the ideals that were important for imperial women and for

⁴⁰² *CIL* VI 787=30832. In this sculpture or relief, the goddess sits on a throne offering food to a sacred snake, which apparently represents the protector of home shrines. As M. Lindner observes, the snake was a symbol of *Salus*, which took care of the people’s wealth and health. The healing symbol of snake, food, wealth and the goddess Vesta were thus connected together in this relief. See Lindner 2015, 23-24.

⁴⁰³ Then a certain Lucius Valerius Proculus, *praefectus annonae* 142-144 CE set up an inscription on behalf of the college of bakers and millers in order to honor the emperor Antoninus Pius. *CIL* VI 31222=1002. For votive monuments and representations of Vesta, see Greifenhagen A., 1967.

⁴⁰⁴ In addition to the monuments associated with the corn supply and the bakers, there are a few other inscription monuments preserved from the second century. One is an inscription of *collegium familiae domus Palatinae* from 98/100 AD and the other is a monument for M. Ulpianus Celsianus, scribe of the librarians. *CIL* VI 32429; *CIL* VI 32282=37143. The last second-century inscription is dedicated to the emperor Commodus. The fragmented inscription was donated by a certain M. Fl. Seleucus Vitellius, who received an office of *consul ordinarius* in 221, and was allegedly Syrian in origin. *CIL* VI 31318a. For M.Fl. Seleucus Vitellius, see Mennen 2011, 129; Levick 2007, 151.

imperial politics. Thus, the idea of Vesta as a mother of the state, her associations with imperial women, and the protective power of Vesta regarding the corn supply were very important incentives to propagate the cult. When the prevailing system was breaking down, or the social system was undergoing transition, Vesta and the priestesses reminded people of continuation and tradition. Thus, my conclusion is that in the second century there already existed a tradition to locate inscription monuments in the House of Vestals, even if there are no remaining inscriptions dedicated to the Vestals from this era. In the next sections, third-century activities in the House of Vestals are scrutinized, and the question of what the inscriptions tell us about the Vestals' social influence is examined. First, I discuss how the women were honoured and whether this differed from the practices of honoring third-century Vestals.

Honouring Practices of Roman Women – Literary Evidence

The Vestals' virtues, and their public activities, were so special and their behavior so outstanding that they were celebrated by historians and by contemporaries alike. In order to analyse further what made them so special, I turn to literary analysis that divides morally virtuous women into different categories. First, the wife honoured by her husband is an archetype represented, for example, by Calpurnia (a wife of Pliny the younger). A Roman *matrona* appears either as an austere and morally impeccable woman, or as an urban, educated and socially talented woman. As an antithesis to these women, we find the morally suspicious, yet still socially talented and educated woman. A woman could also be depicted as masculine and warlike, or as a heroine ready to sacrifice herself. Lastly, there were the women who appeared in public but only when they were making efforts to maintain social order. These categories overlap, but can be used as general categories when exploring women in the epigraphic evidence.⁴⁰⁵ To accommodate the Vestals perfectly within these categories is not my point; rather, the idea of the virtues expressed by women is helpful for understanding the priestesses' actions. The Vestals are represented as virtuous in various public contexts, due to their different sexual status and different social position. As we shall see, their active role is bound with their professionalism as priestesses, their close associations with their birth families, and their virtuous character that was suitable for representing the empire.

⁴⁰⁵ Hesberg-Tonn 1983, 103-104. For a recent study of female virtues in the literature and the idea that the categories can be used as tools for examining epigraphic evidence of women, see Riess 2012, 492. On literary analysis and heroic women in the Roman tradition, see Pyy, 2014.

In the literary sources, we find evidence of the Vestals acting on behalf of their relatives and sacrificing themselves for the sake of their family. Their self-sacrifice is notably represented in the republican or first-century literary sources referring to the legendary Vestals (Claudia) or to contemporary priestesses, such as Fonteia, Iunia Torquata, and Licinia Praetextata.⁴⁰⁶ In the third century, we find the Vestal virgin Cannutia Crescentia, who committed suicide after being found guilty of *incestum*. Even if a person was charged with treason – which *incestum* essentially was – committed suicide, his/her testament remained valid and their property was not confiscated. In this case, the priestess perhaps wanted to save her family from the dishonor of being executed and chose instead to commit suicide. Regarding this action and the practice applied to suicide, I suggest that Cannutia Crescentia followed the Roman virtue of sacrificing herself for the sake of her family. Above all, her case indicates that she determined her own fate rather than let the pontifical college pass the traditional sentence of being buried alive.⁴⁰⁷

The cases above reflect examples of the Vestals' actions being restricted to the family circle; in other words, it was their family that benefitted from their honorable action. However, the case of Vibidia from the mid-first century tells us about Vestals' actions on behalf of persons other than their relatives. Here, it was the empress Messalina who asked to speak on her behalf. Further, the Vestals could act as a group as peace negotiators, in which case their actions concerned the community as a whole. On these occasions, they were on a special mission and did not motivate their own activity; actions taken on behalf of their families, by contrast, seem to have originated with the Vestals themselves.⁴⁰⁸ An example from late antiquity indicates that the Vestals, also this time as a group, were ready to resist the old traditions and counsels of their superior (Q.Aurelius Symmachus). The priestesses wished to donate a monument for their deceased *pontifex maximus* and apparently they succeeded in doing so, even though this meant that they acted against tradition.⁴⁰⁹ In this case, the

⁴⁰⁶ The Vestal Claudia rescued her father (according to some sources her brother) from being denied the right to celebrate a triumph. The three other Vestals defended their male relatives in court, successfully ensuring lenient sentences for them. In the case of Licinia Praetextata, her family was, under the guidance of their mother Sulpicia Praetextata, ready to fight for the *pater familias* if he should be charged. On Vestals sacrificing themselves for a relative, see Val. Max. 5.4.6 (Claudia); Cic. *Font.* 46.-49 (Fonteia); Tac. *Ann.* 3.66-69 (Iunia Torquata); Tac. *Hist.* 4.42. (Licinia Praetextata).

⁴⁰⁷ For Cannutia Crescentia, see Cass. Dio. 78.16.3. For the validity of one's testament and the avoidance of confiscation if a person took his/her own life, see Tac. *Ann.* 6.29. *eorum qui de se statuebant humabantur corpora, manebant testamenta, pretium festinandi*. Those who decided their own fate (i.e. committed suicide) were buried, and their testaments remained intact.

⁴⁰⁸ The chief Vestal Vibidia spoke on behalf of the empress Messalina. For the actions of Vibidia, see Tac. *Ann.* 11.32; 34. On the Vestals as peace negotiators, see Tac. *Hist.* 3.81; *SHA Did. Iul.* 6.5.

⁴⁰⁹ For this case, see Symm. *Ep.* 2.36.

priestesses acted according to their own will, and were motivated as a collective. What is important to notice is that they exceeded the social limits set on women.

Moral impeccability was strongly connected to the Vestals' character, and they were punished if they failed to remain chaste, such as the *matrones* who were condemned for their improper behavior. Thus, the Vestal and matrons shared the same virtues, or limitations. This link was reinforced by granting the same privileges to both groups; they even carried the same external symbols (the *seni crines* headdress). However, the matrons practiced their virtuousness at home and among their families; their sphere of life was comprised of household works and taking care of their children. For the Vestals, by contrast, their course of life was determined by proceeding through their career and serving the cult in public. In this way, the Vestals exceeded the categories of different virtues. They were educated for their profession, and as such were in the category of educated women. They were modest and chaste, and sometimes represented Roman state virtues that resulted in self-sacrificing. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the Vestals had also the quality of *clementia*, which was considered to be an imperial virtue. Thus, in addition to the virtues of chastity, self-sacrificing, professional qualifications, and religious purity, the priestesses were associated with ideal emperors who acted leniently towards the citizens. These themes emerge from the literary evidence, but next I discuss what the epigraphic and visual evidence reveals about the Vestals' virtues.

Honouring the Vestals and Elite Women – Epigraphic Sources

Knowledge about how Roman women and the Vestals were honoured expands significantly when epigraphical sources are studied. My attention is now turned to what word choices can reveal about the honoured Vestals. When the dedicators could not celebrate the priestesses' domestic skills and traditional female features, what were the characteristics and virtues that were seen as proper and praiseworthy? In other words, what differences are evident between the inscription tradition as it applied to Vestals and to other women? My analysis starts from the assumption that the text and the words were well considered, and that the dedicators participated in creating a social role for a Vestal through the project of building a public monument. The inscriptions also manifest a certain ideal priestess: what kind of ideal woman did they present and why?

Recent discussion of W. Riess came to conclusion that closer attention needs to be paid to the social contexts of the inscriptions, and that epigraphical conventions be used to examine how women were presented in their different roles as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters.⁴¹⁰ Most inscriptions dedicated to women were private funerary epitaphs that praised their abilities as good housekeepers and as distinguished mothers. The Vestal virgins, however, received inscriptions while they were alive and served in public office. These inscriptions have been scrutinized for several decades. Although the texts had been interpreted and analysed, the dedicators' motives and overall message of the inscriptions have been neglected. In spite of the public nature of the monuments, the initiative for setting them up came from the private family sphere if the dedicators were their family members. Other inscriptions were set up by clients, slaves and officials (*fictores*), who helped the Vestals in their profession, or by other priests (*sacerdotii Solis, sacerdotii sacra urbis*). Although the Vestal inscriptions may seem formal and similar, I believe that their texts did not remain conventionally unchanged from one decade to the next; instead, subtle differences can be traced in the contents, and the messages in the inscriptions depended on the relationship between the Vestal and her dedicator.

Beginning in the reign of Emperor Augustus, writers noted that the Greek habit of honouring women also elevated the emperor's dynastic power and offered opportunities to celebrate the public prominence of the emperor's family. Through these Greek honouring habits, women of the imperial family, particularly Augustus's sister Octavia, and his wife, the empress Livia, began to appear in public art and they received statues in Rome due to their modest character and ideal beauty. Gradually, other non-imperial women received the same honour and enjoyed public recognition, for example due to their contributions as *patronae*.⁴¹¹ What is more important though, is to notice that in Athens the Vestals were featured in public monuments dedicated by the people of Athens and their male relatives.⁴¹² Thus, public honorary monuments were a Greek habit, and imperial women and the Vestals were the first to receive this honour in imperial Rome.

⁴¹⁰ Riess 2012, 498.

⁴¹¹ In fact, in republican times the Roman elite already honoured their female members when holding high offices in the Greek East. In doing so, they followed local habits even though their women were not yet honoured publicly in Rome to the same extent. It appears from the literary sources that such legendary Vestals as Gaia Taracia, or alleged Vestals such as Claudia Quinta, received public monuments. On women receiving public honours in Greek culture, see Hemelrijk 2005, 309-317.

⁴¹² Honouring the Vestal virgins Aurelia, Vibidia and Valeria occurred in the same era as imperial women receiving honours in the Acropolis. Imperial women set an example for other high-ranking women whose male family members seized the opportunity to emphasize their family's honour and public prominence by setting up monuments for their accomplished female relatives. For Vibidia: *IG II² 3532*; for Aurelia *IG II² 3534*; for Valeria *IG II²/III³ 3533*. For the Vestals' monuments in Athens see the study of M. Kajava (2001).

Recent studies discuss whether the same types of morally virtuous women who appear in the literary sources also occur in the epigraphical material. The most frequently appearing adjectives in the epigraphical material in general refer to several categories: *dulcissima* (sweetest), *pia* (dutiful) and many other terms with similar signification, *bene merens* (well deserving), *sua* (his/hers), *carissima* (dearest), *optima* (best), and *sanctissima* (holiest).⁴¹³ Of the thirty-four inscriptions dedicated to the Vestal virgins, the word *sanctissima* is mentioned in seventeen texts. Another popular expression is *religiosissima*, which appears in ten inscriptions (*religiosa* appears in one). The superlative form *religiosissima* is found rarely in the broader epigraphic evidence, and the Vestals thus constitute a significant (but small) group whose members are addressed with this quality. Table 3 below presents the use of the superlative *religiosissimo –a* in the inscriptions dedicated – besides to the Vestals – to different receivers of different social statuses. The receiver’s social status and the context of the inscription are also noted, where this information is available.⁴¹⁴

Table 3. Religiosissimo –a used in inscriptions.

| Inscription | Receiver | Social status of the receiver/dedicator | Context | Date |
|--------------------|----------|---|---|--------|
| <i>CIL</i> I, 2500 | - | - | Lex Gabinia Calpurnia concerning the Island of Delos, <i>insula Delo antiquissima ac religiosissima</i> | 58 BCE |

⁴¹³ Riess 2012, 492-493.

⁴¹⁴ *Religiosissimo, -a* means 'pious', 'devout' and someone who follows the religious duty. See *OLD* s.v. *religious*, 1606. E. Forbis discusses the virtues that the dedicators connect to their patrons. According to her, *religiosissimo, -a* is used when a patron has shown scrupulous concern for the community. When a patron has been generous and gave money to a community, other virtues such as *munificentia* appear in the inscriptions. For discussing the use of this virtue, see Forbis 1996, 74-76. In the web-pages of Epigraphik Datenbank – Clauss/Slaby (EDCS), there are only thirty-one hits on the word *religiosissimus, -a*. The Vestals are addressed in eight of those hits. In my view, the use of the superlative form narrates societal values and attitudes. My intention is not to argue here that the words construct our beingness or our social lives, but it is important to see who had the right to be addressed by certain words or titles, and what epithets were used to describe certain individuals. Thus *religiosissimus, -a* seems to have been rare epigraphically, except perhaps among the Vestals.

| | | | | |
|---------------|--|--|---|--|
| AE 1955, 170 | Marcus Acilius, Auli <i>filius</i> , trib. Voturia, Prisco Egrilius Plarianus, <i>religiosissimus</i> <i>patronus</i> | Dedicators: decr(eto) decur(ionum) publice | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | early 2 nd century |
| CIL IX, 1686 | Caius Umbrius Vibius Numisius Drusus, <i>patronus</i> <i>religiosissimus</i> | Dedicator: <i>collegium Martense</i> | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | early 2 nd century |
| AE 2002, 498 | (Fragmentary) <i>religiosissimae</i> <i>coniugi</i> | (Fragmentary) | Epitaph | 2 nd to 3 rd century |
| CIL VI, 1341 | Annia Alexadria | The dedicator: Lucius Steius Aemilianus, <i>vir</i> <i>clarissimus</i> | For the most devout wife, <i>coniugi</i> <i>religiosissimae</i> | 3 rd century |
| CIL VI, 1358 | Marcus Aurelius Victor | <i>vir clarissimus,</i> <i>praefectus feriarum</i> <i>latinarum, sacerdos</i> <i>dei Solis/ Iovinus</i> <i>Callidianus</i> <i>condiscipulus</i> | Laudatory inscription <i>sacerdoti religiosissimo</i> | 3 rd century |
| CIL VI, 1490 | Quintus Pompeius Quirinus Sosius Priscus, <i>proavus</i> | Dedicator Quintus Pompeius Falco Sosius Priscus, <i>clarissimus vir</i> <i>pontifex praetor</i> <i>designates</i> | Epitaph: for <i>conditori</i> <i>religiosissimo</i> | 3 rd century |
| 'CIL VI, 2134 | Flavia Publicia, <i>virgo Vestalis</i> <i>maxima</i> | Dedicator Quintus Veturius Memphius, <i>vir egregius, fitor</i> <i>virginum Vestalium</i> | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | mid-3 rd century |

| | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>CIL VI, 2137</i> | Coelia Claudiana <i>virgo Vestalis maxima</i> | Dedicators Fl(avius) Eucharistus Septim(ius) Epictetus i(uvenis) p(erfectissimus) / Aur(elius) Optatus sacerdotes sacrae u[rb]is / de X prim(is) | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | late 3 rd century |
| <i>CIL VI, 2138</i> | Coelia Claudiana <i>virgo Vestalis maxima</i> | Dedicator Octavia Honorata v(irgo) V(estalis) | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | late 3 rd century |
| <i>CIL VI, 32416</i> | Flavia Publicia, <i>virgo Vestalis maxima</i> | Dedicators Bareius Zoticus cum Flavia / Verecunda | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | mid 3 rd century |
| <i>CIL VI 32417</i> | Flavia Publicia, <i>virgo Vestalis maxima</i> | Dedicator: Marcus Aurelius Hermes | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | mid 3 rd century |
| <i>CIL VI, 32420</i> | Coelia Claudiana <i>virgo Vestalis maxima</i> | Dedicator: Aurelius Fructosus <i>cliens et</i> <i>candidatus eius</i> | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | late 3 rd century |
| <i>CIL VI, 32421</i> | Coelia Claudiana <i>virgo Vestalis maxima</i> | (Fragmentary) | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | late 3 rd century |
| | | | | |

| | | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| <i>CIL VIII, 8457</i> | <i>religiosissimum templum</i> | - | Inscription discusses the temple's consecration? | late 3 rd century |
| <i>CIL VI, 2141</i> | Terentia Rufilla <i>virgo Vestalis maxima</i> | Dedicators Ael(ia) Ianuaria quae et Leontia | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | 300 CE |
| <i>CIL VI, 2151</i> | Iunius Postumianus, <i>vir clarissimus, pater patrum dei Solis Invicti Mithrae, XVvir sacris faciundis, pontifex dei Solis</i> | Dedicators: Rome's college of priests (<i>ordo sacerdotum</i>), Flavius Herculeus | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | From late 3 rd to late 4 th century |
| <i>CIL VI, 1707</i> | Gaius Caeionius Rufius Volusianus <i>vir clarissimus corrector Italiae, proconsul Africae, comes domini nostri</i> | - | Laudatory/Honorary inscription | early 4 th century |
| <i>CIL III, 4413</i> | Sol Invictus Mithra | - | restoring the shrine | early 4 th century |
| <i>ICUR-3, 7761</i> | Primigenia | Dedicator: <i>maritus</i> | Epitaph | 4 th century |
| <i>ICUR-5, 14744</i> | (Fragmentary) | (Fragmentary) | Epitaph | ? |
| <i>CIL VIII, 16325</i> | Marcus Caecilius Fausti, <i>religiosissimus patronus</i> | Dedicator: <i>Privatus libertus</i> | Commemorative monument | |
| | | | | |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|--|--|---------------|--|
| <i>CIL VI, 32427</i> | (Fragmentary) | (Fragmentary) | (Fragmentary) | ? |
| <i>CIL VI, 32427</i> | (Fragmentary) | (Fragmentary) | (Fragmentary) | ? |
| <i>CIL XI, 7540</i> | Marcus Aurelius Propinquos | Dedicators: <i>fili religiosissimi</i> | | ? |
| <i>CIL XIV, 343</i> | Corneliae Cocceiae <i>religiosissima filia</i> | Dedicators: Cornelius Victorinus Isiacus et Cocceia Manliane <i>parentes</i> | Epitaph | ? |
| <i>ICUR-9, 25196</i> | Matrinia | (Fragmentary) | Epitaph | ? |
| <i>IRCPacen 00229t</i> | (Fragmentary) <i>flaminica perpetua civitatis Mirietanorum religiosissimae</i> | Dedicators: <i>nepotes</i> | Epitaph | ? |
| <i>RPAA-1990/91-269</i> | (Fragmentary) | (Fragmentary) | ? | ? |
| <i>CIL X, 7995</i> | Secundus | Dedicators: <i>Paulina uxor et Ianuarius filius</i> | Epitaph | 4 TH -6 TH century |

In addition to *sanctissima* (most sacred) and *religiosissima* (most pious), the word *piissima* (most conscientious) ioccurs in seven of the inscriptions. Other laudatory expressions include

praestantissima (most outstanding) and *benignissima* (most kind). Adjectives addressing the moral and sexual purity of the priestesses (*purissima*, *castissima*, and *pudicissima*) likewise appear in the inscriptions, although they are far less prominent than one would expect in light of the requirement that the Vestals be sexually pure.⁴¹⁵ The Vestals thus shared at least two categories (*sanctissima* and *piissima*) with other women who were praised for their moral virtues. However, terminology referring to expressions of affection and more personal/intimate emotions, such as *dulcissima* and *carissima*, are absent from the Vestals' inscriptions. Also associations connected to the domestic tasks and wool work, which was a sign of a virtuous woman, are absent from the Vestals' laudatory inscriptions.⁴¹⁶ Lastly, one essential difference – which must be repeated here again – is that the Vestals received their laudatory monuments when they were still in office, when the vast majority of other women were honored only after their death.

Earlier research has examined what the formulas of the Vestals' inscriptions tell us about their social position, and whether they can be compared to the honorary, laudatory and funeral texts dedicated to other Roman women. Certain differences are evident between the Vestals and ordinary women. While matronly virtues, such as *fides* and *obsequentia*, appear frequently in the inscriptions dedicated to ordinary upper class women, the Vestals are not described by these characteristics.⁴¹⁷ Both the Vestals and women of the Roman upper class were expected to live up to certain moral standards, such as being morally upright and sexually chaste. In this sense, the quality of *sanctissima* fits well both the Vestals and married women since, in a moral sense, *sanctus* refers to virtuousness and blamelessness.⁴¹⁸ However, matronly virtues like obedience and fidelity are not connected to the priestesses because their social status and influence were comprised of different elements. Therefore my conclusion is that even if the Vestals shared many external symbols with married, high-class women – such as clothing and participation in sacril rituals – they were not equal or similar

⁴¹⁵ Mekacher (2006, 123) also notes that words describing sexual purity are not well represented in the Vestals' inscriptions. I chose to include the first- and fourth-century inscriptions in the *Atrium Vestae* for comparative purposes. The few inscriptions from the earlier centuries (*CIL* VI 2127=32403; 2128; 32410) follow the short-spoken, even laconic, style of the early empire. Nothing further can be extracted from these materials considering the Vestals' virtues. However, they are relevant when studying the tradition of setting up inscriptions for the Vestal virgins at their residence. *Sanctissima*: *CIL* VI 2131; 2132; 2134; 2135=32404; 2136=32405; 2137; 2140; 2141=32406; 32412; 32414; 32416; 32417; 32418; 32419; 32420; 32421; 32425. *Religiosissima*: *CIL* VI 2134; 2137; 2138; 2141=32406; 32416; 32417; 32419; 32420; 32421; 32427 (fragmentary). *Religiosa*: *CIL* VI 32415; *Piissima*: *CIL* VI 2134; 2135=32404; 2136=32405; 32414; 32418; 32419; 32420. *Benignissima*: *CIL* VI 2131; 2138; 2140. *Praestantissima*: 2141=32406; 2143=32407; 32418; 32421. *Purissima*: *CIL* VI 2134; 32419. *Castissima*: *CIL* VI 32419. *Pudicissima*: *CIL* VI 2141=32406.

⁴¹⁶ For wool work and female virtue, see Larson-Lovén 1998, 85–95.

⁴¹⁷ Mekacher 2006, 122-123.

⁴¹⁸ For this interpretation, see *OLD* 1687 s.v. *sanctus*.

considering the way that society treated their prestige and their influence. The use of certain words rather than others reinforces this idea.

Since the *matronae* were associated only partially with the Vestals, a comparable peer group of women has to be found elsewhere. Considering the Vestals' public role, imperial women seem to offer a more appropriate group for comparison. Similar to those dedicated to the chief Vestals, honorary inscriptions written for imperial women were often set up while they were alive and in power.⁴¹⁹ Earlier research has not examined the inscription monuments of the third-century empresses in any detail, and so here I will examine similarities and differences in the formulations and stylistic choices used in inscriptions for the Vestals and for the empresses. Particularly interesting is the increasing popularity of addressing empress with the word *sanctissima* from the Severan dynasty onwards, typically interpreted as 'venerable', 'inviolable', or 'someone who has the highest moral integrity'.⁴²⁰

During the Severan dynasty (193-235 CE), there were several prominently and publicly honoured empresses and other women of the imperial house who had influence and authority over state affairs. First, the empress Julia Domna (193-211) was honoured with the title *sanctissima*, and at this point the term also appears in the Vestal inscriptions for the first time.⁴²¹ Other women of Severan dynasty were also honoured by this formulation.⁴²² Particularly interesting is the case of Julia Aquilia Severa *Augusta*, who was a young Vestal virgin when the emperor Elagabalus took her as his wife (after ascending to the throne in 218 CE). Similar to the earlier empresses and the Vestals, she received the title *sanctissima* in her monument after becoming empress.⁴²³ Her status as a *virgo Vestalis* overlapped with the title of *Augusta*, although she was not addressed as a Vestal after she became an empress. However, the emperor later explained that her being a Vestal was the explicit reason he had chosen her to be his empress. Thus, Aquilia Severa had a double identity as a Vestal and as an

⁴¹⁹ On the Vestals and imperial women enjoying the same social privileges, see for example, Beard 1980, 12-27.

⁴²⁰ During the Antonine era, *sanctissima* does not occur in the empresses' inscription monuments. However, Pliny refers to the empress Plotina as a *sanctissima femina*. See Plin. *Ep.* 9.28.1.

⁴²¹ Julia Domna *sanctissima*, *CIL IX*, 4637. The chief Vestal Terentia Flavola was addressed as *sanctissima* in 209 CE.

⁴²² Julia Maesa, the sister of Julia Domna, the grand-mother of the future emperors Elagabalus (218-222 CE) and Alexander Severus (222-235 CE), was also called *sanctissima*. Julia Maesa *CIL VI*, 36775; *CIL XI*, 3774. Julia Maesa *Augusta* was venerated as *carissima et sanctissima avia*; see *AE* 2000,409. The mother of the emperor Alexander Severus, the *augusta* Julia Mamae: *AE* 1912, 5; *AE* 1914, 80; *AE* 1998, 1091; *AE* 1998, 1093; *AE* 2006, 1048; *CIL VI*, 36775; 40684. The wife of Alexander Severus, Sallustiae Orbiana *Augusta*: *CIL VIII*, 9355; *CIL VIII*, 18254.

⁴²³ On the empress Iulia Aquilia Severa, former Vestal virgin: *AE* 1944, 104. [*Iul(iae)*] *Aq[ui]li[ae]* / *Sever[ae]* *sanc/tissimae Aug(ustae)* / *matri castro/rum senatus / ac patriae / ordo / mun(icipii) B[ri]g(etionis)*.

empress.⁴²⁴ After the Severan dynasty, *sanctissima* continued to be adopted by imperial women. This might refer to their need to identify with the former dynasty (the Severans) and the example they set in public life.⁴²⁵ Whether this continuing custom was an effect of a so-called ‘epigraphic habit’ cannot be fully resolved. Perhaps it was a convention and a ‘habit’ that prevailed through the third century. Or, perhaps the use of this title demonstrated the ideas and mentalities of the public that associated the empresses and the Vestals in the same category.

Vestals in Visual Arts and Numismatics

Numismatic sources are another major source material in which the empresses and the Vestals, and the cult of Vesta, were presented together. However, at first neither Vesta nor the priestesses were presented on the coinage of imperial women, but only on that of the emperors.⁴²⁶ This is inconsistent with the fact that Vestals and imperial women from the Julio-Claudian dynasty were connected together on many social levels, starting from their shared privileges. Perhaps the absence of Vesta in the coinage of the empresses relates to the average smaller volume of their coinage. It was not until the second century that the minted coins of the empresses increased significantly in volume, and had more emblematic variation. By contrast, imperial women were more emphasized in public life during the Antonine and Severan dynasties. Thus, their appearance on coinage was also constructed differently, and the cult of Vesta held a more prominent position in public propaganda.

⁴²⁴ On the Emperor explaining his conduct, see Herod. 5.5.6.2.

⁴²⁵ Furia Sabinia Tranquillina, the wife of Gordian III (238-244 CE), adopted the title *sanctissima* and it was presented regularly on her public monuments. Furia Sabinia Tranquillina AE 1914, 35; AE 1935, 19; CIL II, 110; 4607; 14211; CIL VI 1092; 1095; 1096; CIL IX 1458; CIL IVX 4398. Other mid-third century empresses continued the same practice, although their periods in power were short compared to the earlier dynasties. For the wife of the emperor Philippus Arabs (244-248 CE), Marcia Otacilia Severa, see AE 1944, 40; AE 1944, 54; AE 1969/70, 496; AE 1969/70, 497; AE 1969/70, 512; AE 1980, 792; CIL III, 3641; 3718; 4627; 8031; 8113; 8269; 10619; 10627; 10640; 11326; 11336; 14354; CIL VI 1098; IMS-04, 125; Lupa 09732. For the wife of the emperor Decius (249-251 CE) Herennia Etruscilla AE 1944, 56; CIL VI, 2831; 31376. The emperor Cornelia Salonina, the wife of the emperor Gallienus (253-268 AD), had the epithet *sanctissima*: AE 1917/18, 17; AE 1950, 208; AE 1982, 272; AE 2000, 528; CIL III 10206; V 857; 7879; VI 1106; 1107; 1110; 2809; 40705=1111; IX 4961; X 5828; XI 3091; 3092; 3577. *SupIt-01-FN, 00012*. The title *sanctissima* was used again in later third century. Ulpia Severina, the wife of Emperor Aurelian (270-275 AD), AE 1930, 150 = AE 1938, 13.

⁴²⁶ The very first coins from the republic occasionally depict a Vestal virgin or the goddess, and/or the round temple of Vesta. Augustan coins celebrated the temple of Vesta with a conical roof, which was said to be made of bronze. Perhaps Augustan coins reinforced the relationships with the cult and goddess, which was the tutelary deity of the emperor. The temple is regularly depicted on Neronian as well as Flavian coinage, until it began to be a background for the sacrificial scene performed by the Vestals and/or imperial women. From the changes of the column types and height of the temple’s podium, it has been possible to conclude the various phases of the temple’s history.

From Antonine era onwards, the Vestals (one or several priestesses) – rather than just the temple or the goddess – started to appear on coinage more frequently. By this I refer to the sacrificial scene performed by a group of women (the Vestals, imperial women), and other persons (*flamen* priest, emperor), in front of the temple.⁴²⁷ This emblem is challenging to interpret. There is no certainty as to how tight the connections between the empresses and priestesses were intended to be represented through coinage images.⁴²⁸ Can we be certain that the pictures had further significations, and they were not just for decorative purposes? This question can probably not be solved undisputedly. However, there was surely intentional decision making behind the process of minting the coinage: imperial women were purposefully connected to certain cults, although there is no certainty what exactly was intended to be achieved through this action. Could the sacrificial scene indicate that the relationships between them were perhaps closer than before? In my view, the number of participants is important. Instead of the goddess, or one Vestal, the whole group of six priestesses are gathered around the altar. Carrying out a ritual together implies cultic interaction. Or, perhaps the persons of the imperial house appearing in front of the temple signified that they had some level of control over the cult and the priestesses. I shall return to these questions when I study more closely the Vestals' relationships with the imperial family, but for now it is important to notice that the illustrations on the coinage were a significant means of creating public opinion. The majority of Antonine coinage containing many images of Vesta and the Vestals circulated among the citizens during the Severan dynasty. Thus, the coins and their imagery were small-scale monuments that had an impact on the future.⁴²⁹ It is clear that the Severans also used the Vestals on their coinage, but in new and different ways than the Antonines.

Beyond numismatic evidence, statues found in the *Atrium Vestae* are fantastic material to study how the public viewed the priestesses and what their appearances can tell us about their social position. Close associations with imperial women are emphasized once again in this material. In fact, M. Lindner has suggested in her study that imperial women appear as the benefactors, *patronae*, of the

⁴²⁷ This emblem was first depicted during the reign of Antoninus Pius for Diva Faustina Maior.

⁴²⁸ Interesting, yet very difficult to answer, questions concern the intentions that lay behind the images on official coinage. How were the coins perceived by the public? How did the audience interpret the images? Which social ranks are represented by those who used and observed the coins? And what process was used for the minting, and who chose the images that were to be minted onto the coins? An answer to the first question is probably unattainable for us. However, we can conclude that the intended impact of the imagery on the citizens was meant to be positive, and the emperor was shown with associations that were important and favourable for his rule. The coins had different values, and so too would have been the social status of the individuals who used them: the upper class used coins of higher value, and the coins of small worth circulated among the lower classes. C. Rowan has discussed the minting process and the emperor's role in choosing the imagery or at least giving his approval for it. For this and more about this subject, see Rowan 2011, 243.

⁴²⁹ On Antonine coinage circulating during the Severan era, see Rowan 2013, 237.

cult and the Vestals. Many of the second- and early-third-century Vestal statues bear the features of contemporary empresses, or even those of the emperors. Emulating the physiognomic features of the ruling couple was a strong political tool for showing support and close associations. There is no evidence of familial relationships between the Vestals and members of the imperial family, which would explain the physical resemblance, but this cannot be excluded as a possible explanation.⁴³⁰ Regarding the statues in the *Atrium Vestae*, the large-scale production of the so-called Large Herculaneum Woman (LHW) statue type is an interesting phenomenon. This type was produced everywhere in the empire as a mass production product, especially during the second and the early third centuries. This represents exactly the same temporal period when the Vestal statues were preserved. However, productions of this type ceased during the third century due to various reasons, such as cultural changes in art, visualization, and, in particular, honouring the individuals.⁴³¹ In addition, evidence from *Atrium Vestae* might further reveal honouring practices. By this I refer to traces found on the marble inscription blocks that insinuate that an item was placed above the monument. Such traces are found on the honorary inscription of Coelia Claudiana. Thus, the block apparently supported a statue, as the printings on top of the marble base let us conclude.⁴³² This evidence lets us understand that there was a habit of producing honorary statues for third-century Vestals. Perhaps the missing statues were then recycled and used for other purposes. Regarding these circumstances, I suggest that the practices of honouring the Vestals followed the customs of the rest of society, but possibly changed during the third century, as the case of the LHW-statue type already suggests.

⁴³⁰ On emulating features and using art as a political tool, see Lindner 2015, 121-123.

⁴³¹ For a complete analysis of the LHW-statue type, see Trimble 2011.

⁴³² Regarding the numerous honorary monuments of the Vestals, Nina Mekacher states that the inscription block of Coelia Claudiana (*CIL* VI 32420) is in fact the only one on which traces are found suggesting usage of the block or recycling. The traces insinuate that an item, a statue, was made from bronze. What is perplexing, though, is that the statue was probably for a male judging from the proportions of the traces. However, a possibility that it was a female statue cannot be excluded. But when this statue was situated on top of the block, during Coelia Claudiana's lifetime or during later times, is beyond our knowledge. Thus, although this evidence connects the Vestals' honorary blocks to honorary statues, there is no absolute certainty what kind of statue – if any – was placed on top of them. For this analysis, see Mekacher 2006, 143. On the same subject, see also Lindner 2015, 75. The question of what might have happened to the third-century Vestals' statuary and images is an interesting one; in my view, Mekacher's discussion offers an exploratory foundation.. If there indeed were bronze statues of the Vestals, they were particularly suitable for recycling and plundering. In this case, it is likely that the marble blocks were attached to some work of art. However, many questions stay open for the discussion: What kind of process was there before a monument was set up in the *Atrium*? How were the monuments positioned in relation to each other, and on what basis were they situated in the limited space of the *Atrium Vestae*? What happened to the honorary monuments of deceased priestesses?

The Vestals' statues are of different types. Portraits or busts, distinct from the heads likely attached to life-size statues, have provoked the idea that they are actually memorials to deceased priestesses.⁴³³ It has also been suggested that since the busts do not include the traditional veil, the priestesses depicted by them were clearly not about to perform a sacrifice. In other words, the busts distinctively represent Vestals, but neither their office holding nor their ritual performance is indicated by the traditionally covered head or other symbolic gestures.⁴³⁴ I agree that the busts of the priestesses could very well be ancestral pictures. After all, I consider that Vestals formed a kind of family community of their own and, as such, saw their predecessors as their ancestresses.⁴³⁵ However, if the portraits or busts were the memorials to deceased priestesses, where they were situated, and were they kept alongside the honorary statues of the living priestesses? I suggest that the statues from the *Atrium* were a part of Vestals' own cultic practices, in which the chief Vestals appeared as honorary members. I base this idea on the Roman tradition that the presence of a person was invoked by his/her image. Thus, a picture held the essence of a person, and this was brought alive in imagery that was located in a carefully selected place.⁴³⁶ Therefore, I propose that the statues, or at least some of them, can be viewed as a part of an ensemble that formed a gallery of important members – the patrons and financiers – of the cult. The visual evidence in the *Atrium* was thus intended for the practices of Vestals' own community. The statues reinforced the institution by showing which chief Vestals and which families had been the most important for the cult's progression and survival.

To conclude, the Vestals are treated in the visual evidence (inscriptions, numismatics and statues) as women who were placed amongst high-ranking Roman women and especially amongst the empresses. The *sanctissimae*, as they are called, was a category that married elite women, the empresses and the Vestals shared. In public art and in numismatics, the Vestals' relationship with the empresses was manifested and brought into a viewer's attention. As we shall see shortly, this relationship was diverse in nature. In epigraphic material, the Vestals were addressed as *religiosissimae*, which appears rather seldom in the inscriptions more broadly. When a person was addressed by this virtue, he/she had taken care of the community by being a particularly scrupulous benefactor. This quality fits well with the Vestals' profession and career development, which demanded religious devoutness and dutifulness. Furthermore, the honorific monuments functioned,

⁴³³ On the busts likely being memorials to deceased priestesses, see Lindner 2015, 162-163.

⁴³⁴ Mekacher 2006, 139.

⁴³⁵ On theory that the Vestals worshipped the deceased priestesses as their ancestress, see p. 101 above.

⁴³⁶ For images of the ancestors, see Polyb. 6.53. For the images' functions and ideas, see Trimble 2011, 156-57.

as I have suggested, to connect the Vestals' own institution and their family-like community. The monuments conveyed the legacy of the chief Vestals to their successors. Thus, the statues were lifelike figures reminding their viewers who had authority, who had built the cult, and who had taken care of it. In the next sections, my attention turns to the dedicators. What did they communicate through the inscriptions they devoted to the Vestal virgins, and what did they gain through this action?

3.3. *Virgo Vestalis, Soror Sanctissima* - Family Members as Dedicators

Although the social status of the Vestal virgins' families has been carefully studied, the relationships between the Vestals and their biological families have been at the centre of the discussion only recently.⁴³⁷ Still fewer studies have examined how the priesthood might have benefitted the Vestals' family, or whether their families were motivated to exploit the privileges of the priestesses' office. In this section, I examine if the Vestals' office provided a strategic means for achieving social honor and economic benefits. Tied to this is the question whether sending a daughter to the Vestal institution was occasionally a more (or equally) tempting choice than marrying her off. Against this background, questions about decision-making concerning the course of life of Roman girls forms an essential framework for my analysis.

There is a striking ambiguity between the legal status of the Vestals and what seems to be their social reality. The priestesses' extraordinary way of life and special status has raised much interest in the scholarship, which portrays them as anomalies of Roman society. Their exclusion from normal family connections likewise has reinforced the tendency to concentrate more on their sacral nature and cultic duties than on whether they could contribute and their level of activity in society. Despite the dichotomy in the Vestals' character, however, I treat them here as active members of society, and pay less attention to the nature of their sacral duties. Although they were separated from their families, they were not isolated from their relatives and from the rest of society. Instead, the priestesses preserved relations with their biological families while in office, and very often acted on behalf of their relatives or in order to help them. The task here is to explore in what ways they benefitted their families and what was the nature of their aid.

⁴³⁷ For discussions about the Vestals' families, see Gallia 2015 and Mekacher 2006.

I start from the assumption that the Vestals' office could be used as a strategic instrument, or at least as an aid in the process of achieving social distinction for an individual or for a community/family. The key term here is 'strategic'. In this study it signifies a way of conceptualizing the families' activities.⁴³⁸ As V. Vuolanto notes, 'strategic' can be understood from a 'synthetic' point of view: 'strategic' does not describe historical practices as such, but rather only expresses the way families' actions appear to the scholar. Therefore, strategic action is more a concept that helps the scholar to express this behavior in the past.⁴³⁹ I hypothesize that families exploited the priesthood more or less consciously, seeking to gain benefits. I study the families' activities through the concept of strategy, and I am able to answer to the questions of what kind of activity this was, or who was active in exploiting the lucrative office of a Vestal. In the end, since there is no direct evidence, it is more justified to assume that the families used strategic thinking when giving their daughters to the cult, rather than judging too firmly their motivation in each case.

Why Offer a Daughter to the Cult of Vesta?

S. Treggiari concluded that choosing the career of virgin-priestesses for a daughter was a family business. Regarding the daughters' marriage plans, there probably was a similar kind of decision-making process concerning the future priestesses. The parents together, or more likely the *pater familias*, decided their children's future, and underage girls had very little to say about their future.⁴⁴⁰ However, the Vestals' way of life was not at all ordinary, and no peer group in this sense existed. Thus, in the Roman world, remaining single and non-married was practically impossible. In fact, the

⁴³⁸ The concept of family strategy and the term 'strategic' in the analysis of family history is thoroughly discussed by V. Vuolanto 2015, 18-27. Earlier but still useful analysis comes from D. S. Smith, 1987, 118-120 and L. A. Tilly 1987, 123-125). Recently, S. D. Lambert has discussed social appreciation of the priests and priestesses in the Greek world. He also considers the families' role and motives in individual's office holding; see Lambert, 2011, 67-134. Studies about whether the ancient priesthoods were used in a strategic way by the families are few in number. Most useful for my studies has been J. A. North 1990, 527-543. Studies on the same subject concentrating on the imperial era are practically non-existent.
⁴³⁹ Vuolanto 2015, 21.

⁴⁴⁰ See Treggiari 1991, 83. Giving a daughter to the cult of Vesta can be compared – with caution – to mediaeval religious practice which made a religious 'career' possible for the girls of nobility. Christian culture was an equally father-centered culture in which a child had only a little to say about her future. B. Caseau concluded that even if there was a requirement for a person's absolute voluntary choice, the fathers (or the parents together) made decisions on behalf of their children concerning their betrothal, marriage and also entering religious life in the monastery in late antiquity (fourth century). See Caseau 2012, 250. On the other hand, maidens of marriageable age who lacked a suitable husband and dowry were 'put into storage' in convents in early modern/renaissance Europe. It is difficult to judge whether the 'extra' daughters of the Romans were put into the cult of Vesta, but it is probable that this happened – occasionally at least – during the many years of the cult's history.

law prescribed that everyone must be married, and that single people, of certain ages, should pay penalties.⁴⁴¹ A successful outcome in the selection process of a Vestal was far from certain, as we have seen in an earlier chapter. An extraordinary way of life, outside familial connection and with a very difficult access to the office in the first place – what made families choose a priestly career for their daughters?

When considering Roman religious organization, the role of the priests was very much associated with the role of the benefactor and donator who financed the cult and its rituals. Thus, office holding was very much involved with finances and money. In this respect, it is clear that a priestly office was a great expense for its holder.⁴⁴² However, this was not the whole truth. Priestly offices were also a source of income and numerous immaterial benefits, such as social distinction and an honorary position, and the stepping-stones to even better positions in society.⁴⁴³ As far as the Vestals are concerned, they seemed only to have profited from the system, as they were given a *stipendium* provided by the state and they also had other sources of income that increased their wealth.⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, they seem to have been free from sponsoring building projects, etc. One could expect that the Vestals would have paid for such public expenses, but it cannot be proved that they did so.⁴⁴⁵ In fact, their lack of contribution can be explained by evidence from the late antiquity, that this kind of activity was not in fact considered suitable or morally proper for the Vestals. In the late fourth century, the urban prefect Q.Aurelius Symmachus stated his severe opposition to the Vestals' proposition to set up a commemoration to honour the late *pontifex maximus* Praetextatus.⁴⁴⁶ Given this, I suggest that the Vestals were traditionally 'freed' from the obligation of public charity that usually was applied to the priests. This increased their wealth further, and secured their economic

⁴⁴¹ Furthermore, non-married men could not apply to important offices, and if a woman was widowed or divorced, she had to be married again within a certain amount of time. The Augustan laws of marriage were based on the *Lex Julia et Papia Poppaea*. For these laws, see Evans-Grubbs, J., 2002. About the necessity to marry and the family's aspirations concerning the marriage, see Treggiari 1991, 83-123.

⁴⁴² For an example of financing the priesthood by personal expense in the Greek world, see Lambert 2011, 87-88. In the college of the Arval brethren, members paid the costs of yearly celebrations; for this see Scheid 1990, 176.

⁴⁴³ Suetonius writes how young Iulius Caesar gave up trying to attain the office of the proconsul and pursued the office of *pontifex maximus* instead. He was ready to offer financial bribes to beat his rivals. Suet. *Iul.* 13.

⁴⁴⁴ We can speculate that the custom of granting *stipendium* continued through the entire imperial era. Was money a motive that encouraged families at all times?

⁴⁴⁵ Clark 1990, 261.

⁴⁴⁶ On the Vestals' proposal to erect a statue, see Symm. *Relat.* 2.36. For an analysis of this case, see Matthews 2014, 86; Sogno 2006, 56. It seems that Symmachus also had a motive for not provoking the Christian community with the statue project. However, my purpose is to show that Symmachus – according to his words – based his opinion on the tradition that prevented the Vestals from setting up public monuments.

position so that they were free to spend their money as they wished – for the benefit of their families, for example.

In spite of the advantages of the lucrative office, families were not always eager to give away their daughters to the cult. This was the case in the early first century, and the crisis of a lack of eligible applicants could re-occur in later centuries.⁴⁴⁷ When the political system began to centralize round the emperor, and his authority regulated just about everything in the bureaucratic society, more families had an opportunity to come forward and secure their position in the Vestals' election. Sources from the second century seem to reinforce the importance of the personal relationships between the Vestals' families and the emperor. Regarding the selection of a new priestess, Aulus Gellius stated that in his days it was enough for a man of impeccable background to approach the *pontifex maximus* and propose his daughter to the office of a Vestal.⁴⁴⁸ The encounter between the candidate's father and the emperor was at the center of the procedure. The senate's inclusion in the selection process seems to have been a new amendment to the practice. Thus, the senate granted an exemption to the Papian law, which originally required that there be twenty eligible applicants to a Vestal's election.⁴⁴⁹ It was probably the emperor who presented the case to the senate, and his authority ultimately dictated the outcome. In the process of getting one's daughter into the cult, then, the emperor appears as if he was an approving *patronus* towards his clients. As part of his politics, I propose that the emperor rewarded important families by giving the office of Vestal to their daughters.

My idea is reinforced by a case from 19 CE, when families were rewarded handsomely for participating in the election process. When the Vestal Occia passed away in 19 CE, Fonteius Agrippa and Domitius Pollio, both presumably of the senatorial rank, came forward and offered their

⁴⁴⁷ Suet *Aug.* 31.3.2; Cass. Dio 55.22.5. During the reign of Augustus, the cult seems to have lacked suitable candidates. This development resulted in an alteration in the law, and approximately in 5 CE (?) it was announced that freedmen's daughters were also allowed to step into the Vestal's office. Both Suetonius and Dio described that many families were even avoiding the situation whereby their daughters would be submitted to the election process. Regarding this, added Suetonius, the emperor Augustus personally declared that if there were a suitable girl in his own family, he would nominate her as a candidate. This case shows that the appreciation for the cult of Vesta was not stable. Furthermore, whether his actions increased the popularity of the cult is controversial, and also it is questionable whether the cult maintained its prestige when the offices were opened to freemen. Regarding the different institutions, it seems that the higher the status of an institution was, the more distinguished family background was needed. For the idea about how prestige was connected with the popularity of an institution, see Mouritsen 2011, 274.

⁴⁴⁸ Gell. *NA* 1.12.12. *Sed ea sortitio ex lege Papia non necessaria nunc videri solet. Nam si quis honesto loco natus adeat pontificem maximum atque offerat ad sacerdotium filiam suam, cuius dumtaxat salvis religionum observationibus ratio haberi possit, gratia Papiae legis per senatum fit.*

⁴⁴⁹ Talbert 1984, 389.

daughters as a new priestess. The daughter of Pollio was elected, but – what is striking in this case – the daughter of Agrippa was given one million sesterces as a consolation. This massive sum of money – given by the emperor – was intended as her dowry (*dos*).⁴⁵⁰ As such, participating in the Vestal election seems to have been profitable even if a daughter was rejected: this sum of one million sesterces was what was needed when a person reached the senatorial rank.⁴⁵¹ Both of the families very probably already belonged to the *senatores* and one could presume that they had enough money to secure dowries for their daughters. The emperor's action suggests rather that he personally wished to reward Agrippa's family publicly. Be that as it may, the Vestal election was an occasion for which imperial *indulgentia* and expressions of loyalty were made as a public spectacle. On this bases, I suggest that there were advantages to offer a daughter as a Vestal and that the families were very conscious of them. For the families, the procedure brought social capital in the shape of publicity, which made the election process itself more attractive. From the perspective of a young girl, participating in the election of a new Vestal could function as a recommendation that benefitted her in the future. Her physical and mental qualities were found to be impeccable, not to mention her moral character. Therefore her value and position in the marriage market were perhaps significantly improved if she was not selected to become a Vestal.

The early-third-century Vestal election shows again how relationships between the emperor and the Vestals' fathers were crucial in determining the outcome of the election. At this point, the emperor Caracalla had secured his position as sole ruler by organizing a purge of the senators, whom he saw as a potential threat because they either supported the previous dynasty or his brother, whom he also ordered to be killed. He concentrated on rewarding the families useful for his politics, and that remained loyal to him rather than to his deceased brother.⁴⁵² The Vestals were not spared, and four priestesses were condemned to death on the charge of *incestum*. This opened opportunities for families to get their daughters into the cult, and Vestals Campia Severina, Flavia Mamilia, Aquilia Severa and possibly Flavia Publicia were newly taken into the cult. As was discussed earlier, the senatorial background of these girls is not altogether evident, except for Aquilia Severa.⁴⁵³ It seems that the emperor rewarded the men of these families by granting the office of Vestal to their daughters.

⁴⁵⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 2.86.

⁴⁵¹ Alföldy 1988, 115.

⁴⁵² Regarding the cult of Vesta, this development had huge consequences, which I shall discuss in later chapters.

⁴⁵³ For prosopographic details and annual lists of the priestly officials, see, for example, Rüpke 2008. For the social origins of the Vestals' families, see Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 260-269: Campia Severina no. 9; Iulia Aquilia Severa no. 20; Flavia Mamilia no. 17 and Flavia Publicia no. 18. For the latest discussion regarding the social stand of Flavia Publicia's family, see Ruggeri 2015, 168-169; Mayer i Olivé 2011, 156.

Receiving this honour had nothing to do with good luck or coincidence, but rather the emperor – in the capacity of the *pontifex maximus* – chose carefully those families that he could trust and approve within his immediate circle.

Finally, my discussion takes a stand on the speculative question whether giving a daughter away to the cult was in fact a way to get rid of daughters for whom there was no suitable husband. Was it perhaps convenient to put these ‘extra’ daughters into the cult so that the family fortune could be preserved, and that there was no need to bequeath wealth to all the children? If we compare the motives of Christian parents who gave their child to ascetic community during the fourth century, there were economic reasons as well as religious motivations, such as to fulfil a promise to God. These sacral communities also took care of orphans or children experiencing maltreatment. The poorest families, which had no other choice than to appeal for help from the church, left their child to be raised by sacral communities of the church. Religious life in ascetic communities also provided a solution for a wealthy family that had no desire to finance its daughters’ dowries.⁴⁵⁴ As we know, it was a Roman custom and the sign of a good *pater familias* that he left wealth to all his children. However, it could be a burden to divide the family fortune amongst several heirs. Economic reasons therefore could have been a very powerful motivation for the *pater familias* of a wealthy family to plan his young daughter’s future in the cult. Furthermore, personal motives to give a daughter as a Vestal are suggested in the legend of the Vestal Rhea Silvia. According to tradition, narrated by many authors, it was her uncle who decided to give her to the *ordo*. This was done in order to prevent the girl from bearing children, and so that her uncle’s family escaped from an avenger and future competitors.⁴⁵⁵ The possibility that families saw an opportunity to leave one of their daughters without marriage or children, by sending them to be Vestals, cannot be excluded. Although historical evidence does not support this suggestion one way or the other, quarrels, the fracturing of family relationships, and different branches competing with each other was not uncommon. Fathers could give their daughters away to the cult for the simple reason that they already had other daughters who could marry suitable men and give children to the family. In such cases, having a one daughter in the office of a Vestal was a good opportunity to strengthen the family’s social honour – as well as save the

⁴⁵⁴ For religious motivations of parents to give their children to the church see Caseau 2012, 257; for the economic motivations of wealthier families, see pages 259-261.

⁴⁵⁵ In the background, there was a violent fratricide, which left Rhea Silvia in a vulnerable position. Apparently she fell into the *patria potestas* of her uncle, who then decided her future. Rhea Silvia gave birth to Romulus and Remus, so her uncle’s plans failed in the end. For the legend of Rhea Silvia and she being denied the right to have children by consecrating her as a Vestal virgin, see Cass. Dio 1.5.1; Dion. Hal. 1.76.3; Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 3.1-3; Liv. 1.3.11.

family fortune. In addition to these financial motivations, religious reasons cannot be excluded, of course. A child could be a votive to the goddess, although there is no direct evidence to support this idea. Regarding the religious practices of the Roman world, this could, however, be probable during the long history of the cult.

It is evident that both economic benefits and immaterial benefits, such as social distinction, attracted families to send their daughter to the cult. There was no economic investment required but, on the contrary, all kinds of possibilities to gain profit from the wealthy cult (in a shape of a gift from a Vestal). More importantly, however, the families — and the fathers in particular — aspired to gain the emperor's favor. He co-operated with those families he chose, and gave the Vestal offices as a reward. In this situation, the Vestals made the most of their lucrative office holding.

The Vestals in the Role of Daughters, Sisters and Aunts

Relatives other than their parents erected honorary monuments for the Vestals. This was probably due to natural causes: since it took several decades for a priestess to achieve the status of chief Vestal, her parents were probably deceased by the time the daughter's office holding reached its climax, i.e., she was a *maxima*. At the peak of her career and influence, a chief Vestal was like insurance for her relatives who benefitted from her office. Siblings and their families were her closest surviving relatives and it was they who had the longest time to enjoy her benevolence.

Relationships between siblings are most prominent with the founding story of Romulus and Remus, or, during the republic, of Sempronia, the sister of the Gracchi brothers. In the Vestals' honorary inscriptions, their sisters and brothers promoted their families in ways to make them stand out from the rest – often with prominent self-assertion. Setting up a monument in *Atrium Vestae* can be analysed as a kind of family project, created to boost a family's social prominence and prestige.⁴⁵⁶ This trend is clearly prominent in the honorary inscriptions to Terentia Flavola, *virgo Vestalis maxima*, whose leadership started in 209 at the latest. Her family was politically successful already before the Severan dynasty, and thanks to the father Q. Hadius Rufus Lollianus Gentianus, the family

⁴⁵⁶ For the motives behind the public building projects and monument production, see Hemelrijk 2015, 168.

had secured a position in the Severan court.⁴⁵⁷ Q. Hedi^{us} Lollianus Plautius Avitus, a brother of Terentia Flavola, displayed his entire *cursus honorum* in his inscription. Lollianus Plautius erected the monument alongside those of his wife Claudia Cocceia Sestia Severiana and daughter Lolliana Plautia Sestia Servila.⁴⁵⁸ The inscription does not manifest Terentia Flavola's merits as priestess; instead, she is simply a *soror* and *sanctissima*; further information about whether she had helped her family members in the capacity of Vestal virgin are nonexistent. The same style is repeated in monuments donated by another brother, Terentius Gentianus: he informs us that he was in the office of *flamen Dialis* and *praetor tutelaris* (apparently he had not yet been elected as a consul, which happened in 211 CE). His wife Pomponia Paetina and nephew Lollianus Gentianus are at his side as dedicators.⁴⁵⁹

It is no coincidence that children are mentioned in both inscriptions. This reinforced the family's social position and publicly manifested its fertility, i.e., vitality. Roman thinking was that sisters and brothers took care of their nieces and nephews; uncles and aunts were expected to help them financially and provide them with life guidance.⁴⁶⁰ Furthermore, by mentioning their children in the inscriptions, the parents showed that they hoped that the family's name would be preserved in the future. Through these honorary inscriptions, children were introduced to the public, and their family connections became evident. One could assume that the monuments were intended to last in the *Atrium* forever, allowing the family to depend on the idea that future generations would know about their contribution to society and their influential position.

Half a century later, the chief Vestal Coelia Claudiana received honorary monuments from her two sisters, Coelia Claudianace and Coelia Nerviana. The family probably belonged to the senatorial rank, but Coelia Claudianace's husband was apparently an equestrian, *vir egregius*.⁴⁶¹ Compared to *Hedii Lolliani*, there is no evidence that this family had similar importance in society, or that their socio-economic position was equally well-established. However, for a quite long time the Vestals' family members enjoyed the possible benefits of her office holding, since as an honorary monument donated

⁴⁵⁷ For the *Hedii Lolliani* and their political position in the third century, see Mennen 2011, 107-108.

⁴⁵⁸ At this point, he apparently had inherited the office of augur from his father, and he had already gained the office of consul. His military career was likewise impressive. *CIL* VI 32412.

⁴⁵⁹ *CIL* VI 2144.

⁴⁶⁰ Hallet 1984, 88.

⁴⁶¹ *CIL* VI 2139; 2140. On the family's social status, see Mekacher 2006, 113; Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 262-263, no. 12. For the social status of C. Claudianace's husband, see *PLRE* I, 630.

by her client attests that Coelia Claudiana celebrated her twentieth anniversary as chief Vestal.⁴⁶² Furthermore, in her capacity as a chief Vestal, she received outstanding attention and was celebrated in another inscription as *super omnes retro maximas*, above all other chief Vestals.⁴⁶³ The inscription monument donated by Coelia Nerviana, *cum coniuge ac liberis*, ends with the wish that the gods would permit her (Coelia Claudiana) to continue in her office for the whole century. Unlike the brothers of Terentia Flavola, the sisters of Coelia Claudiana celebrated her religious office holding, her kindness and her being *a diis electa*, chosen by the gods. These differences could be due to stylistic development in epigraphic habits. However, since she was as a chief Vestal for so long, I suggest that the women of the family of *Coelii* wanted to emphasize their sister's religious capacity and sacral value. The sisters identified themselves as representatives of a family that had produced a celebrated and prestigious Vestal, whose religious knowledge was outstanding compared to previous chief Vestals.

The inscriptions are often very short and do not tell us what had led to the process of erecting the monument. The above-mentioned inscriptions for Terentia Flavola and Coelia Claudiana reveal family relations and the families' social capital, but the immediate factors behind the honorary inscription are left unclear. Close-reading of the next two inscriptions let us understand what were the grounds for setting up monuments. Two chief Vestals from the mid-third century, Flavia Mamilia and Flavia Publicia, received honorary monuments from their nephews. In these texts, the word *pietas*, sense of duty or responsibility, gives us very clear idea of what motivated the dedicators or what were the immediate reasons for setting up the monuments. Flavia Mamilia's brother Aemilius Rufinus and Flavius Silvinus and Flavius Ireneus, the sons of her sister, say that she had shown an extraordinary sense of duty or responsibility, i.e. *pietas*, towards them.⁴⁶⁴ In the inscription for her aunt, the chief Vestal Flavia Publicia, Aemilia Rogatilla and her son Minucius Honoratus Marcellus Aemilianus used a similar formulation.⁴⁶⁵ Although further information is lacking, it seems certain that the Vestals had fulfilled their relatives' expectations and wishes. The benefit was perhaps economic in nature, or else the Vestals had used their influence and helped their relatives to achieve social benefits.

⁴⁶² *CIL* VI 32420.

⁴⁶³ For the formulation, see *CIL* VI 2137. This formulation appears usually in inscriptions dedicated to the emperors. I shall discuss this formulation and its signification in the next chapter.

⁴⁶⁴ *CIL* VI 2133.

⁴⁶⁵ *CIL* VI 32414.

Pietas was a very important virtue in terms of relationships in Roman culture. The relationships between family members, or between patrons and clients, or between humans and gods/goddesses, were loaded with a mutual sense of obligation and expectation. A virtuous Roman showed *pietas* in both actions and relationships. What is important to notice, I think, is the fact that in these inscriptions for Flavia Mamilia and Flavia Publicia, we see dedicators who were the ‘next generation’. They had probably, compared to the Vestals’ siblings, the longest period of time to enjoy the Vestals’ attention and favours, from when they were young to the time when they reached adulthood.

Did Certain Families Occupy the Cult of Vesta?

In his history, Dionysius of Halicarnassus stated that religious participation was regulated in early Rome. In addition to communal participation, there were some celebrations that were taken care of by certain families.⁴⁶⁶ Was the Vestals’ participation regulated, and were there certain families that took priority when a new priestess was selected? What was the situation during imperial times? According to N. Mekacher, it is difficult to prove that some families were distinctively “Vestal families.”⁴⁶⁷ However, I believe that there were families that seemed to succeed better than others in the business of getting their daughters selected as Vestals. I argue that the nomination for Vestal was by no means a coincidence; instead, ideas prevailed about which families were capable of handling the cult. Power politics also dictated whose daughters were taken into the cult. In the background, we can see traces of religious and socio-political reasons to select right kind of girls for the office.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ On religious ceremonies divided into those common to all and those practiced by certain families, see Dion. Hal. 2.65.1.

⁴⁶⁷ See Mekacher 2006, 116-117.

⁴⁶⁸ The Arval brethren and their records – engraved on the marble – have helped us to understand Roman practices and how they co-opted members to the cults. Although their co-optation was unparalleled, scholars have supposed that it also included characteristics that were common in Roman culture. According to tradition, the Arvals, founded by Romulus, were united by ties of consanguinity; thus, they were the sons of Acca Larentia, who accepted Romulus in the place of her deceased son. For the Arvals, see Schied 1990, 39. Although my interest is not to discuss whether the same idea prevailed among the Vestals, it is relevant to notice that the cult of Vesta was also very archaic in its origins, and therefore a similar tradition about consanguinity becomes plausible. Scholars have suggested that the Vestals were originally the female relatives of the kings of Rome (either wives or daughters). On this idea and earlier research, see Beard 1980, 13-14. Beard also suggested her own idea about the Vestals’ status. Without going any deeper into this subject here, I want to emphasize the significance of the family in the system of selecting priestesses. This was probably true in archaic Roman culture, and in imperial times the emperor-centric system favoured certain families over others.

Although rare, there were sometimes several Vestal virgins from the same family in office at the same time. According to the regulations presented by Aulus Gellius, it was not customary to select siblings as Vestals and any girl who had a sister as a Vestal was exempted from the Vestal election.⁴⁶⁹ However, the sisters *Oculatae* were taken into the cult during the mid-first century. This case shows that the dogma of not selecting sisters as Vestals was not applied to this family.⁴⁷⁰ Unlike the relatively unfamiliar *Oculatae*, the famous patrician family, the *gens Cornelia* had two or three Vestals during the first century.⁴⁷¹ The first, Cornelia, was chosen to replace the Vestal Scantia in 23 CE. She was the one who was given the substantial *stipendium* of two million sesterces and one might assume that her distinguished family background promoted the social and cultic position of a new priestess.⁴⁷² Given that her family had a long history and an influential position in the Roman society, it is unfortunate (and rather peculiar) that there is no further information about her familial relations. Perhaps she needed no presentation among contemporaries due to her distinctive background.⁴⁷³ The last known Vestal of *Cornelia* was Cornelia *ex familia Cossorum*. She was taken into the cult in 62 CE to succeed the Vestal Laelia. At the beginning of the 80s, she was charged with *incestum* but acquitted. In 89, she was charged again and found guilty. As a part of the emperor's moral campaign and as a deterrent to others, she was executed in the traditional manner by being buried alive, an act that generated much criticism in the contemporary public.⁴⁷⁴ After Cornelia, the family disappears from the cult of Vesta.

⁴⁶⁹ Gell. *NA* 1.12.6.

⁴⁷⁰ The sources do not give us a detailed genealogical tree for the *Oculata* sisters. Their only identifiable relative was a father (or a brother) named L. Aelius Oculatus who had received a consulship in 74 CE (*consulsuffectus*). The family's later history remains unknown. It is remarkable that the family had decided to give up not one, but two of their daughters. For the family, the socio-economical advantages of the priesthood must have offered more lucrative prospects for the future than did possible grandchildren and continuity of the family name. Perhaps there were other children and daughters who had fulfilled these expectations. The *Oculatae* ultimately were not successful in continuing in their office, as the emperor Domitian executed them in 83 CE on grounds of *incestum*. Suetonius describes that the emperor, unlike his father and brother, did not disregard (*neglego*) the Vestals' *incestum*. Did the fact that the sisters of *Oculatae* were selected as Vestals against the regulations reinforce the emperor's suspicions, enabling him to purge the cult of such unsuitable priestesses? Were the *Oculatae* removed from the cult so that their family would not gain too much influence in religious life? For their case, see Suet. *Dom.* 8.3-4. For prosopographic details of the *Oculatae*, see Rüpke 2008, 508 no. 452-453.

⁴⁷¹ For prosopographic information about the Vestals of *Cornelia*, see Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 263, no 13.-15.; Rüpke 2008, 630 no. 1299-1300.

⁴⁷² For Cornelia's *captio* and *stipendium*, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.16.4. Tacitus (himself from *gens Cornelia*) says little about the replacements in the Vestal *ordo*.

⁴⁷³ For dating her period in office and the lack of further evidence about Cornelia, see Mekacher 2006, 106. During the reign of Augustus, the *Cornelia Balbi* was the family branch that held positions in the pontifical college; see Scheid 1978, 633. There is, however, no further evidence whether Cornelia came from this branch of *Cornelia* or whether she came from the non-patrician branch of the family.

⁴⁷⁴ About Cornelia's *captio*: Tac. *Ann.* 15.22.2. An alternative year for her execution is 91 CE. On her trial and execution: Suet. *Dom.* 8.4; Plin. *Ep.* 4.11.6-13; Philostr. *VA* 7.6 (death, no names); Juv. 4.9-10 (death, no names, reference uncertain). Possible explanations for Domitian's actions when condemning Cornelia are discussed by Bauman 1996, 92-99; Jones 1992, 101-102; Stewart 1994, 321- 322.

The *Licinii* also occupied the cult, but unlike the *Cornelii* they managed to succeed in keeping their influence. First, Licinia Praetextata became *virgo Vestalis maxima* after the turbulent era in the cult's history described above.⁴⁷⁵ Licinia was one of the surviving Vestals and took the leadership of the cult as *virgo Vestalis maxima* after Cornelia. Her niece Calpurnia Praetextata was taken into the cult at the turn of the century; she ultimately also became chief Vestal when she succeeded her aunt. The fact that Calpurnia succeeded Licinia has been seen as a special favoring of the family.⁴⁷⁶ In those turbulent years, when the Vestal *ordo* went through a purge, it is important to acknowledge that there were also those who remained intact and were perhaps even rewarded. Given that the family survived the power struggle of 69 CE, there seems to have been political know-how and skill among the *Licinii*.⁴⁷⁷

The *gens Lollianii* managed to win the favour of both the Antonines and the Severans in the second and third centuries. The Vestal Terentia Flavola of *Lollianii* was in office at the turn of the century, and remained chief Vestal when the emperor Caracalla carried out a purge among the nobility and the Vestals. Her father had already established relationships with the imperial house during the Antonines, and Terentia's male relatives held many distinguished religious and political offices.⁴⁷⁸ What is crucial here in my view, is that both the *Licinii* and the *Lollianii* managed to stay in the cult – and in the emperors' favour – during the period of transition, when power was transferred from one dynasty to the other. It has been suggested that in the Augustan era members of the Arval brothers were selected from among those families that opposed the emperor in order to create solidarity and cooperation.⁴⁷⁹ In this way, participating in the cult possibly helped to convert opposing men/families into supporters of the imperial dynasty. However, this tendency is not demonstrated among the Vestals, because the priestesses needed to be absolutely honest with and loyal to the imperial house. I base this conclusion on the fact that the Vestals guarded the home hearth of the imperial house, and that they were so closely associated with imperial women. If there were any doubt about the loyalty

⁴⁷⁵ She was a daughter of M. Licinius Crassus Frugi, consul ordinarius in 64, and Sulpicia Praetextata. See Rüpke 2008, 765, no. 2220. By 'turbulent' I refer here to the age of the emperor Domitianus, who accused the Vestals of *incestum* twice and eventually used the archaic way to execute an errant Vestal by burying her alive in Campus Sceleratus.

⁴⁷⁶ The supposition that Calpurnia's nomination in the office of the chief Vestal was a reward for the *Licinii* was presented by Pignon 1999, 209-213, see especially n. 12.

⁴⁷⁷ Tac. *Hist.* 4.42. Tacitus describes how the Vestal Licinia's mother was ready to preserve her husband's memory with her four children and fight against falsely (?) scribbled scandal by *delator* M. Aquilius Regulus.

⁴⁷⁸ For Terentia Flavola, see Rüpke 2008, no. 3219.

⁴⁷⁹ For this conclusion, see Schied 1990, 183-84.

of a Vestal, she would corrupt female members of the imperial house, not to mention the state hearth. A Vestal opposed to the imperial power or one with questionable loyalty offered a much greater threat than an Arval who was against the emperor.

After Terentia Flavola, there was possibly one other Vestal from the *Lollianii*. Prosopographical research suggests that Terentia Rufilla, who was a chief Vestal in the latter half of the third century, belonged to this family. Although the Vestals bear the same name, their family connection is not certain; prosopographical details cannot prove their relationship.⁴⁸⁰ If the kinship is true, the family of Terentia Rufilla seems to have lost its social status, since her parents do not refer to themselves as *clarissimi* (which signified the senatorial rank). However, the family could have still had social capital because of their distant ancestors and their position in *gens Lollianii*. The good reputation of Terentia Flavola was remembered through the decades, and her loyalty to the imperial house worked as a recommendation for future members of that family. Terentia Rufilla's admittance into the cult could have been a result of this relationship. Her career lasted well over the required thirty years, and she achieved the status of the *virgo Vestalis maxima* in the late third century.⁴⁸¹

The Vestals' position as representatives of their families seems to have been two-sided. They were expected to produce benefits for their families, but they were also in the middle of power struggles if the family's reputation or political stand were against the emperor's power politics. When their career advancement was favourable, and their families supported the imperial house, the Vestals were undoubtedly used as instruments to gain social prestige for the family. The case of the *Hedii Lolliani* and the Vestal Terentia Flavola show that a priestess benefitted from her father's and brothers' solid political status. She managed to remain untouched at a time when the two thirds of the priestesses were charged and put to death during the reign of emperor Caracalla. The fact that the *Hedii Lolliani* supported the imperial house over many generations helped Terentia Flavola to strengthen her own position. The activities of her two brothers, as dedicators in the *Atrium Vestae*, resulted in increasing their social visibility, and the whole place reflected their family's honour. Thus, it can be concluded that the siblings of the *Hedii Lolliani* occupied the early-third-century cult of Vesta (and the *Atrium Vestae*). This was done not only by celebrating Terentia Flavola as the chief Vestal, but by

⁴⁸⁰ Settipani 2000, 406-407. See especially the family tree presented on p. 407. Mekacher does not agree with these conclusions, considering them too weak to prove the identity of Terentia Rufilla in one way or the other. Mekacher 2006, 113.

⁴⁸¹ For Terentia Rufilla, see Rüpke 2008, 914, no. 3220.

manifesting the prestige and honour of the male members and their families. Family honour is present also in the inscriptions dedicated to the chief Vestals Flavia Mamilia and Flavia Publicia, although their families were less prestigious than the *Hedii Lolliani*. Their cases show that they benefitted their relatives and demonstrated *pietas*, a cardinal virtue for the Romans. Their help or favours towards their family members could have been economic, or they could have advanced the position or careers of their relatives. The inscriptions celebrating the Vestals' contributions also manifest the achievements of their families. Regarding the Vestals' activities that promoted their close relatives and clients shall be the theme in the next section. Despite the fact that they did not have actual political power, the priestesses' office made them both economically influential and socially prestigious.⁴⁸²

3.4. *Praestantissima Patrona* – Clients Honouring the Vestals

Most of the monuments in the House of the Vestals were dedicated by persons who can be identified as clients. This group was comprised persons of different social origins: some represented the equestrian order and imperial officials, while others were the freedmen of the priestesses.⁴⁸³ Considering that during the third century there occurred the so-called rise of the equestrian order, the quantity of members of this class among the dedicators is an interesting phenomenon. My task is to examine what the equestrians' activities – manifested in the honorary inscriptions – can tell us about the Vestals' social position and influence. To explore this issue, I shall examine what kind of beneficence the Vestals practiced.

During the third century, the senatorial order lost its dominant position, especially in the military field as its members were removed from the army's key offices. The equestrian order replaced the senatorial men in the army.⁴⁸⁴ It is unclear what influence the Vestals had – as the *patronae* – on these

⁴⁸² Earlier studies included some discussion about whether the Vestals were used as instruments to gain political influence. For example, the late republican case of Bona Dea celebrations, during which Clodius caused a scandal with political consequences, has been interpreted as one such a possible occasion. For the suggestion that the Vestals were lobbied and under political pressure during the Bona Dea scandal, see Rawson 2010, 330.

⁴⁸³ The *fictores virginium Vestalium* identified themselves sometimes as clients of the Vestals. Their dedications and connections with the Vestals are discussed thoroughly in the next section. This division is necessary, since the *fictores* were a specific professional group of officials, and as such they cannot be merged with the other dedicators.

⁴⁸⁴ In the 260's, the emperor Gallienus allowed equestrians to take the offices that had traditionally been held by the senators. The later third century was a particularly lucrative era for the equestrians as they began to be appointed to such positions as governor and commanders of the legions. On the removal of the *senatores* from military posts and the elevation of the equestrian order, see Southern 2001, 254-257. Inge Mennen goes further in her discussion about the position of third-century equestrians: instead of simply seeing that the equestrians were elevated as a social order during

changes since the inscriptions dedicated by their clients are often very vague about the motives and purposes behind the act of setting up the monument.⁴⁸⁵ Furthermore, the monuments can be viewed as part of a larger set of social interactions and as cultural products; as such, they contained messages other than just the inscribed text. Their relevance becomes clearer when we study more closely the relationships between the dedicators and the Vestals that were built on mutual expectations and responsibilities. One also has to consider the public as a third party that valued the monuments and perceived their complex message.

The complex nature of the relationships between the Vestals and their clients can be seen in the inscription of a client of the chief Vestal Campia Severina who was in charge during the emperor Gordianus III (238-244). The client, a certain Quintus Veturius Callistratus *vir egregius*, was a *procurator rationum summarum privatarum bibliothecarum Augusti nostri*. Thus, he was in charge of managing the finances of the emperor's private libraries.⁴⁸⁶ He probably also handled financial or economic affairs when he was responsible for the office of Campia Severina's *procurator*, more likely her personal funds as the formula *procurator eius* strongly suggests, and not the finances of the entire Vestal community (although this possibility cannot be excluded entirely).⁴⁸⁷ The relationship between Campia Severina and Callistratus indicates that a chief Vestal needed bureaucratic help in her office: her office holding was demanding and her personal business needed someone to take care of it.

Although the advancement of Veturius Callistratus is relevant, it also reveals the methods by which his *patrona* achieved successful results for him. Fortunately, Veturius Callistratus reveals more about the Vestal's contribution: she had clearly acted for the benefit of her client. This is formulated in the

the third century, she argues that scholars should dig deeper and study how they were elevated and which members of this heterogeneous order advanced socially. Mennen 2011, 135-137.

⁴⁸⁵ Saller 1982, 64; Mekacher 2006, 127. Mekacher discusses the Vestals' patronship in general, not the third century particularly. Saller studies the situation during the early imperial period, and refers to the third-century Vestals when he discusses patronage between the high-ranking women, such as Vestals and imperial women, and their clients.

⁴⁸⁶ *CIL* VI 2132. Before the chief Vestal Campia Severina, we can identify Terentia Flavola as *virgo Vestalis maxima*. Whether there was another unknown Vestal in charge between their two terms is uncertain. Considering that the Vestals advanced step by step in their career, it was probably during the 230s that Campia Severina was appointed to the office of the chief Vestal, providing that she was inaugurated to the cult in 210s as Jörg Rüpke plausibly suggests. We cannot date the dedication of Q. Veturius Callistratus for certain, but Campia Severina was in power in 240 CE but already had a successor in 242 CE. Therefore Q. Veturius Callistratus probably dedicated the inscription sometime in the late 230s to early 240s. On Campia Severina and her term in office, see Rüpke 2008, 596, no. 1076. The emperor Gordianus III (238-244) and his family were known for their literary interests and even bibliomania. See family's interests in *SHA Gd.* 18.2-3.

⁴⁸⁷ On the career of Quintus Veturius Callistratus, see Houston 2002, 167-168. Veturius Callistratus was in charge of the Vestal's personal funds; Mekacher 2006, 42, n. 307.

text through references to the Vestal's favourable actions in supporting and recommending (*suffragium*) Veturius Callistratus so that the emperor approved his candidacy or petition.⁴⁸⁸ Although the word often refers to voting, it is more likely that in this case the word refers to Campia Severina's expressions of approval or recommendation as Veturius Callistratus's *patrona*. Interestingly, *suffragium* appears in many honorary monuments specifying the good deeds of a male supporter or *patronus* but is very rare in references to the actions of patronesses.⁴⁸⁹ Women are, of course, celebrated as benefactresses in honorary monuments, but their support for their client is not described by the word *suffragium*.

Equestrian men advanced in their careers by being promoted step by step, starting at the lowest position and moving up the social rank. Exceptions were allowed inside this system, and if a candidate had an influential supporter, he could skip stages in the rank system.⁴⁹⁰ It seems that this is what the Vestal Campia Severina enabled her other client to do.⁴⁹¹ This client, a certain Aemilius Pardalas, seems not to have even been an equestrian in the first place, achieving this status through Campia Severina's intervention. As a freedman, which he probably was in origin, Aemilius Pardalas had no access to military offices.⁴⁹² He declared, however, the Vestal requested a military rank for him (*petito eius ornatus*); thereafter, he was appointed as a *tribunus cohortis I Aquitanicae*. However, the specific title of equestrians, *vir egregius*, is absent, which seems peculiar if Aemilius Pardalas was elevated to this rank. Perhaps the title was already gradually losing its significance as the social situation of the equestrian *ordo* evolved and old definitions and hierarchies were placed with new ones (i.e. *honestiores* and *humiliores*). The third-century equestrians were bound to meet economic terms that dictated their position. If Aemilius Pardalas lacked the wealth needed to achieve the rank of equestrian, his *patrona* could help him financially. He also could be elevated to the order by the emperor, who selected individuals through the suggestions of his advisors and associates, including the Vestals. This might have happened in Aemilius Pardalas's case.

⁴⁸⁸ For an interpretation of the inscription and its motives, see Kajava 2015, 400; Bielman – Frei-Stolba, 2000, 229-242. For the term, see *OLD* s.v. *suffragium*.

⁴⁸⁹ Evans, 1978, 102-128.

⁴⁹⁰ On practices concerning the military career of equestrians, see Demougin, 2000, 121-138; Nicolet, 1967, 417-418.

⁴⁹¹ *CIL* VI 2131. Unfortunately, the original inscription is now lost. On the history of the monuments of Campia Severina, see Mangiafesta 2007. For an interpretation of the inscription, see Kajava 2015, 399-400; Beard – North – Price vol. 2. 1999, 204.

⁴⁹² Freedmen were excluded from the army; on this, see Mouritsen 2011, 72-73.

A similar situation can be seen in Ulpus Verus and Aurelius Titus's tribute to their patroness, the Vestal Flavia Publicia.⁴⁹³ These men designated themselves as *centuriones deputati*, deputy centurions. This post came with a good salary and an excellent retirement pension. The most experienced legionaries and former Praetorians typically filled the post of *centuriones*, but equestrians sought to be nominated to it.⁴⁹⁴ Again the Vestal deserved credit for the appointments of these men, and it was her *benevolentia* that elevated Ulpus Verus and Aurelius Titus.

The cases discussed above concern men in imperial administration and the military. The Vestals managed to promote the careers of men in both fields, implying that the priestesses used their personal influence. What is interesting here is a third-century change among the social orders and the appearance of new prospects for equestrians, particularly in the military as they began to take over from senatorial control of the offices and posts. It remains speculative whether the Vestals could utilize their abilities and influence because of this particular third-century situation, or whether they had had opportunities to help their clients during previous centuries. Although our sources fail to elucidate this further, similar activity and influence likely existed earlier.⁴⁹⁵

In the cases discussed above, the Vestals seem to have acted as channels for their clients who pursued military offices or waited for social promotion. The third-century emperors were many times 'absent' emperors who travelled to military expeditions and left Rome for years – or in some cases never visited the capital at all. In this situation, the Vestals' institution appeared as a constant, able to fulfill advancement expectations. More importantly, the Vestals were influential enough to act as mediators between the emperor and their clients. Although the emperorship was not endangered, dynastic continuity was. The cult of Vesta, by contrast, was a firmly established institution led by chief Vestals who stayed in their office for decades. Thus, I propose that the cult of Vesta and the priestesses perhaps represented the absent emperor and the imperial house, or at least the idea of them. The cult of Vesta certainly represented the state cult, and was bound to the imperial household from the reign of the emperor Augustus. This enabled the priestesses – if necessary – to act as associate members of

⁴⁹³ *CIL* VI 32415.

⁴⁹⁴ For *Centuriones* see *RE* III 1897, p. 1962–1964 s.v. *centurio*.

⁴⁹⁵ Iulius Caesar is said to have been able to proceed in his career thanks to the Vestal virgins. For this case, see Suet. *Iul.* 1.2.

the imperial house and representatives of the emperor. There was also a bureaucratic system for the Vestals, managed by officials called *fictores*. Their relationships are discussed next.

3.5. The Third Century *Fictores* as Dedicators

The *fictores virginum Vestalium* were a conspicuously third-century phenomenon among the priestesses' dedicators.⁴⁹⁶ Recent research has proposed that in the third century these officials controlled the Vestals' affairs and even the priestesses themselves.⁴⁹⁷ The fact that they appear in inscriptions as assistant officials who were in office when the inscription monuments were set up gives some idea of their status and duties.⁴⁹⁸ Originally, the *fictores* had specific duties connected to the baking of sacrificial cakes – the word *fictor* is derived from the verb *figere*, to mould, form or produce. However, the third-century *fictores*' tasks differed from this, and they formed an institution of officials who assisted the priestesses and possibly the other priesthoods as well. But what kind of relationships existed between the Vestals and the *fictores*? To what extent did the *fictores* exercise their power and control over the priestesses? And furthermore, what does the situation of the *fictores* tell us about the social influence of the Vestals? My purpose here is to determine their significance to the priestesses and to analyze what the *fictores* gained through the Vestal virgins' assistance. This is an important question being examined in the research for the first time. Not all *fictores* were low-ranking: some were equestrians. In fact, it is problematic to categorize them as clients of the Vestals at all. As I shall show, their relatively high social status combined with their cultic and administrative office makes the *fictores* as an unparalleled group of dedicators.

From Professional Connections to Bureaucratic Linkages

Sources from the Republican era and early Empire connect the *fictores* particularly to the pontifical priests; the Vestals are not mentioned in this manner yet. At this point the function of the *fictores* is explained as moulders of sacrificial cakes called *liba*.⁴⁹⁹ The connection between the *fictores* and the Vestals arises from the original cultic tasks of them both. Servius states that when it was time to

⁴⁹⁶ I base the discussions of this chapter on my article 'Fictores and the Cult of Vesta' (2013).

⁴⁹⁷ Rüpke 2008.

⁴⁹⁸ Their position has been interpreted literally to have been 'moulders' or 'sculptors', thus the significance of the word *fictor*. For this idea see Lindner 2015, 135. Elsewhere Lindner proposes that the *fictores* took care of the Vestals' business; see Lindner 2015, 55, 58.

⁴⁹⁹ For the earliest literary sources mentioning the *fictores*, see Enn. *Ann.* 2.115 and Varro *de ling. de ling.* 7.43-44. From Cicero we learn that the ideal *pontifex maximus* would not act without the help of a *fictor*. Cic. *Dom.* 139.9.

prepare the new corn and make the sacred flour used in sacrifices, the three eldest Vestal virgins, *tres maximae*, prepared and ground the grains of emmer wheat (*ador*). Although the Vestals did not actually bake the *mola salsa*, they had to produce this important offering and used the same kinds of ingredients as the *fictores*.⁵⁰⁰ This linkage between the Vestals and the *fictores* — their mutual connection to corn — was the basis on which their relationships were built during the imperial era.

At the turn of the third century, the *fictores* disappear from the literary evidence, but start to appear in the epigraphical material instead. For the first time, they are directly connected to the Vestals and to the cult of Vesta: in the honorary monuments of the chief Vestals they are designated as the *fictor virginum Vestalium* or, simply, as the *fictor*.⁵⁰¹ We find, for example, a certain Eutyches, whose title is simply *fictor*. He honours the emperor Caracalla and the emperor's mother (empress Julia Domna) in his votive offering to Vesta.⁵⁰² As the *fictores* first appear under the title *fictores virginum Vestae*, Severan religious politics also began propagandizing the Vesta and renovation work in the *Aedes Vestae* took place on a large scale. It seems, then, that the *fictores*' organization was created anew – or the old one was re-developed – so that it could reinforce the religious position and status of the cult of Vesta.⁵⁰³ Could imperial religious politics be behind the third-century institution of the *fictores*? Considering the evidence, I suggest that this is very probable when the activities of the *fictores* and the religious politics of the Severans are examined together. Whatever the second-century situation among the *fictores* was, from the early third century onwards they acted as assistants to the Vestals and their organization developed into an institutionalized and bureaucratic complex.

The relationship between *fictores* and the pontifical priests also continued in the third century, evidenced by inscriptions mentioning *fictores pontificium*.⁵⁰⁴ Although it is challenging to determine whether the *fictores* worked in similar way in the service of the Vestals and the pontifical priests, it seems – as we shall see from the next examples – that their organization was a well-structured institution. It followed the model of other organizations of cultic assistant groups, such as the *kalatores*, whose members worked for pontiffs, augurs, and *quindecim viri*.⁵⁰⁵ The fact that the

⁵⁰⁰ The *tres maximae* blended saltwater (*muries*) into the coarsely grounded flour and this mixture was used in many rituals. See Serv. *Ecl.* 8.82 and also *RE* XV (1932), p. 2516-2517, s.v. *mola salsa*. Compare the ingredients of the *mola salsa* and the *liba*, which were made from spelt and salt. For *liba* see Ov. *Fast.* 1.127-128.

⁵⁰¹ *Fictores virginum Vestalium*, see *CIL* VI 2136 (=32405); 2134; 2137; 32413; 32418; 32419; 32423. *Fictor*, see *CIL* VI 786; 36834.

⁵⁰² Inscription for Caracalla: *CIL* VI 36834.

⁵⁰³ Rüpke discusses the institutional isomorphism that developed in certain organisations of religious assistants. The assistants' organisations followed a similar form and structure to the priestly colleges. See Rüpke 2011, 34-35. See also *Oxford English Dictionary*, 919 s.v. *Isomorphic*: Corresponding or similar in form and relation.

⁵⁰⁴ *Fictor pontificium*, see *CIL* V 3352; *CIL* VI 1074; 10247; *CIL* VIX 2413.

⁵⁰⁵ About this institutional isomorphism, see Rüpke 2011, 34-35.

fictores appeared as the Vestals' assistants indicates the growing significance of the institution of Vesta: the more important the priestesses became, the more assistant workers they required.

Clients and Assistant Officials of the Vestals

Regarding the *fictores*, we know that their social status varied from the lower social echelons to that of an equestrian, indicated by the title *vir egregius*. My aim here is to analyse how this (social status of a *fictor*) impacted a *fictor's* relationships with a chief Vestal, and what kind of help the Vestals possibly received from the *fictores*. Was it assistant help on cultic occasions, or were the *fictores* officials of the priestesses' practical and bureaucratic affairs? Are there grounds for arguing – as recent studies have suggested – that the *fictores* used their power over the Vestals? The social influence and status of the chief Vestal becomes clearer when we analyse their relationships with the *fictores*.

The first identifiable *fictores* date to the early third century. By then, the chief Vestal was Terentia Flavola, whose term had started by the 209 CE at the latest. She was honoured by Cnaeus Statilius Menander and Cnaeus Statilius Cerdo, both of whom came from the family of the *Statilii*. They each held a different status: Cn. Statilius Menander calls himself *alumnus*, a protégé or pupil of Cn. Statilius Cerdo.⁵⁰⁶ This is a strong indication that at that point, by the 210s, the *fictores* had an institution in which there were officials of different ranks, and that some of the *fictores* were clearly in the leadership positions while others were *alumni*, wards or protégés. Cn. Statilius Cerdo and Cn. Statilius Menander, *alumnus*, bear the same name, indicating that they were probably freedmen of the same patron.⁵⁰⁷

What kind of favours did the *fictores* produce for the Vestals, and what did they receive in return? Can we classify these men as clients of the priestesses, or was their position more influential as recent

⁵⁰⁶ *CIL* VI 32413. There is also another inscription dedicated by Cn. Statilius Menander: *CIL* VI 32423. For a possible duplicate, see van Deman 1908, 175-176.

⁵⁰⁷ In addition to these men, the family *Statilii* seems to have been active around the *fictores'* institution and the donation of monuments. Their members stand out not only as *fictores Virginum Vestalium* but also as the *fictores* of the pontifices in the third century. In the year 202/203 CE, a certain Statilius Dionysius, *discipulus fictorum pontificum clarissimorum virorum*, participated in the donation of an honorary monument to the empress Fulvia Plautilla, wife of the emperor Caracalla. However, it is not confirmed in the sources if these men were related, although their family name and the office of *fictor* suggest that possibility. For an inscription set up by Statilius Dionysius, see *CIL* VI 1074. For the case of the *Statilii* and their possible strategies for social advancement, see Sihvonen 2013, 126.

studies of M. Lindner and J. Rüpke suggest?⁵⁰⁸ Although the inscriptions erected by the *fictores* do not answer these questions directly, some information can be extracted from their messages that elucidate the relationships between the chief Vestals and the *fictores*. For this we have the example of a certain Q. Veturius Memphius, *vir egregius, fctor virginum Vestalium*, who expressed his gratitude to the chief Vestal Flavia Publicia in the 240s. The Vestal's favour or kindness (*beneficium*) clearly made an impression on him, as he thanked her 'for her many good deeds;' unfortunately, he did not give any detailed information about how the Vestal had helped him. Nevertheless, since the word *beneficium* was often used to emphasize the economic nature of a connection between persons, the link between Veturius Memphius and Flavia Publicia was based on a client-*patrona* relationship.⁵⁰⁹

What is notable, is that Memphius was an equestrian indicating his position with a title *vir egregius*. This is a new turn when studying the social origins and status of the *fictores*. To achieve the status of equestrian, a man had to have wealth worth at least 400 000 sesterces.⁵¹⁰ The economic aid provided by Flavia Publicia might have helped Memphius to achieve this, although we can only speculate. As a Vestal, Flavia Publicia probably held a lucrative financial position that enabled her to act this way on behalf of her clients. Earlier studies suggested, however, that Q. Veturius Memphius would not likely have been *fctor virginum Vestalium* and *vir egregius* simultaneously; instead, he more likely donated the monument to the Vestal after retiring from his office (of *fctor*).⁵¹¹ It is plausible that he was thanking Flavia Publicia for his rise to the equestrian rank, but there is no indication that he left the office of *fctor* after achieving his new social position.⁵¹² As a result, there is no certainty that being an equestrian would have eliminated the possibility of executing the office of *fctor* simultaneously.

⁵⁰⁸ For the responsibilities and status of the *fictores* see Sihvonen 2013. The *fictores* were the artisans working for the Vestals see Lindner 2015, 135. However Lindner also states that the *fictores* took care of the Vestals' finances and business, see Lindner 2015, 58. J. Rüpke goes further by suggesting that the *fictores* had influence over the Vestals, see Rüpke 2008, 12.

⁵⁰⁹ *CIL* VI 32419 (=2134). About *beneficia*, see for example R. Frei-Stolba 1998, 246; R.P. Saller 1982, 17-36; 43-58 (imperial *beneficia*). See more about the titular addressing in Frei-Stolba 1998, 241-242.

⁵¹⁰ For the development of the equestrian order, see Brunt P.A., 1983, 42-75; Davenport 2012, 89-123

⁵¹¹ Jörg Rüpke interprets the wording of the inscription as suggesting that Q. Veturius Memphius donated the inscriptions to Flavia Publicia *after* he had been her *fctor*. See Rüpke 2005, 1366, no. 3479. In the early study of Arthur D. Nock, the appearance of the equestrian *fictores* is, instead, connected to the fact that the cult of Vesta was gaining a lot of positive attention and devotional appreciation: Nock 1930, 259.

⁵¹² This is one problem with the inscriptions: often there is no certainty of the chronological order of events, and there is usually no further information about what a person has accomplished to warrant his/her reward.

The next examples elucidate further the social standing of the third-century *fictores* and their relationships to the Vestals. A certain Titus Flavius Apronius, a contemporary of the above-mentioned Q. Veturius Memphius, also donated an inscription to the chief Vestal Flavia Publicia. His relationship with the Vestal is declared clearly: he states that she is his *patrona*. He also declares being in the second place (*loci secundi*), which probably refers to his position in the *fictores*' organisation. If true, he was probably not yet Veturius Memphius's successor, but under his authority.⁵¹³ Thus, Apronius held secondary place in the *fictores* while Memphius was the chief. From such circumstances we can conclude that perhaps there were two *fictores* in the service of the Vestals at a time. The number of the *fictores* can also be connected to their cultic tasks. The Vestals executed their religious duties or cultic celebrations by dividing into smaller groups: in twos, in threes, or the chief Vestal alone, carried out the primary tasks during each religious activity.⁵¹⁴ Accordingly, the theory of institutional isomorphism suggests that the *fictores* adopted similar habits and practices from the Vestals.⁵¹⁵ Perhaps the two *fictores* were originally appointed to take care of the baking of the sacrificial cakes, and during the mid-third century there still was a *fictor* in secondary place who worked under the guidance of the chief.

Titus Flavius Apronius shared his family name with the chief Vestal Flavia Publicia. Was he a member of the Vestal's household and a freedman who benefitted from her patronage? Given that this *nomen* was very common it is difficult to demonstrate that it actually was the case, although their familial connection certainly comes to mind.⁵¹⁶ Among all chief Vestals honoured in the *Atrium Vestae*, Flavia Publicia received the most inscription monuments and her dedicators were – except for one – her clients. In addition to sharing the family name, this concentration increases the possibility that the Vestal had recruited her *fictor* from her familial household since there was very often a family connection between the *patrona/patronus* and a client.⁵¹⁷ Among the other *fictores*, there is no equally clear indication about a family connection between a Vestal and a *fictor*. However, regarding the *fictor* Titus Flavius Apronius, his apparent successor Flavius Marcianus came also from the same family.⁵¹⁸ The office of the *fictor* was perhaps hereditary, just like the priestly offices such

⁵¹³ *CIL* VI 32418. On Titus Flavius Apronius probably being the successor of the *fictor* Q. Veturius Memphius, see Rüpke 2005, 987 no.1668, especially note 3.

⁵¹⁴ As noted above, when it was time to prepare the *mola salsa* there were *tres maximae* executing this duty.

⁵¹⁵ About institutional isomorphism, see note 503 above.

⁵¹⁶ Mekacher discusses the Vestals' relationships with their clients, noting that in many cases the familial connection cannot be determined. Mekacher 2006, 193.

⁵¹⁷ For inscriptions dedicated to Flavia Publicia, see the Appendix. Coelia Claudiana and her successor, Flavia Publicia, received most of the inscriptions. However, Flavia Publicia had more clients among her supporters, while Coelia Claudiana received monuments from priests and relatives.

⁵¹⁸ The office holding of the *fictor* Flavius Marcianus is discussed further in the next sub-chapter.

as the office of an *augur* or *flamen Dialis* that passed from father to son. At the beginning of the third century, the *Statilii* family was in charge of the offices of both the *fictores pontificium* and the *fictores Vestalium*, although the certainty of their familial ties cannot be proven. Their dominance suggests, however, that perhaps the offices of the *fictores* were also handed down to members of certain families.

I suggest that by the mid-third century, it was the *ordo* of the equestrians that occupied the office of *fictores*. Thus, there occurred a change regarding the social status between the early-third-century *fictores* and those of the mid-third century. This indicates that their organization had perhaps gained prestige, and instead of being freedmen, like the *Statilii* in the early third century, the *fictores* now had the status of the *equites*. The circumstances by which the priestesses had the equestrians as their assistants likely also increased their public reputation and value. The more bureaucratic and prestigious the institution of the assistants was, the more respected was also the status of the priestly organisation. The social status of the *fictores* indicates that they were inferior to the Vestals, who were often from the senatorial class.⁵¹⁹ Furthermore, those who donated monuments approached the object of honour as an applicant or client. Therefore, it is evident that although the *fictores* managed the priestesses' business, they could not be in charge of their lives or control the Vestals in any way.⁵²⁰ Indeed, as noted earlier, the Vestals were freed from guardianship and they were entitled to make independent decisions about their wealth and business. The *fictores* could not use their influence beyond the priestesses, but rather took care of practical things on behalf of them.

The functions of the third century *fictores*' institution were actually created to assist the chief Vestal. Although the *fictores*' title – *fictor virginum Vestalium* – indicates that they were in the service of all the priestesses, in practice the role of the chief Vestal is emphasized regarding their career development. The patrona-client relationships determined that the *fictores* answered to their patroness and that they were *her* personal assistants. This of course stresses the growing importance of the chief Vestals in the cult's institution. Similar to the Vestals' *ordo*, the *fictores* followed the same hierarchical system: there were men in the secondary position, as the *fictor* Titus Flavius Apronius describes his position, and those who apparently leaders. After the mid-third century, however, there

⁵¹⁹ The chief Vestals Terentia Flavola and Flavia Publicia, who were the objects of the *fictores*' honorary inscriptions, were members of the senatorial order. The first was mentioned with certainty, and the last was mentioned with high probability.

⁵²⁰ Jörg Rüpke's prosopographic study argues that the *fictores* were in charge of the Vestals. Considering the epigraphic evidence, however, I suggest that their relationship was that of *patrona* and client.

were changes in both the Vestals' and the *fictores*' organizations. Next, I explore how their relationships developed in this new situation.

New Order of the *Fictores*

The evidence and all that we know about the activities of the *fictores*, and their relationships with the Vestals, come from the third century. The unsteady political situation and the continuous dynastic battle around the emperors provide a background for the development of the *fictores* institution and their function as assistants to the Vestals. As I suggested in the previous section, the beginning of the *fictores*' close association with the Vestals was organized by the Severans; it was they who sought to elevate the cult of Vesta and to boost the priestesses' public image. By this point, the status of a *virgo Vestalis maxima* had grown so influential that her office holding required extra help and an appointed assistant. Here, my attention is directed to the late-third-century chief Vestals and their relationships with the *fictores*, whose office holding also seems to have changed at that point. What did these changes signify?

Late-third-century epigraphic evidence demonstrates that the word *curante* started to appear together with the title *fictor*. The *fictor* of the chief Vestal Coelia Claudiana, Flavius Marcianus, was the first person whose participation is conveyed with this word. His name, the title, *vir egregius*, and *curante* were engraved on one side of the inscription block next to the consul dating. It has been suggested that his office was comparable to the office of the *ministri* of various cults.⁵²¹ In any case, practical office holding was now being described in a more detailed manner than previously. Could his duties be connected to practical matters, such as setting up the honorary monument? If this was a case, they perhaps operated under supervision of the *curatores operum publicorum*, who were in charge of setting up the public monuments.⁵²² Although there is no further evidence that his duties were connected to taking care of the chief Vestal's business or even whether he was in charge of setting up the inscription, his participation is mentioned alongside the consular dating.⁵²³ On this basis, I

⁵²¹ See inscriptions for Coelia Claudiana *CIL* VI2136; 2137. Both inscriptions are from 286 CE. About the word *curante*, see Mekacher 2006, 128-129. About the office of the *fictor* being comparable to the office of the *ministri*, see Scardigli 1995, 234. The word *curante* implies that the *fictores* were in charge of practical matters related to the cult, or that they were arranging the business of the Vestals, or perhaps even that they were responsible for setting up the inscription monument. Again my studies point out that due to the independent status of the Vestal virgins, neither the *fictores* nor their assistants called *curante* were entitled to use their power beyond the priestesses.

⁵²² For the *curatores operum publicorum*, see Beltrán Lloris 2015, 92.

⁵²³ Considering the amount of work and costs involved in the monuments, it was not a coincidence what was engraved in the inscription and on which side of the block the texts were placed. Every letter and text was deliberately engraved on public inscriptions, and therefore his title and name alongside the consular dating is important to notice.

suggest that perhaps his office holding was connected to date the certain periods in the administration of the cult of Vesta.

One more change took place related to the *fictores*' relationships with the late-third and early-fourth-century priestesses. The title *fictor* disappeared entirely from the inscriptions, and only the word *curante* remained. In two inscription monuments for the chief Vestal Terentia Rufilla, a certain Aurelius Niceta appears using this formulation. His name and occupational duty are written on the side of the inscription block along with the consular dating, but details of his social status – or his official title – are absent. The reason for omitting the social status might be tied to the fact that the rank order was changing again in that period, and the old titles, such as *vir egregius*, were about to fall into disuse.⁵²⁴ We do not have information about whether Aurelius was in the service of the chief Vestal, or if they had the relationship of *patrona* and client as manifestations of the early- and mid-third century *fictores* indicate.⁵²⁵ In any event, the duties of the *fictores* – or the men who now took care of the office – were expressed in a more detailed manner, but manifestations of whether they had *patrona*-client relationships are absent.

From this point forward, there is no evidence that the institution of the *fictores* or the officials using this title existed. It is possible that evidence was destroyed, or even that the entire institution was abolished. The fate of the *fictores* was probably connected to the larger scale changes that marked religious organisations and cult life. At this point, the cult of the Sun god, *Sol Invictus*, was introduced as an established part of Roman religion. The emperor Aurelian (270-275) supported the new cult, and priests of the Sun god were organized as a college, *pontifices Dei Solis*. Members of the older pontifical college were renamed, now called *pontifices maiores* from that point forward.⁵²⁶ The change among the assistant officials, such as the *fictores*, likely took place at the same time that the re-arrangements in the organization of the *pontifices* were underway.

Was the institution of the *fictores* abandoned in the turn of the fourth century? Was it likely that the professional assistants were not needed or provided for the Vestals? The fourth century evidence tells

⁵²⁴ However, his predecessor, Flavius Marcianus, was an equestrian. He held his office about ten to twenty years before Aurelius Niceta took charge, and therefore I consider that it is probable that men from this social class also occupied the offices of the Vestals' assistants at the turn of the fourth century. On changes inside the equestrian rank, see Davenport 2019.

⁵²⁵ See inscriptions for Terentia Rufilla in *CIL* VI 2141 (299 CE) and *CIL* VI 2143 (301 CE). In the inscription *CIL* VI 2143, the dedicator is a certain Aurelius Eutyches. Although Aurelius Niceta and this dedicator bear the same family name, there are no indications of closer connections between them.

⁵²⁶ From the mid-fourth century onwards, the *pontifices maiores* were designated as *pontifices Vestae*. For the change among the pontifices, see, for example, Harries 2012, 20.

us that the priestesses were taken care and the healthcare was granted to them. The *archiatri*, the doctors of the Vestal virgins were maintained by the state as it becomes evident from Valentinian I's (364-375) law, later published in Codex Theodosianus. There is a clause that constitutes the doctors for each district of the city; yet the doctors of the *portus* and of the *virginium Vestalium* were excluded from this new system. This short mention of the Vestals' doctors shows that they enjoyed the services of different professionals.⁵²⁷ Given that the *fictores* were specialized to their office holding, it is probable that their services and professionalism was needed – as that of the *archiatri* – also after the third century.

The office of the *fictores* can be first connected to the Vestals and the cult at the same time that the Severan dynasty started to promote the cult and gave the Vestals a prominent role in their religious politics.⁵²⁸ It seems that their organization was a Severan creation and a critical part of their religious politics. In the early to mid-third century, the social conditions and the political circumstances were more favourable for creating new offices than afterwards. Consequently, cultic practices were constructed in relatively established conditions. When the cult organizations went through a change in the 270s as the Suncult constituted a new part of the official religion, the organization of the *fictores* also started to change; the title *fictor* ultimately fell into disuse. After the turn of the fourth century, the Vestals also seem to disappear from public view and there is a long break in the habit of donating inscriptions to the chief Vestals.⁵²⁹ Thus, my conclusion is that religious reform significantly impacted the Vestals' organizations and their practices, along with the institutions of the religious assistants. We cannot, of course, exclude the possibility that the continuity of the Vestals' own office

⁵²⁷ *Cod. Theod.* 13.3.8. The translation for this clause comes from Pharr C. (et al.), 1952, 388. This interesting source – disregarded by earlier studies – is fully discussed by Á. Zimonyi in his recent article. This law and its context have raised questions about how the Vestals' healthcare was arranged, and why they needed this kind of favour from the state in the first place – since there is no similar evidence concerning other Roman priesthoods. However, on the grounds of a later part of the clause, Zimonyi suggests that there prevailed a strong tone of Christian influence, since the law encouraged the doctors to work honourably in the service of the weak or unimportant (people) rather than to disgracefully serve the rich. He refers here to the translation from Pharr (1952). Zimonyi suggests that Vettius Agorius Praetextatus arranged the law, and that he was later honoured by the Vestals for this work. As a conclusion he states that the high esteem that the Vestals enjoyed during this period of great social and religious change in the Roman culture is demonstrated by the arrangements for their healthcare. In my view it is significant that fourth-century society and lawmakers saw the Vestals' doctors a separate institution, one that was excluded from those physicians who 'prefer to honourably yield to the weak, than to disgracefully serve the rich' (my own translation). This clause suggests that the Vestals' physicians were in the minority at that point, separate from other doctors.

⁵²⁸ The two eldest Vestals took part in the celebrations of the secular games of 204. Furthermore, the public role of the Severan women, particularly the empress Julia Domna, relied heavily on the cult of Vesta, as the following chapters will show.

⁵²⁹ After the chief Vestal Terentia Rufina received an inscription in 301, the next evidence from the *Atrium Vestae* is from the 360s when an anonymous Vestal was celebrated in an honorary monument. My conclusion is that Terentia Rufilla did not stay in her office for very long after 301 since she had become a Vestal already during the 250s. Thus, at the time she received her honorary monument, she was already in her fifties or sixties. After her, we have a gap of over six decades when there is no evidence for a chief Vestal.

holding was endangered for one reason or the other, and that they were unable to maintain official assistants. However, the priestesses had many connections to other priests and religious officials, as we shall learn from the next section.

3.6. Priests as Dedicators in the Vestal Inscriptions

Roman religious life was very rich, comprising numerous deities, priesthoods and cults – and this all in addition to the official state religion. In this section, my objective is to uncover what cultic officials can be connected to the Vestals, and what this can tell about their (the priestesses’) social influence and activities. What did religious officials and priests pursue by establishing relations with the Vestals? Can they be categorized as their clients, or were they rather colleagues? My interest lies in analysing whether these cultic connections indicate changes inside the cult of Vesta, or in cult life in general. Third-century religious life and the unstable social situation provide a background for this exploration.

The Emesian Sun-Cult – The Severans, Rome and Traditions

The emperor Elagabalus and his new religious politics in the 220s were centred on the Sun cult and the priest of the Sun. The cult and its representatives – particularly a certain Julius Balbillus – had been active in Rome’s public life already two decades before the young and reformative emperor took the throne. Why these priests and their cult was connected to the Vestal virgins, the priestesses of the traditional religion of Rome, is an interesting and yet challenging question. Evidence based on the inscriptions gives some indications, but omit the explicit reasons behind this development. However, the priesthoods had common features in their office holding, and the Severan house connected these two institutions together.

Although worshipping the Sun god had very long tradition in Roman cult life, the Emesian El-Gabal was a later addition. By the third century, worshipping El-Gabal was not only regional: votive gifts were sent to Emesa from surrounding provinces and countries. This benefitted the priests of the Sun,

who collected a rich fortune from the luxurious donations sent to the god.⁵³⁰ The cult was wealthy – just like the state maintained the cult of Vesta – and it had resources to lift its public image. What is most interesting to notice here, is that the Sun god had connections to the family of Empress Julia Domna, for she was a daughter of a certain Julius Bassianus, the priest of *El-gabal*. As far as it is known, the family was related to the ruling royal house of their hometown, and apparently their wealth came from office holding.⁵³¹ Furthermore, Septimius Severus was also engaged with the Sun-god ideology and he gathered impressions of different cults during his expeditions to the provinces. Later, when he had established his position, he built an imposing entrance *Septizonium* in the Palatine hill in 203 CE, where the Sun-ideology was an important theme.⁵³² Generally, dedications to the Syrian sun god increased at the turn of the second and third century. Dedicators of Syrian origin erected monuments for their hometown deity all over the empire. This can be seen as a result of Septimius Severus gaining the throne, and the fact that he had an empress with eastern and Syrian origins.⁵³³

However, scholars meet difficulties when attempting to estimate the impact of these cultic connections and enthusiasm. For example, the literary tradition connects the empress Julia Domna directly to the cult of the Sun god, but there is no clear evidence of her belonging to it. On contrary, she apparently never showed any attention to her family cult. She instead wanted to be a protector of the very traditional Roman cults, as is manifested in the emblems on the coins minted in her honour. In this connection I want to point out, that perhaps the empress followed the Roman habit that a wife abandoned her family cult and started to take care of her husband's family cult. In spite of the emperor's enthusiasm towards different cults, he showed a certain conservatism, which is evident regarding his reconstruction works in the temples and cult sanctuaries of Rome.⁵³⁴ Aside from literary notes, we lack direct evidence of the early Severans showing interest in the cult of *El-gabal*. However, based on the activities of Balbillus *sacerdos Solis*, it seems that he and the cult probably had an unofficial position in the Severan house, although the imperial couple refrained from showing public sympathies towards the Sun cult. In the next section, the activities of the Sun-priest Julius Balbillus

⁵³⁰ Herodian writes further about the massive and colourful rituals, which included music and dance. For the temple of the Sun god, the appearance of the priests and cult-rituals performed by them, see Herod. 5.3.4-8. For the origins of the cult and its characteristic features, see for example Turcan 1996, 176-178; Icks 2011, 48-52. For the development of Sun god worshipping, see Watson 1999, 194-195.

⁵³¹ About the family origins of Julia Domna, see Cass. Dio 78.24; 79.24; Herod. 5.2-6.

⁵³² Septimius Severus was above all interested in Serapis, sun-oriented deity. For more about Severus and cults, see *HA Sev.* 8.4. Birley 1999, 73-74. On *Septizonium* see *HA Sev.* 19.5.24 and Benario 1958, 717 *LTUR*.

⁵³³ Turcan 1996, 177. Turcan interprets that the empress inspired the citizens to emphasize the deity of her hometown. In my view, it is plausible to presume that it was socially profitable to interact and show the same identity as those in the capital. This was done by building the sanctuary to the deity, and by being active in dedicating the monuments.

⁵³⁴ Turcan 1996, 178.

are my focus. His case is an interesting one, since by analyzing his activities, it is possible to see that the Vestals, the Severans and the Emesian Sun cult are connected.

The Case of the Severan *Sacerdos Solis*

Archaeological, epigraphical and numismatic material reveal the development of the Sun cult, which had its center in the north-eastern area of the Palatine (Vigna Barberini).⁵³⁵ Unlike earlier studies that have explored the Sun cult, my focus is on the social meaning of Sun-priest's activities in the city of Rome and whether surviving epigraphical material offers evidence of a link between Vestal politics, the Emesan Sun-god cult, and the early Severan dynasty.

Topographically, the cultic centers of Vesta and the Sun-god were situated far away from each other. The Vesta's cultic center was located in the *Forum Romanum*, in the very heart of the city. The sacral center for the oriental Sun-god, by contrast, was outside the *urbs*, beyond the city walls in the fourteenth district called *Transtiberim* (modern Trastevere). This was an area inhabited by immigrants from the provinces. Curiously, though, the inscriptions dedicated by Julius Balbillus to the two chief Vestals were discovered in this area; more precisely, they were dug up in the garden of the Mattei family. Many other inscriptions invoking the Syrian deities have been found in this area as well. Sanctuaries containing inscriptions in such large numbers is unusual in Rome, and it therefore can be concluded that this particular area had some relatively important status.⁵³⁶ Regarding the cultic centers, the Vestal virgins and the Sun-priests shared one particular practical arrangement: unlike the other priests active in Roman cult-life, they both lived in the immediate environs of their deity's temple. Since the inscriptions for the Vestals were found in this certain area on the outskirts of the city, it seems probable that Balbillus had his residence or cultic headquarters there.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁵ Francois Chausson 'Vel Iovi vel Soli: quatre études autour de la Vigna Barberini (194-254)'. *MEFRA* 1995 vol. 107 no. 2, 661-765.

⁵³⁶ Turcan 1996, 177-178. Chausson estimates that the inscriptions were produced in the neighbourhood of the garden of Mattei or even in the same place. Chausson 1995, 683, 685. Augustus made the *Transtiberim* area the fourteenth district of the city and many gardens were laid out there outside the urban city core. *Transtiberim* was also known as a meeting place of many foreign cultures. The cultic communities of foreign origin constructed temples in the area; the temple of *El-gabal* was presumably situated there.

⁵³⁷ About the temple in Palatine, see Herod. 5.5.8. and about the temple outside the city, where the deity was solemnly taken for the summer season, see Herod. 5.6.6. Chausson 1995, 713.

Regarding the Sun-priest Julius Balbillus, there are two different views concerning his identity and his position in Rome. According to the monuments he had commissioned, he was Syrian in origin and dedicated monuments to his hometown deity *El-gabal*, or *Algabal* when formulated in the Syrian way of writing. He may have well been a part of Julia Domna's entourage, as she took her nearest relatives, including her sister, to Rome. Balbillus's main task may have been to act as the Sun-priest until one of Julia Domna's male relatives could take the charge of the office.⁵³⁸

The ambiguous and problematic inscription (*CIL* VI 708) can be interpreted in another manner as well, and therefore his origins have to be reconsidered. If the spelling *Al-gabal* is indeed correct, Balbillus used an unusual formulation instead of using the formulation *Elagabalus* which had been in public use since time of Antoninus Pius. His uncommon spelling of the god's name could reveal his unfamiliarity with the cult rather than his close connections to it.⁵³⁹ Furthermore, if he was of noble origin and held a high social position in Rome, as has been suggested, why did he need the friendship of imperial freedmen or those of equestrian background?⁵⁴⁰ In addition to these problematic issues, there are different names offered for the Sun-priest on the inscriptions, and this suggests the possibility that there in fact were two persons, instead of one. In the inscription for the chief Vestal Numisia Maximilla in 201, the dedicator uses the name Tiberius Julius Balbillus. Almost fifteen years later, the inscription for the Vestal Terentia Flavola gives the name of the *sacerdos Solis* as Aurelius Iulius Balbillus. The research has suggested that Balbillus took the name Aurelius later in order to honor the emperor Caracalla, whose sovereign title was Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus. Changing his name was therefore possibly connected to the *constitutio Antoniniana*. Since the year 212 many citizens, particularly those of eastern origin, adopted the emperor's (Caracalla)

⁵³⁸ For interpreting the etymology of the name Balbillus, see *CIL* VI 708. Chausson suggests that the name *Balbillus* has Syrian and Emesian origins. Chausson, 'Vel Iovi vel Soli: quatre études autour de la Vigna Barberini (194-254)' (1995). According to him, Balbillus came to Rome in the later part of 190s at the latest. He suggests that Balbillus was possibly related to the empress Julia Domna. Perhaps he was the first Sun-priest at Rome, for there are no evidences of anyone who had this position before him. For these themes and Balbillus's activities, see Chausson 1995, 680-681, 700, 705. On the long presence of the Sun-cult in Rome, the influence and extraordinary status of the empress' family, and also more about Ti. Julius Balbillus as an important member of the Sun-cult, see also Levick 2007, 13-14, 126.

⁵³⁹ For this other theory about Balbillus' origins, see Hijmans 2009, 492; see especially note 36.

⁵⁴⁰ Hijmans asks these relevant questions and opposes Chausson's arguments. He analyzes further that the position of Iulius Balbillus has probably been overestimated and his relations with the empress Julia Domna were certainly possible but no means a necessary reality, since there are no direct evidence of them. For this discussion, see Hijmans 2009, 505-506.

name as a result of this new law.⁵⁴¹ Whether Balbillus was one person with two different names, or two separate people, remains unresolved.

In his honorary inscriptions for the two chief Vestals, Balbillus followed the conventions of his time, and the texts are short in content and style. The dedication to Numisia Maximilla is dated 13 January 201, while the inscription for her successor Terentia Flavola is dated 215. Consular dating in these monuments refers to the fact that there was a certain official tone in Balbillus's actions. In the second inscription, Balbillus reveals his gratitude for Terentia Flavola's many favors. This indicates clearly a relationship between a client and his *patrona*.⁵⁴²

Whatever his origins, and whether there were one or two persons, I believe the Sun-priest sought to make himself and the cult known to the Roman public and élite.⁵⁴³ While Balbillus was extremely busy setting up inscription monuments for high prestige persons, he also received honorary monuments of his own. He was thus a person who had enough power, wealth, and status to be a *patron* in his own right. Apparently he benefitted from the wealthy cult and used its finances to promote both the cult and himself.⁵⁴⁴ Considering the volume of his public activities, Balbillus was a notable person in Roman cult life, or at least he aspired to such public prominence. Donating the inscription monuments reached its climax in honoring the Vestals, but Balbillus had started his activities as a dedicator already in the late 190s. The emperor Septimius Severus was honoured in 199, after he had held the throne for six years. Curiously, though, Balbillus utterly omitted the emperor's title and indications of his supreme pontificate.⁵⁴⁵ His friendship with a certain imperial

⁵⁴¹ Chausson argues that there was only one person who dedicated the Vestal inscriptions. For this, see Chausson 1995, 694. However, Gaston Halsberghe's study of the phases and developments of the cult of *Sol Invictus* concludes that there were two Sun-priests named Balbillus. Halsberghe G.H. *The Cult of Sol Invictus*. Leiden 1972, 76-77.

⁵⁴² For Numisia Maximilla *CIL* VI 2129; Terentia Flavola *CIL* VI 2130. The inscription for Terentia Flavola was dedicated on the fourth of April (*pridie Nonas Apriles*), which was the birthday of the emperor Caracalla. This may be a coincidence, but regarding her favourable position in the imperial house, it was convenient to associate the inscription with the *pontifex maximus*. I base my conclusion about Terentia Flavola's good position on the fact that she managed to stay out of the severe conflict that took place between the Vestals and the emperor in 212/213.

⁵⁴³ I would not completely exclude the possibility that Ti. Iulius Balbillus and Aurelius Iulius Balbillus were two different persons, possibly relatives, who succeeded each other in the office of the Sun-priest. We should bear in mind that there is over a decade between these dedicators, addressed to two different chief Vestals. Two persons or not, the family name Balbillus remained the same, indicating at the least a certain continuity inside the cult.

⁵⁴⁴ For Balbillus being honoured by his freedman, see *CIL* VI 2269. This inscription is unfortunately undated but it contains one conspicuous element. Several letters have been erased following Balbillus' title *sacerdos Solis*. The erased word has been interpreted as Elagabal, suggesting that this mutilation happened after Elagabalus was overthrown in 222 and his memory was cursed (*damnatio memoriae*).

⁵⁴⁵ *CIL* VI 1027. On Balbillus omitting the emperor's titles, see Rüpke 2006, 733, no. 2001.

freedman, Eutyches, was celebrated in another public monument in the year 199. Eutyches addressed him as his best of friends, *amicus optimus*. On the basis of this address, and since *amicitia* was possible between the persons of similar social status, I suggest that their social status was perhaps of a similar kind: Balbillus was also an imperial freedman.⁵⁴⁶

The imperial house seems to have been his first priority for establishing relationships with notable persons. Balbillus dedicated an inscription to the *praefectus annonae*, Claudius Julianus, on 20 January 201. This happened close to the dedication to Numisia Maximilla. This was probably a pure coincidence, and it can be explained by the idea that the monuments just happened to be completed in the same month. However, the Vestals and their cult were, as I have discussed above, the protectors of corn production. The *praefectus annonae*, for his part, was responsible for the administrative practicalities of the corn supply and its distribution. Thus, I suggest that the production of corn and its distribution can be associated with Balbillus' activities.⁵⁴⁷

Balbillus was active from the reign of Septimius Severus (197-211) to Caracalla's (211-217) time. There was continuity in his actions when he approached the two chief Vestals and donated honorary inscriptions to them. The office holding of his priesthood was either in the hands of a one person, or else was handed down through the male-line from a father to his son. The early Severan Sun-cult was well organized in Rome, and it had its own cultic center where there were inscription monuments dedicated to, among others, the chief Vestals. This Sun-cult of the early Severans has been seen as a prologue for the religious politics of the emperor Elagabalus, who gained a prominent position for the Sun-god after Balbillus had already prepared the ground for the cult.⁵⁴⁸ However, the imperial couple, Septimius Severus and Julia Domna, refrained from appearing as supporters of the cult – at least in public. At this point, office holding was not in the hands of the male members of the Severans, and there apparently existed no agenda for the cult being promoted through imperial religious politics. The Severan court was associated closely to the cult only after Elagabalus ascended the throne. Then, the cult and its public image had more importance when the emperor himself became its high priest.

⁵⁴⁶ *CIL* VI 2270.

⁵⁴⁷ *CIL* VI 1603.

⁵⁴⁸ For this theme, see Mekacher 2006, 149-150; Chausson 1995, 696, 712.

The case of the Sun cult shows that the chief Vestals' social and economic influence promoted other cults. However, it was perhaps their close association with the Severan house that motivated the Vestals to give their support. Balbillus likely had dual motives when he sought the protection of the chief Vestals. On one hand, he celebrated his relations with highly honored and respected priestesses in order to elevate his own social position. On the other hand, the Sun-priest highlighted his cult and deity, which had connections with the imperial house. The chief Vestals that he honoured were the same ones who participated in the Severan secular games in 204. As we shall see in the following chapters, these Vestals – Terentia Flavola in particular – seem to have possessed a special place in the Severan court. Thus, these priestesses' close connections with the imperial house were probably an important factor that brought the priestesses and Balbillus together. The Vestals – and Numisia Maximilla and Terentia Flavola in particular – apparently represented the imperial house and its power and authority. Their role as keepers of the state hearth in the *Atrium* gave them the capacity to act as associate members of the imperial family. The fact that these Vestals' honorary inscriptions were set up not in the *Atrium Vestae* but in the cultic center of the Sun-god indicates that perhaps the priestesses and Balbillus interacted frequently. At least it is plausible to assume that the priestesses were familiar with cult center of the Sun-god.⁵⁴⁹ Since the empress was strongly associated with the Sun cult, the fact that the Vestals acted as patrons of its priest connected them to the same religious community. This reinforced their shared identity, and promoted the public image of both parties.

Sacerdotes sacrae urbis

If the Emesian Sun cult was a somewhat foreign cult at the beginning of the third century, the late-third-century priesthood of *sacerdotes sacrae Urbis* represented the *Urbs Romae* and had its origins in the early-second century. The chief Vestal Coelia Claudiana received an honorary inscription from its priests on 25 February 286 CE. Four days later, on the first of March, the priesthood again dedicated a monument to her, also bearing an honorary text.⁵⁵⁰ Very little is known about these priests or their responsibilities, at least in the third-century context. However, associations between the

⁵⁴⁹ Perhaps Balbillus set up the Vestals' honorary monuments in the cultic center of the Sun-cult because it would have been religiously inappropriate to appear in the House of Vestals as a member of the eastern cult. Later, the emperor Elagabalus's removal of the sacred objects from the temple of Vesta was considered a sacrilege. Thus, the cult centers were protected by tradition and by the authorities of the city. Considering the connections between the imperial house, the Vestals and Balbillus, there is a possibility that the empress both visited the sanctuary and was a close member of the cult of Vesta. The Vestals may even have been part of her entourage during these visits. However, this idea remains speculative due to the lack of direct evidence.

⁵⁵⁰ *CIL* VI 2136; *CIL* VI 2137.

Vestals and the priests of *sacrae Urbis* can be found in public art as well as in epigraphic materials. The question of the social status of the *sacerdotes sacrae Urbis* is relevant for discovering the nature of their relationships with the Vestals.

The city of Rome and its personification of the goddess Roma connect closely to the functions of the *sacerdotes sacrae urbis*. In the first half of the second century, the emperor Hadrian officially organized the worship of the goddess Roma.⁵⁵¹ In the priests' official titles, the epithet *sacra* was probably first introduced by the Severans. The third century seems also to be the period to which most epigraphical evidence can be dated, although literary evidence also survives into the fourth century.⁵⁵² The city (*urbs*) itself is a connecting link between the cults of Vesta and *dea* Roma. While Vesta guarded the hearth of the city, the *dea* Roma represented a personification of the state and its *virtus*. Together, the two deities guaranteed the continuity of the Roman Empire and the wellbeing of its citizens.

Occasionally these close associations and cultic connections were manifested in public monuments. *Dea* Roma appears with the Vestals in the Flavian monumental relief, the so-called Cancellaria relief (frieze B). The Vestals are welcoming the homecoming emperor, while the *dea* Roma sits on a throne dominating the scene and representing the *genius* of the state.⁵⁵³ Thus, the goddess was presented in official state art already before the emperor Hadrian organized her worshipping by building the temple and arranging the priesthood. In the Cancellaria relief, the Vestals and *dea* Roma represent distinctive symbols of imperial power and state. Furthermore, the *Palladium* (image of Pallas Athene/Minerva) was kept in the temple of Vesta, but *Dea* Roma occasionally was portrayed holding the *Palladium*, reinforcing the associations between the cults.

⁵⁵¹ The goddess had been presented already in several earlier monuments and was a popular image on republican coinage. The emperor Hadrian ordered the temple of Venus and *dea* Roma to be built in 121 CE. In literature, the sanctuary was referred to as *templum urbis Romae*. Emperor Hadrian also first arranged the priesthood, *duoviri*, to take care of the cult. Although they were the priests of the *urbs Romae*, they appear in several inscriptions outside the city as well. In Italian cities and in western provinces, their titles vary slightly: *sacerdotes urbis* or *sacerdotes urbis Romae* and *sacerdotes urbis Romae Aeternae*. For the cult and its development, see Mellor 1981. The temple stood at the end of *Via Sacra* and containing the sanctuaries for both Venus and *dea* Roma was the largest temple in Rome.

⁵⁵² Mellor 1981, 1023.

⁵⁵³ The seated lady has been interpreted also as Minerva or Virtus. On the Cancellaria relief, see Greifenhagen 1967.

Before discussing the third-century *sacerdotes sacrae urbis* and their connections with the Vestals, it is important to note that there is one earlier piece of evidence connecting the cult of Rome and the Vestals. To underline the city's importance and its safety, the attributes of *dea Roma* include the *corona muralis*, mural crown, which represents the walls of the city and its towers. A similar kind of headpiece decorates the Vestal's portrait head from the Hadrian era. It is covered with the recognizable *vittae*, which are wrapped six times around the head. On top, there is the *corona muralis* with faintly visible towers and arches.⁵⁵⁴ Pliny the Elder wrote that the Vestals' sacral power, which allegedly had superstitious features, was contained inside the city walls. Thus, the city was their place of office holding.⁵⁵⁵ The mural crown is thus a manifestation of this connection. Although, as an attribute, *corona muralis* can be connected to the other goddess as well (Cybele/Magna Mater), it seems that the *dea Roma* is the most probable goddess when considering the temporal context. The portrait's dating corresponds with Hadrian's organization of the cult and its temple in 120. Considering that the Vestals had been presented earlier with the goddess, in the Flavian relief, it seems plausible that the *dea Roma* was now being promoted by individual Vestals, or at the least they were being associated with her. Thus, the priestess wears the attributes of *dea Roma*, which in turn was being promoted by contemporary imperial politics.⁵⁵⁶ It seems probable that connections between the Vestals and the cult of the city were in place already in the early-second century; by the late third century, the cult had an organized structure and its connections with an individual chief Vestal were articulated in an inscription monument. What was manifested through this action is examined next.

Cultic Connections with the Vestals

Even if we can trace the connection between the Vestals and the cult of *dea Roma* already in the early second century, the priests of the city, *sacerdotes sacrae urbis*, appear only at the end of the third century. Fortunately, the third-century priests have left information about their social status and there is also evidence about the structure of their institution. Due to the nature of the evidence, I am able to better reconstruct the kind of contacts that existed between the priestesses and the priest. Did they

⁵⁵⁴ For the Vestal virgin with the *corona muralis*, see fig. 5 in Appendix II.

⁵⁵⁵ Plin. *HN* 28.13.1.

⁵⁵⁶ However, recently N. Mekacher has discussed whether it can be concluded indisputably that this Vestal with the *corona muralis* can be identified with the goddess Roma and whether she represents Roma together with Vesta. This uncertainty is due to overlapping associations with other goddesses; the *corona muralis* is also an attribute of Kybele/Magna Mater and Fortuna. Furthermore, these goddesses and cults can be also associated with the Vestals. For this discussion see Mekacher 2006, 138. Perhaps this Vestal from the era of the emperor Hadrian represented the cult of Rome while taking care of her main duty as a Vestal.

communicate at the cultic level, or were the men of the cult *dea Roma* the clients of the *virgo Vestalis maxima* Coelia Claudiana?

Earlier research concluded that the *sacerdotes sacrae urbis* were the same as the *sacerdotes virginum Vestalium*, the ‘priests of the Vestals’. Thus, it was assumed that they assisted the priestesses by executing practical tasks for them and for the cult.⁵⁵⁷ However, the members of these priesthoods differed in their social backgrounds. The priesthood of *sacerdotes virginum Vestalium* is based on one inscription, which declares that the priest was a freedman.⁵⁵⁸ The social background of the priests of *urbis*, by contrast, points to a higher social position. One of the *sacerdotes sacrae Urbis*, a certain Septimius Epictetus, belonged to the equestrian class, being an *iuvenis perfectissimus*.⁵⁵⁹ Judged from this scanty evidence, we could conclude that the members of these two priesthoods had different social statuses and therefore they must be studied as members of separate organisations. Of course, one member from the equestrian rank is insufficient to declare with certainty the social status of the entire group. Along with Septimius Epictetus, a certain Aurelius Optatus and Flavius Eucharistus are mentioned as dedicators, but detailed information about their social status is unknown.⁵⁶⁰

The *sacerdotes sacrae urbis* represented an institution with an organizational structure. This detail separates them from being merely servants of the priests. They declared themselves to be the *decem primi* of their priestly *ordo*, indicating that they constituted a certain élite — the ‘first ten’ members — of their priesthood.⁵⁶¹ The arrangement of *decem primi* was a particularly third-century invention. It was probably connected to the general change in the power structures that socially advanced the equestrian order. It has been estimated that their cult itself supposedly went through subtle changes when the cult of *Roma Aeterna* gained growing popularity towards the end of the third century.⁵⁶² The extremely close cultic associations between the priests of *sacrae urbis* and those of *Roma Aeterna*

⁵⁵⁷ Wissowa 1912, 483 n. 2.

⁵⁵⁸ For the funeral inscription of the *sacerdos virginum Vestalium*, see *CIL* VI 2150. Rüpke 2008, 766. Unfortunately, it can only be concluded that the monument is from the imperial era; further dating is impossible. It therefore cannot be determined whether the *sacerdos* was practicing his office simultaneously with the *sacerdotes sacrae urbis* or whether their offices were contemporaneous.

⁵⁵⁹ Rüpke 2008, 9; Fishwick 1999, 224; Mellor 1981, 1023.

⁵⁶⁰ For the *sacerdotes sacrae urbis*, see prosopographical studies. Septimius Epictetus: *PLRE* vol. I, s.v. Epictetus; Rüpke 2008, 885, no. 3030. Aurelius Optatus: Rüpke 2008, 563, no. 854. Flavius Eucharistus: Rüpke 2008, 688, no. 1680.

⁵⁶¹ *RE* 1901, Band VI, hb 7-8, 2254-2256.

⁵⁶² *Roma Aeterna* appeared already on second- and particularly third-century imperial coinage and cultic propaganda. The cult of *Roma Aeterna* was tended by the *duodecem viri Urbis Romae* and they are attested in the fourth century. About the associations with *Roma Aeterna* in the fourth century, see Salzman, 1990, 155.

might have also affected the organizational structures of the priesthood, although there is no further evidence if the priesthods emerged by the end of the third century and not earlier.

Most of the Vestal inscriptions that bear dating were set up in the spring. It is not possible to make any conclusions about whether the dates and months are connected, for example, to some particular stage during the priestesses' lives.⁵⁶³ The monuments of the *sacerdotes sacrae urbis*, by contrast, were set up at the turn of the year. Also, they seem to have been connected to one another because there is such a short period of time between their dedications. The first was set up on 25 February and the second on the first of March, the beginning of a new calendar year. In both dedications, there is a note about a certain *fictor virginum Vestalium* Flavius Marcianus, who seems to have been responsible for making practical arrangements.⁵⁶⁴ The content of the inscription follows the form of the earlier honorary texts for the chief Vestals. Coelia Claudiana had managed her priestly office particularly well and she was also considered as the 'first and foremost of all previous chief Vestals' (*super omnes retro maximas*). Both inscriptions emphasized that divine powers — the goddess Vesta — accepted her work and priesthood.⁵⁶⁵ Although the immediate impetus for the monuments is not obvious, the priest celebrated Coelia Claudiana's skilful office holding. The vocabulary and formulations referring to the relationships between the patroness and her clients are missing. It is likely, then, that the sacerdotes wished to emphasize the cultic relations between themselves and the chief Vestal, rather than their gratitude for the Vestal's favours towards them or their organization.

The City of Rome was a connecting link between the chief Vestal and the other priests of Rome. Emphasizing the *urbs Romae* also reflected the need to enhance the importance of the capital in imperial cultic propaganda.⁵⁶⁶ The priests of the city acted publicly to promote their cult. The cult of Vesta, by contrast, was associated not just with the city of Rome but also with the continuity of the state of Rome. The three *sacerdotes sacrae Urbis* celebrated the chief Vestal in an honorary

⁵⁶³ Mekacher 2006, 128-129.

⁵⁶⁴ Rüpke 2008, 690, no. 1699. On the narrow side of the inscription block there is a notation about Flavius Marcianus, *fictor virginum Vestalium*. The term *curante* implicates his contribution.

⁵⁶⁵ *CIL* VI 2136. For the phrase '*super omnes retro maximas*' see *CIL* VI 2137.

⁵⁶⁶ Already in early 280, the emperor Carus (and his son Numerian) had won against the Germanic tribes; thereafter, operations and military expeditions seem to have finally ceased after decades of continuous unrest on the borders. However, in the field of domestic policy, the situation was not yet settled. Diocletian was just about to consolidate his power, but he still had to beat Carinus, the elder son of Numerian. Besides, he was not in Rome and did not travel there even after he gained the throne in the spring of 285, a few months after the priests of the city set up their monument for Coelia Claudiana. On the political situation and power struggles, see Potter 2004, 279-280; Southren 2004, 132, 135.

inscription, in which their own cult and status was also manifested. Based on the evidence provided by inscriptions from the spring of 285 CE, I suggest that the priests of the *urbs* appear to have been cultic partners of the Vestals rather than their servants/assistants. Even though we cannot totally exclude the possibility that Coelia Claudiana had somehow helped the priests of *sacrae urbis* by being their patroness, these priests were not serving the cult of Vesta. Instead, they acted as a priestly *ordo* of their own. In this light, the chief Vestal's status was utilized to promote the cult of Rome. Considering the relationships between the chief Vestal Coelia Claudiana and the priests of the city of Rome, it again can be noted that the priestesses represented different kinds of communities. In this case, the Vestal was in cultic cooperation with the *sacerdotes sacrae Urbis* and their co-work is an example of activity across cultic communities.

3.7. Vestals and the Messages in Inscriptions

A general view of the Vestals' honorary inscriptions is that they follow the conventions of the so-called 'epigraphic habit'. Their formulations are monotonous and annoyingly often omit further information about the Vestals' achievements, let alone the reasons why the monuments were set up in the first place.⁵⁶⁷ However, information can be extracted by close reading of the texts and by studying their context. When studying the inscriptions, it is sensible to be aware that there was a certain 'modus operandi' by which the inscriptions were produced, and setting up the monuments was strictly regulated by officials. Furthermore, the habit of donating inscriptions needed efforts and funds, and this favoured individuals wealthy enough and a social environment that supported and made possible such activity. These individuals were active and pursued their own interests – immaterial as well as economic benefits. When it comes to the objects of celebration, the Vestals, there was already a tradition from the late first century to set up monuments in their honour. The individual chief Vestals were very often *patronae* and perhaps they expected their clients to raise statues and honorary monuments in the *Atrium*. Perhaps, then, there prevailed mutual expectations and obligations between the priestesses and their clients. Next, my interest is to summarize the messages of these inscriptions, and discuss what kind of public image the dedicators produced. How were the Vestals seen and presented in public?

⁵⁶⁷ The source materials are treated differently in research on the Vestals. Some scholars emphasize certain materials as their main sources, while some include all possible materials in their work.

Honour and Praise for Religious Professionalism

The Vestals, the empresses and the noble *matronae* shared the same kinds of virtues – at least partially. As I discussed above (in chapter 3.1.), the word *religiosissima* appears relatively frequently in the Vestals' honorary inscriptions. In general, it seems to have been used rather rarely in inscription material. Considering the meaning of the term, *religiosus/religiosa* refers even better than *sancta* to the religious duties and devotion of the Vestals. In this chapter, the honouring practices of the Vestals are analysed further in terms of what religious professionalism signified in their case. Furthermore, honouring them in public is compared to how other cult officials, particularly the female priestly persons, were honoured. Since prosopographical details exist of the known female cultic specialists in the city of Rome, I use this information here to compare their honorary monuments to those of the Vestals. This comparison underlines how special the third-century Vestals' honorary monuments were and how their social influence was articulated publicly. Were there similar practices in honouring the other priestesses, for example those of Bona Dea or Isis?

Before turning my attention to the public honours of the female priestly officials, it is necessary to briefly explain the practices of praising religious professionalism more broadly. One could expect that specialization and professionalism gained public attention and praise in general through the epitaphs and other monuments. The Vestals' career had many special characteristics, such as office holding that was practically life-long. Although other priests had to learn their duties, it is questionable whether they can be called professional priests/priestesses, since they were not appointed for life-long duty. However, they apparently acted in similar institutional systems as the Vestals and other priests of the state religion.⁵⁶⁸ A well-known example of how personal qualities were celebrated publicly comes from the late fourth century. Then, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus — the notable representative of the *senatores* and high-priest (320-384 CE) — was honoured in a funerary inscription by his wife Fabia Aconia Paulina. In addition to the fact that Praetextatus was a member of many priestly colleges and held many honorary offices, his particular personal qualities that made him suitable as a priest and devotee were eulogized in the inscription. According to the

⁵⁶⁸The epithets *maxima* and *maximus* were used in priestly colleges, suggesting institutional similarities. *Maxima/maximus* suggests gradual proceeding in the priestly career as well. For more about the institutional similarities in the collegial structure, see Rüpke 2011, 34-35.

words of his wife, he was suitable for the many mysteries and cultic actions and he even taught his wife the secrets of the cults by preparing her for the initiatives.⁵⁶⁹

Besides the Vestals, only a few female priestesses received public monuments while they were alive. Funerary commemorations are more usual, as they were for other noble women. According to recent prosopographical studies, there are 148 female religious specialists, including the Vestals, who can be identified and whose priestly profession is documented. Of them, only nine (aside from the fourteen Vestal virgins) are represented in the inscriptions with descriptive epithets and not merely with a cultic title (as was common for these women).⁵⁷⁰ Their praise seems to be connected to their role as a *patrona*, although the adjectives concerning religious character are also used.⁵⁷¹ The priestesses of other cults, such as Isis, are honoured with similar words as the Vestals, for example *sanctissima*.⁵⁷² However, they are described also with common adjectives, *optima* (best) and *pientissima* (most dutiful), which are characteristics of good wives and mothers. The absence of words indicating religious capabilities is a striking difference from the Vestals. For example, the term *religiosissima* is lacking entirely. In the Vestals' inscriptions, it was also very typical to make reference to Vesta or even to the senate, and to emphasize that they approved the priestess's office holding. This formulation, together with appeals to gods or senate, is not articulated in the inscriptions to other priestesses. In other words, their profession is not discussed in the honorary inscriptions and memorials, and there are no references to whether they gained the support of the society (senate) due to their professionalism or the approval of the deity they were serving. The significance of the city of Rome for the Vestals may be why only they received praise for their profession. They were, above all, the priestesses of the city's heart and its sacred flame. This responsibility gave the Vestals a unique

⁵⁶⁹ For the funerary poem of Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, see *CIL* VI 1779. The temporal context is relevant when explaining his case. In the late fourth century, rivalry between the polytheistic religions and Christianity was turning to the benefit of the latter. At this point, members of the Roman aristocracy felt it relevant to emphasize the religious offices and devotion of Praetextatus. Perhaps it was a question of heightening the position of the traditional polytheistic religion and the social prominence of its representatives. Also it is further noted here, that the formulations of the inscriptions had become more complex by this point, with poetic language being favoured stylistically. For the case of Praetextatus, see the thorough analysis in M. Kahlos 2002.

⁵⁷⁰ With the help of vast source material, prosopographical data for all the persons, male and female, engaged in cult life in the city area of Rome from 300 BCE to 499 CE has been recently collected together to help scholars to identify the persons and gather information about their careers. J. Rüpke, 2008 [2005] (*FS*). My focus is strictly on the city of Rome. For the situation of the priestess outside Rome, see for example, Hemelrijk 2006, 85-117.

⁵⁷¹ The characteristics occurring in the inscriptions are: *Sanctissima* (most holy): *CIL* VI 2249. *Pudica* (chaste): *CIL* VI 32458. *Benemerens*: (well deserving) *CIL* VI 13454. *Pientissima* (most dutiful or most conscientious) *CIL* VI 34776. *Optima* (best) *CIL* VI 2249. *Patrona bene merens* (well-deserving benefactress) *CIL* VI 2237; *CIL* VII 2239. *Gratissima* (most pleasing, or dearest), *casta* (chaste) and *sedula* (attentive, sedulous) *CIL* VI 17985a.

⁵⁷² *CIL* VI 2249.

cultic status.⁵⁷³ Their close relations with the emperor and the excellent position of the *Atrium Vestae* near the Palatine probably inspired the donators even more.

Praising their religious professionalism seems also to be connected to the Vestals' religious and social power. The priestesses had the power to communicate with divine powers and to perform rituals and duties, all learned during their training. Although anybody could worship deities and although religious dutifulness, *pietas*, was an important Roman virtue, ordinary people did not have the professionalism and knowledge of certain sacrifices and rituals. Thus, the Roman state and citizens communicated through the medium of the Vestals with divine powers, and the priestesses' religious professionalism was considered to be an essential factor in this process. The honorary monuments clearly manifest this power, and the texts indicate that the dedicators were thankful to the Vestals for their professional office holding. Furthermore, the inscriptions contain filiations or patronymics, which are usual for public monuments. This seems to extend the honours of a Vestal to her relatives and family, and to her father in particular. A Vestal and her family enjoyed the community's esteem, and family name was forever connected to successful office holding and religious dutifulness. Thus, there was an underlying assumption that certain families were capable of preserving relationships with the gods, and therefore they alone were responsible for being on good terms with the gods.

Super Omnes Retro Maxima

The discussion about religious professionalism can be taken a little further, as I examine how religious expertise could be used as an instrument for social distinction among the Vestal virgins. A certain formulation describing a Vestal's superiority, *super omnes retro*, appears in several inscriptions. This is interesting since the formula was usually connected to emperors. What did it mean that the Vestals and their Emperor were honoured in a similar manner, with the same language? The *super omnes retro* formulation started to appear extensively in imperial inscriptions during the reign of Caracalla (211-217), although the second-century emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus were also celebrated with this description. The phrase allowed a present emperor to be positively compared with his predecessors, giving him the higher honour and foremost position among all earlier

⁵⁷³ The priestesses of other deities, such as a priestess of Ceres, were called *sacerdos publica populi Romani* but their office holding was not described in the same way as the Vestals'. Their professionalism was subsequently not celebrated on the same scale.

principes.⁵⁷⁴ Its exclusive link to the imperial title makes it stick out in the four Vestal inscriptions. In addition to the emperors and Vestals, some high-ranking officials were also honoured with the formula. People of lower class were also praised in this manner, although examples are very rare.⁵⁷⁵ Notably, it was almost never used in inscriptions dedicated to women, some rare examples and the dedications to the chief Vestals being the exceptions.⁵⁷⁶

In the Vestal inscriptions, the formula was used for the first time in the dedication to Flavia Publicia. Her period in the office of *maxima* started no later than in the late 250s, when Q. Veturius Memphius, *fictor virginum Vestalium*, dedicated an inscription to her. A closer interpretation allows us to conclude that Veturius Memphius praised Flavia explicitly for being religiously more pious, and more pure as well as more morally chaste (*super omnes retro religiosissima, purissima, castissimaque*) than her predecessors.⁵⁷⁷ Veturius Memphius was not only Flavia Publicia's *fictor*, but also her client who had benefitted from the Vestal's favours. Thus, her religious dutifulness was praised but so too was the Vestal's capability as an excellent *patrona*.

A client of chief Vestal Coelia Claudiana also chose this formulation. In the late third century, Aurelius Fructosus set up the monument for her in order to celebrate her twenty year period in the office of *virgo Vestalis maxima*. Aurelius Fructosus praised his Vestal for being more conscientious (or upright) than any of her predecessors (*super omnes piissima*).⁵⁷⁸ In 286 CE her other clients, priests of *sacerdotes sacrae urbis*, also dedicated an inscription to her, calling her the foremost chief

⁵⁷⁴ The adjectives and attributes were attached in the formula *super omnes retro principes*. Thus, the achievements and good qualities of the sovereign raised him above all previous *principes*. On the formula and its use, see Scheithauer 1988, 155-177. It seems that it was the emperor Caracalla who especially received honorary inscriptions bearing this formula. The *super omnes retro* was, though, used regularly in the course of the third and fourth centuries.

⁵⁷⁵ Scheithauer 1988, 168.

⁵⁷⁶ For inscriptions that address a chief Vestal as *super omnes retro*: *CIL* VI 2134; 2137; 32419; 32420. For detecting the formulation *super omnes retro* Clauss-Slaby database produced 79 results with the search term 'super omn' and with the exact search term 'super omnes retro' there are only 25 results. The last mentioned inscriptions are for the emperors and the Vestals. On the other hand, for the women other than Vestals there are a few dedications (from which the Christian inscriptions are omitted). There is a burial epithet in which a husband praises his wife Pomponia L. f. Aphrodisia as being the most pure of all (others) *ac super omnes castissima*; see *AE* 1999, 519. There is also a fragmentary inscription for the most wonderful and incomparable wife, who is the purest and above all other women; see *CIL* VI 26248. See also *CIL* IX, 1448 and *AE* 1987, 713 Otherwise, it was very rare to use this formula in any inscription dedicated to a woman.

⁵⁷⁷ *CIL* VI 2134 = 32419.

⁵⁷⁸ *CIL* VI 32420.

Vestal compared to the previous chief Vestals, *super omnes retro maximas*.⁵⁷⁹ Thus, here her religious professionalism is emphasized above all other qualities.

Close analysis of the inscriptions has shown that the dedicators of Coelia Claudiana concentrated on praising her religious abilities rather than her role as *patrona*.⁵⁸⁰ They refrained from mentioning *pietas* or *beneficia*, which might have clarified why the inscription was set up and indicate any relationship of *patrona* and client. Thus, the difference with her predecessor Flavia Publicia is certainly clear, for the latter was primarily the *patrona* and venerated for her benevolence. In 248, Rome celebrated its millennium, and possibly Flavia Publicia participated in festivities in a manner similar to the Severan Vestals in the *ludi saeculares* of 204. Flavia Publicia's public image and office holding were reinforced by celebrations.⁵⁸¹ If the rituals were similar to those of the Severan *ludi*, the two eldest Vestals participated. Thus, it was probably Coelia Claudiana with Flavia Publicia. My suggestion is based on the fact that Coelia followed Flavia as the *maxima*, and therefore she probably was in the second place in the Vestals' rank order. These two Vestals had a common past, and there might have been rivalry between them. The public image of the Vestals was therefore different – while Flavia was celebrated for her role as a *patrona*, Coelia's dedicators praised and emphasized her religious professionalism rather than her patronage. Moreover, it can be noticed that when studying the inscriptions of the successor of Coelia Claudiana, i.e., Terentia Rufilla, it becomes evident that the role of the benefactress became again the most important of Terentias's actions and identity. Her cultic actions are not mentioned in the way that Coelia Claudiana's were.⁵⁸² Thus, it seems that Coelia Claudiana was regarded as exceptional, when compared against the other chief Vestals.

A. Scheithauer concluded that the inscription formula was indicative of the Roman tendency to put individuals into different hierarchical categories. The most important purpose of the inscriptions was to praise the virtues relevant to the office holding and the person's professionalism in executing his/her role.⁵⁸³ Considering the interpretation process that surrounded these inscriptions, it is important to notice changes in textual conventions, the so-called 'epigraphic habit'. Third-century

⁵⁷⁹ *CIL* VI 2137.

⁵⁸⁰ Rüpke 2008, 627, no. 1281.

⁵⁸¹ For the life and office holding of Flavia Publicia and the millennium celebrations in particular, see Ruggeri 2015, 175-80.

⁵⁸² For the inscriptions to Terentia Rufilla: *CIL* VI 2141=32406; 2143=32407.

⁵⁸³ Scheithauer 1988, 168. For the emperors, the epithets described imperial ideas and virtues such as *indulgentia*, *clementia*, *pietas*, and *felicitas*.

inscriptions differed markedly from those of the first or second centuries, as texts in the later imperial era became longer and their style more elaborate.⁵⁸⁴ The Vestals' inscriptions must be studied with this cultural change in mind. Of particular note is the usage of the formula *super omnes retro maximas*, which first appeared in imperial honorary monuments and only later was used in the Vestals' monuments.

The development of stylistic and epigraphic habits cannot, however, explain thoroughly the significance of the inscription formulation. The formula was used to point out differences — especially in religious skills — between the chief Vestals. Furthermore, the case of the chief Vestal Coelia Claudiana clearly shows the manner in which these differences were highlighted in the honorary monuments. This was done first and foremost because her dedicators wanted to emphasize her identity as a priestess and her cultic skills, which they believed to be more important than her role as a benefactress. Since the *super omnes retro maximas* formula was used more commonly to honor emperors, its significance to the Vestals is an interesting question. The priestesses obviously were not comparable to the emperors, but either their social role or their abilities seem to have been measured against similar standards.

It is striking that the two Vestals Flavia Publicia and Coelia Claudiana who received the most inscription monuments were also the ones to whom the formula *super omnes retro* was applied.⁵⁸⁵ The actual process of creating an honorary position for the Vestals seems to have been built on the same foundation that applied to state officials: the more clients a *patronus/patrona* had, the higher his/her social influence and veneration.⁵⁸⁶ If the person was successful and had a large clientele, he/she was more likely to be the object of gratitude (and thence an honorary monument). Since the monuments dedicated to Flavia Publicia and Coelia Claudiana remained in the House of the Vestals for future generations to see, their social impact continued long after the honoured Vestals and their dedicators had passed away. Memory and fame thus continued to remind the community of the two Vestals' achievements.

⁵⁸⁴ Salomies 1994, 63-106.

⁵⁸⁵ There are eight for Flavia Publicia (*CIL* VI 2134; 2135; 32414; 32415; 32416; 32417-32419) and seven for Coelia Claudiana (*CIL* VI 2136-2140; 32420; 32421).

⁵⁸⁶ Frei-Stolba 1998, 251.

The Vestals' social influence reflected in multiple ways the requests of the dedicators, who included family members, clients, religious officials (i.e., *fictores*), and priests from other cults. The relationship between the Vestals' biological family members and the imperial house influenced the extent of her patronage. Those Vestals and their families who announced themselves as supporters of the imperial house were undoubtedly in a better position to gain imperial favours. By contrast, if there was conflict between the emperor and the biological family of a Vestal, her office holding could be endangered, let alone her role as a benefactress. Furthermore, the social status of the Vestals' biological families impacted their motives towards the priestesses. For example, Terentia Flavola came from a distinguished patrician family, whose male members possessed many political and religious offices. Their motive in setting up inscription monuments in her honour was to increase their family's honorary position and prestige. This way, the family name, and the achievements of its members, were displayed publicly in the *Atrium Vestae*. Their posthumous reputation was likewise secured by using the Vestal's social status and the cultic centre of Vesta. An entirely different situation was probably going on with the relatives of chief Vestal Flavia Publicia, who had apparently helped her sister's daughter Aemilia Rogatilla and her son Minucius Honoratus Marcellus Aemilianus. First, the dedicators came from the second- and third-generation family members. Second, the inscription mentions *pietas*, which indicates that the Vestal had fulfilled her relatives' expectations. Thus, Flavia Publicia was active in her role as an aunt, and she had helped her niece and grandnephew either financially or in other ways, such as by using her influence to produce social advantages for them.

The support of their *patronae* was articulated more frankly in the inscriptions dedicated by the Vestals' clients, in some cases with detail. For example, the clients of Campia Severina in the late 240s expressed their gratitude for her favours that helped them to achieve nominations for an office. The terms used in the texts are revealing. The Vestal's client states that his *patrona* had helped him – with her vote (*suffragium*) – to achieve the office of *procurator* of financial affairs in the emperor's private library. This indicates that the chief Vestals had opportunities to use their social influence and to recommend their clients for imperial offices. They thus had social contact with the imperial administration and could influence the decision-making process. More importantly, they succeeded in persuading the emperor to accept their clients. The lack of direct evidence, however, makes it

impossible to determine whether the Vestals had familial relationships with their clients (whether, for example, their clients were the clients, i.e. freedmen, of their biological families). This, however, is probable when considering the structure of Roman society and the social advancement of freedmen.

The permanence of their cultic institution and long-term office holding were obvious benefits for the chief Vestal, enabling her to act as *patrona* in the third century. When imperial power was challenged again and again, and as dynastic continuity faltered after the Severans, the cultic institution of Vesta appeared as a stabile, reliable establishment. Since the Vestals took care of the hearth of the Roman state, which in turn was connected to an emperor's home altar, I suggest that the priestesses were idealized as representatives of the emperor and that they were considered as associate members of his family. They were thus in a good position to help their clients and to grant them favours that were acceptable to the imperial administration. There is evidence that some of the Vestals' equestrian clients achieved their status — and their new offices — with the priestesses' help. To achieve the social rank of equestrian required a certain amount of wealth, or else imperial intervention (such as via a Vestal's influence), when a candidate was promoted to the rank directly. Considering this ability to promote their clients, both the priestesses' economic power and their social influence were critical.

The mid-third century was marked by a political situation and crisis that threatened Rome's continuity as a state; eventually, the crisis was resolved, social conditions became stable, and the lost provinces were again reconquered. Emblems representing *Roma Aeterna* became popular on imperial coinage, and the promotion of the cult of the *sacerdotes sacrae Urbis Romae* seems to have belonged to this propaganda. The Vestals' cultic and religious professionalism was used to secure the city of Rome and its welfare. In this context, it is plausible to propose that the chief Vestal Coelia Claudiana's identity and religious capacity was utilized as a part of the cult that promoted the city and its welfare, since her purpose was to reinforce the cult of the city with her status as a religious professional. The *sacerdotes*, for their part, co-operated with the chief Vestal.

To sum up, the Vestals' lucrative economic position and wealth, as well as their influential position, was converted into benefits for their dedicators. Although the inscriptions follow certain formulations, the priestesses were treated differently in them and appeared in different roles. I suggest that these roles can be better comprehended when the Vestals are treated as members of different

families or family-like communities. First, in the role of daughters and sisters they represented their biological families whose public reputation and honour held in the priestesses' hands. Although a Vestal's appointment prevented her from producing offspring and preserving the family name, ideas of continuity and hopeful prospects were built into her activities. Her social stand and status as a priestess – if she succeeded in preserving her virginity – guaranteed enduring prestige for her family.

In addition to their biological families, the Vestals were connected to a cultic family of their own. Together, the priestesses formed a cultic family of different ages, and their interaction with other priesthoods reinforced their sacral community. And, as the case of the *sacerdotes sacrae Urbis Romae* shows us, the Vestals offered their religious professionalism for the use of other cults. From the viewpoint of their clients, the Vestals represented – if not their biological families, which possibility cannot be excluded – the imperial house and the emperor. As they managed the state hearth, which was also the hearth of the imperial family, the priestesses were associated with members of the emperor's household. As such, the Vestals, or at least those of them who supported the emperor and approved his politics, had their place as associate members of the imperial family. However, these relationships were not always uncomplicated. In the next chapter, my task is to study these aspects further, and to discuss what kind of connections the Vestals had with the imperial house, and with the emperor and the empress in particular.

4. The Vestals as Agents of Power and Politics

The Vestals' activities and their role as *patronae* have dominated my study to this point. In this chapter, my focus turns to their position as instruments of imperial politics. There were individuals – from different social orders – who sought imperial favours and used the priestesses' social influence and value for their own purposes to pursue power and fame. The senatorial order had responsibilities and power that connected directly with the Vestals' capability to act as priestesses and benefactors. Members of lower social status also appeared in the *Atrium Vestae* and used this central place for their own purposes without directly linking themselves to the priestesses. They used the priestesses' social status and the importance of their residence in their own attempts to obtain success and social benefits. Thus, although the emperors' and empresses' actions towards the Vestals are this chapter's

emphasis, I also discuss how the *senatores* and other social groups benefitted from the priestesses' social value and that of the *Atrium Vestae*.

How did third-century imperial families benefit from the propagandistic value of the cult and the Vestals? The Severan dynasty and its political use of the cult of Vesta is at the center of my analysis, which discusses how the cult and the priestesses were instruments in their religious politics and what was communicated through their religious propaganda concerning Vesta. The Severan dynasty seems to be the last imperial house to promote the cult extensively. For example, the *atrium Vestae* as we find it today resulted from Severan restoration work. The dynasty's actions were also disruptive, however, and, the priestesses suffered from them. They were, in short, victims of power politics. The Severan dynasty also propagated the Sun-cult during the reign of emperor Elagabalus, and this caused Roman cult life to go through unparalleled change.

The Severans are generally considered to have been traditionalists, especially with regards to their moral campaigns. Paternal supremacy and the emperor's omnipotence is evident in the clause of the *Digesta* recorded by Ulpian: *The emperor is freed from the laws; although the empress, admittedly, is not freed from the laws, emperors nevertheless grant her those same privileges, which they themselves enjoy.*⁵⁸⁷ R. Bauman's research argues that changes – whether tightening or liberating – in public morals are crucial indicators of women's social role and prominence.⁵⁸⁸ To what extent were the Vestals controlled as a result of the Severans' tightening of public morals? Since this question underlies my analysis, it is necessary to consider changes in legislation when studying the emperors' actions towards the priestesses. My final task thus is to consider what impact imperial religious and moral politics had on the cult and the priestesses in the later third century. My starting point is to study those occasions when the Vestals were included as important actors or elements in imperial religious politics. By analyzing these occasions, I am able to explain what they communicated and for what purposes the emperor used the priestesses. When necessary, I discuss earlier developments

⁵⁸⁷ *Dig.* 1.3.31. *Ulpianus libro 13 ad legem Iuliam et Papiam. Princeps legibus solutus est: Augusta autem licet legibus soluta non est, principes tamen eadem illi privilegia tribuunt, quae ipsi habent.*

⁵⁸⁸ On public morals and attitudes towards the Vestals during the principate, see Bauman 1996, 71-75. Mustakallio also emphasizes changes in attitudes towards the Vestals, see Mustakallio 2007, 194.

in imperial Vesta politics, although as elsewhere this study concentrates primarily on the third century.⁵⁸⁹

Before turning my attention to imperial benefit from the priestesses, I will briefly introduce the socio-political problems and changes known as the crisis of the third century. How the cult, which had such a long tradition and history, survived and/or changed during this century? Since the reign of emperor Augustus, the link between the cult of Vesta and the emperor had been articulated more or less strongly in imperial propaganda.⁵⁹⁰ The Julio-Claudian emperors' political use of the cult of Vesta has received particular attention in the scholarship, but few have concentrated on the relationships between the third-century *pontifex maximus* and the Vestal virgins.⁵⁹¹ Disputes following the Severan dynasty disrupted imperial continuity, but whether and how this affected interactions between the sovereign and his priestesses has seldom been asked. The third-century emperors occasionally represented social ranks other than the senatorial, and therefore their social relationships with the élite also became fragile.⁵⁹² Since religious offices had previously been in the hands of the senatorial order, one suspects that fractures occurred in the relationships between the *pontifex maximus* and the pontifical college, including the Vestals' institution as it too had previously been occupied by senatorial priestesses.

In addition to changes in social relationships within the political and religious élite, my objective is to discover whether the Vestals were used as guarantors of imperial power in this constantly changing situation. If they were given this role, how was it manifested publicly? The 270s saw a change in the pontifical order, as the new organization of the *pontifices Solis* became a major priesthood and the name of the old *pontifices* was re-styled as *pontifices maiores*. Later, in the fourth century, they were also called the *pontifices Vestae*. This has been explained as a mere change in the styling of the orders, meant to better identify them. However, the impact of the cult of Sol on the Vestals' position has not

⁵⁸⁹ Regarding relationships between the emperors and the cult of Vesta, the term 'Vesta politics' is used to describe the imperial religious propaganda in which the Vestals were important elements.

⁵⁹⁰ When Augustus built a sanctuary for the goddess Vesta in his Palatine residence and consequently connected his family's well-being to the goddess, Vesta gained a new and official position as a tutelary goddess of the ruler. Vesta's protection and blessing was asked for in prayers, and this new relation between the emperor and the goddess was described in poetry with eloquent expressions. The emperor's and his male relatives' birthdays were also connected to the cult of Vesta, as when votive offerings were performed for the goddess. On relations between the goddess and the emperor, see Ov. *Fast.* 4.949-54. On the Augustan Vesta, see Frascchetti 2005. For the birthday celebrations of the members of the imperial house, see Edmondson J., 2014.

⁵⁹¹ On the republican and early imperial Vestals, see Wildfang 2006. On the Augustan cult of Vesta, see Ittai G., 2002; for the emperor Domitian and Vesta politics, see D'Ambra E., 1993.

⁵⁹² Inge Mennen considers what consequences there were when the emperors came from a social class other than the *senatores*. Mennen, 2011.

yet been thoroughly studied. To uncover changes in the Vestals' social influence and how they were valued, it is my task to study if broader changes in the religious institutions affected the Vestals specifically. Although sources from the third century are often scattered, and there is only a small amount of literary evidence, there is surviving epigraphic and numismatic evidence. The epigraphic evidence permits a close study of the individuals and groups linked to the imperial house and the Vestal virgins. Numismatic materials are especially good sources for tracing changes in the Vestals' ordo and its relationships with the imperial house. Literary sources reported by contemporary historians Cassius Dio and Herodian, reach into the 240s; after this, the biographies of *Historia Augusta* provide information about the mid- and late third century. These sources help me to explain the social and religious changes that apparently impacted the Vestals and their position. In the end, considering the long history of the cult and the traditional Roman values that the Vestals represented, my aim is to study whether the time of crisis affected the organization of the Vestals.

4.1. The *Atrium Vestae* of the Early Severan Dynasty

Monuments for other distinguished persons sat alongside the Vestals' honorary inscriptions in the *Atrium Vestae*. What motivated dedicators who were not in relationships with the Vestals to honour members of the imperial house within the *Atrium*? The Vestals' role as mediators between honored individuals and their dedicators certainly played a role. The Severans built their religious politics and cult life – more or less – on the foundations established by their predecessors. The Severans wanted, in particular, to present themselves as the continuators of Antonine politics and their dynasty. To do so, they created and reinforced a strong link between present and past by inventing familial ties between themselves and their predecessors.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹³ After Septimius Severus adopted himself into the Antonine clan, his familial ties were no longer an “invention” but *de facto*. On Septimius styling himself as adendant of Marcus Aurelius, see Cass. Dio 76.7. The Antonines were also presented by other means as important figures in the Severan family. For example, Faustina the Younger appeared in a dream of Severus when he was to marry Julia Domna; Cass. Dio 75.3.1. For the life and politics of the emperor Septimius Severus, Birley's study (2002; 1971) is still relevant today. For a discussion of how the Severans transformed the city of Rome and how their political agenda was seen through building projects, see Lusnia, 2014. For Julia Domna, her patronage, and her role in Severan politics, see Langford, 2013; Nadolny, 2016.

Both the Antonines and the Severans propagated the food supply through their politics.⁵⁹⁴ The Antonine empresses were represented in front of the temple of Vesta on imperial coins, and this visual manifestation was continued on the coinage of the Severan *Augustae*. In the House of the Vestals, many activities commenced during the Antonine era, continued throughout the Severan dynasty and beyond. However, the Severans' imitation of the Antonines was not comprehensive in terms of their politics with the cult of Vesta and the Vestals. In fact, drastic changes are evident regarding attitudes towards the priestesses. Moreover, I argue that the Severan emperors distinguished themselves from the Antonines by overtly propagandizing the Vestal priestesses.

After the fire disaster of 191 CE, the Severans carried out restoration work on the House of Vesta. The central area of the House was expanded and the conveniences in the Vestals' residential areas were improved.⁵⁹⁵ Although the building was the private residence of the priestesses, as noted earlier it also served as a public building and the cult's official center. This double function gave the place a special character, unparalleled in the *forum Romanum* since the priests of all other cults or deities lived elsewhere and not in the immediate environs of their cult center.

That the Severan house appears most frequently in the non-Vestal inscriptions found in the Atrium may be a mere coincidence, a result of the fire disaster or the accidental preservation of later periods. An inscription found in the *Atrium* dedicated to the emperor Commodus by a certain M. Flavius Vitellius Seleucus indicates that there was a certain "epigraphic habit" in the House of Vestals before the third century, when most of the inscriptions are dated.⁵⁹⁶ Statues found in the area can be dated to the second century by their artistic and stylistic features. This suggests that there were also inscription monuments in earlier periods, although there now remain only those from the third century. There were some specific developments connected especially to the Severans and to third century society in general; understanding what they were and their link to the House of Vestals first requires a clearer awareness of the decline of the senators' social position and prestige, especially as it relates to the Vestal virgins.

⁵⁹⁴ For Severan propaganda related to the food supply, see Rantala, 2016, 64-83. For Severan reforms to secure the food supply and how this activity was seen in the cityscape, see Lusnia 2014, 189-190.

⁵⁹⁵ Scott; *LTUR*.

⁵⁹⁶ For an inscription dedicated to Commodus, see *CIL* VI 31318a. On M. Flavius Vitellius Seleucus, the consul of 221 CE, see *RE* 1909, band 6, halbband 12, s.v. Flavius no. 211, 2729.

Senatores Authorizing the Vestals' Activities

The third-century crisis clearly had a negative effect on the authority and supremacy of the *senatores*.⁵⁹⁷ Traditionally, the emperor, the senate, and archaic religious institutions such as the Vestal *ordo* shared a noble background and communicated with each other on the basis of similar education, values and sense of solidarity. Once the emperors no longer represented the senatorial order, the balance between the emperor, the senate, and the Vestals changed. Against this background, the senate's influence on the Vestals' selection process, and its authorization of their activities, demands further attention. This is particularly important since the senate is mentioned in the honorary inscriptions of some individual chief Vestals, raising questions about the relationships between the priestesses and the senators. How was power and influence divided between profane officials and the priests/priestesses? Certainly, the Vestals and the *senatores* formed an administrative organ, in which the Vestals took care of the *sacra* and the senate ruled profane affairs. Their influence and power were by no means identical, but they needed one another, and they had to submit to each other's power – sacral and profane.⁵⁹⁸ How, then, did the senate and the Vestals interact during the third-century political situation, and what did the senate's approval signify for individual priestesses?

The problem of the Roman system was that there was no clear division of powers, particularly between the senate and the emperor. The ascending emperor established his relationships anew, being simultaneously concerned that some of the senators might challenge his rule. Most of the second-century emperors enjoyed good reputations due to their positive relationships with the *senatores*; certain third-century rulers, however, were less appreciated and even loathed because they believed that it was far more important to win soldiers' approval in the tightening political and military situation than to consider the senate's opinions.⁵⁹⁹ How this rupture affected the Vestals' activities and their position has largely been ignored until now.

⁵⁹⁷ For an overview of senatorial power and office holding at the beginning of the third century, see de Blois L., 2019.

⁵⁹⁸ Scheid discusses this subject regarding the *fratres Arvales* and their social significance. He also notes how Romulus, the founder of the City, was viewed as an official and king Numa Pompilius was considered to be a priest. See Scheid 1990, 277-79.

⁵⁹⁹ Septimius Severus enjoyed an ambivalent posthumous reputation. On one hand, his actions were condemned because he carried out a purge among the *senatores*. On the other hand, he was treated as a supporter of the senatorial rank and his actions, such as celebrating public funerals for the emperor Pertinax, raised a spirit of solidarity among the *senatores*. On this, see Várhelyi 2010, 53-54. A completely different situation existed between the emperor Maximinus Thrax (235-238) and the senate, and his reputation within the senate was unambiguously poor. Because of his low-ranking origins,

As I discussed earlier, there was a subtle dominance of the senatorial class among the Vestals' origins, although there are also many uncertain cases.⁶⁰⁰ Already the emperor Augustus allowed the daughters of freedmen to enter to the office of a Vestal, but their proportion remained modest.⁶⁰¹ In only a few cases can an equestrian or inferior social class be definitely verified amongst first- and second-century Vestals using existing data.⁶⁰² In the third century, by contrast, more priestesses can be identified whose family did not represent the old senatorial families, let alone the patricians. At this point these families' origins could be also non-Italian.⁶⁰³ In some cases, third-century Vestals' families had connections to the equestrians by birth or by marriage.⁶⁰⁴ These examples provide us with subtle indications that the third-century change in the social orders and the break in the *senatores'* supremacy can also be traced in the priestesses' family relations and social origins. Nevertheless, the change was modest, as there are only a few Vestals whose social origins can be connected with certainty to any class, let alone the "lower" orders. It simply is not possible to conclude that the equestrian order was favoured, even if third-century emperors had sympathy towards them or occasionally represented the *equites* themselves.

In addition to the fact that the most of the third-century priestesses belonged to the senatorial order and shared the senatorial identity, there were other, more practical issues that connected the priestesses to the nobility. One of the senate's administrative duties, from the republican and early-imperial eras, concerned the Vestals' selection process.⁶⁰⁵ Papian law describes selection by drawing lots, but the senate also had a role. In the senate assembly, the emperor announced that a new priestess

he was considered to be a barbarian, and his physical force and alleged cruelty caused fear. On Maximinus Thrax and the senate, see *SHA Max.* 8.6.

⁶⁰⁰ For the social origins of the Vestals see chapter 2.1. Of fourteen priestesses who can be identified with certainty as third-century Vestals, six had definitely or probably had a senatorial background.

⁶⁰¹ On Augustus reorganizing the Vestals' requirements, see Cass. Dio 55.22.5.

⁶⁰² For the social origins of the early-imperial Vestals, see Raepsaet-Charlier 1984; Rüpke 2008 (*FS*).

⁶⁰³ The Vestals Campia Severina and Vettienia Sabinilla came from non-senatorial families. Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 262 no. 9 (Campia Severina); 268 no. 37 (Vettienia Sabinilla); Rüpke 2008, 596 no. 1076 (Campia Severina); 948 no. 3466 (Vettienia Sabinilla). Aquilia Severa's family had origins in Asia Minor. Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 265 no. 20; Rüpke 2008, 541 no. 695.

⁶⁰⁴ For example, in an inscription for Flavia Mamilia, her nephews declared they were serving in military offices. See *CIL* VI 2133. Furthermore, the brother-in-law of Coelia Claudiana was a *vir egregius*; see *CIL* VI 2140. The late-third-century Vestal Vettienia Sabinilla set up an epitaph (*CIL* VI 1587) for her father P. Aelius Dionysius, *vir perfectissimus*. His title gives away their family's social position.

⁶⁰⁵ We are not aware if the selection process contained religious elements, or whether it was viewed as an administrative duty. Since in the early days the selection was conducted by drawing lots, divine powers and perhaps the goddess Vesta herself might have been considered to be involved. Many of the senate's meetings had a religious character and matters of a religious nature were first in importance when meetings were held. For the religious content of the senate's gatherings, see Várhelyi 2010, 47-48.

should be selected, and the occasion proceeded with an evaluation of the candidates.⁶⁰⁶ By the third century, this custom of selecting a priestess had apparently fallen out of use, and fathers proposed their daughters directly to the *pontifex maximus*.⁶⁰⁷ This made an individual father a third important agent, along with the senate and the *imperator*, whose centrality was now emphasized. Thus, a father's relationship with the emperor and his status in the imperial administration seems to have been crucial, since the new system allowed him to approach the emperor and communicate with him directly concerning religious decision making. The senate's role seems to have diminished at the same time. However, if a girl was accepted, it was still the senate's business to grant the father an exemption from Papian law.⁶⁰⁸ This might have been only a formality and it was the emperor's decision that had ultimate legitimacy.

The senate's authority beyond the priestesses becomes clearer considering its authorization of the Vestals' public agency. The senate had the right to decide on matters concerning the priestesses' sacral obligations or public actions, as well as their independent status or their residence. Furthermore, the senate had a voice in matters affecting any of the Vestals' social status and public appearances that had a political character, such as participating in a triumph or the granting of public honours. For example, during the early imperial period it was decided after a *senatus consultum* that imperial women should sit with the Vestals in the theatre and at the games.⁶⁰⁹ In following decades, associating the Vestals and imperial women together continued to be an essential part of imperial propaganda, although it is not clear whether the decision about appearing together in the theatre had to be made separately concerning each individual empress. Presumably, it depended on the emperors' relationships with the senate if its approval was sought to legitimize the action.

⁶⁰⁶ Although female citizens were forbidden to enter the senate house, Vestal candidates – who were young children at that point – were allowed; apparently they drew lots in the senate in the presence of their fathers. However, segregation occurred by the candidate's social status: equestrians were allowed to enter, but freedmen had to stay out. For the selection process of a Vestal, see Tac. *Ann.* 2.86; Cass. Dio 55.22.5. For a discussion of the practice of selecting a new priestess during senate meetings, see Talbert 1984, 156–157. The sources do not directly state that freedmen were left out the senate's house; it is only inferred since there were no candidates of freedmen status at this particular occasion.

⁶⁰⁷ This new custom was already a common procedure during the mid-second century, Aulus Gellius discusses. Gell *NA* 1.12.10-12. *Sed ea sortitio ex lege Papia non necessaria nunc videri solet. Nam si quis honesto loco natus adeat pontificem maximum atque offerat ad sacerdotium filiam suam, cuius dumtaxat salvis religionum observationibus ratio haberi possit, gratia Papiae legis per senatum fit.*

⁶⁰⁸ On the Senate granting an exemption from Papian law, see Gell. *NA* 1.12.12.

⁶⁰⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 4.16. The granting of *lictors* to the Vestals also required the *senatus consultum*; for this see Cass. Dio 47.19.4.

The senate was in a key position to authorize events that had a political agenda. For example, processions saluting the emperor or triumphant victor were recommended and approved by the senate. The Vestals attended these major events, along with other priests and the senators themselves together with their wives and children who gathered to salute the triumphant general or emperor.⁶¹⁰ The senate could also oppose suggestions for these processions. In 193, as he was about to fail in his attempt to battle Septimius Severus, the emperor Didius Julianus proposed that the senate, the Vestal virgins, and other priests meet Severus's troops to negotiate peace. With his colleagues, the senator Plautius Quintilius prevented this delegation as the senate's support for Julianus disappeared.⁶¹¹ Regarding practical matters, the Vestals were unable to leave the city given their daily duties in the temple of Vesta or to participate in processions outside Rome. Although the sources are vague about the exact course of events, it seems that in the case mentioned above, Didius Julianus was about to send the Vestals somewhere outside Rome where Severus's troops were located (or as they were approaching the city). Perhaps the Vestal delegation included a few members of the order while the rest of the priestesses stayed in the city.⁶¹² In any event, the priestesses, other priests and the senatorial families appeared together as a unanimous group of high-ranking Romans supporting the emperor. Through this public event, the senate strengthened its importance and authority by means of the character of each participant: the Vestals, the other priests, and the senators' own wives and children. In this instance, the senate used the Vestals' sacral character and their symbolic value for its own political aims.

The senate was also an important institution regarding individual priestesses. In some epigraphical texts, there is a formulation that the senate approved individual chief Vestals for the good administration of their office. Three priestesses, Flavia Mamilia, Campia Severina and Coelia Claudiana, received such approval (*comprobo*) — with eternal praise — for their professional abilities by the senate, or at the least their office holding was accepted by the senate's opinion or vote (*senatus*

⁶¹⁰ When the emperor Augustus returned to Italy after Actium, most of the senate hurried to Brundisium to meet him. The welcoming party was so large that there was no room for possible rebellions; on this, see Cass. Dio 51.4.4. Publicly celebrating a triumph was an excellent opportunity to strengthen one's political position. In this way, the senators could strengthen the position of men with whom they were pleased.

⁶¹¹ *SHA Did. Iul.* 6.5-6; *Haec cum Iulianus videret, senatum rogavit ut virgines Vestales et ceteri sacerdotes cum senatu obviam exercitui Severi prodirent et praetentis infulis rogarent.* On the senate's delegation, see Talbert 1984, 408, 410. About the earlier case of the Vestals' delegation, see Tac. *Hist.* 3.81.8.

⁶¹² In Roman tradition and cultural memory, such as in the story of the Sabine women or of Veturia (Coriolanus's mother), women or their delegations were represented as negotiators and mediators. For women's role as mediators during critical times, see Mustakallio K., 2011, 41-56. The Vestals' role can be reflected against this background springing from cultural memory.

sententia).⁶¹³ Clearly only some of the priestesses were objects of the senate's attention, and not all Vestals systematically. The first two mentioned priestesses ruled at the turn of the 240s, when the political situation was in turmoil, the emperor's power was challenged, and the senate's authority was opposed by the military. The equestrian emperor Maximinus Thrax (235-238) was particularly loathed by the senate, but supported by the military. He was the first to be called a soldier emperor, and never visited Rome during his period in office. On the other hand, his short-lived successors Gordian I and II in 238 – and later Pupienus and Balbinus in the same year – were supported and selected by the senate. The emperor Gordian III (238-244), who was also a senate favourite, succeeded in holding his office longer than a few months and – in a way – restored the senate's position after Maximinus Thrax. I suggest therefore that perhaps the senate was mentioned in the Vestals' monuments to boost its social prominence at a time when its influence was being challenged. Concerning the relationships between Maximinus Thrax and the cult of Vesta, it is notable that his portrait was not installed in the *Atrium Vestae*, unlike his predecessors from the Antonine and Severan dynasties and the emperor Gordian III. Perhaps the emperors' membership in the *senatores*, or the fact that the senate traditionally selected them, affected their religious politics in a way that favoured the traditional Roman cults, such as Vesta.

Concerning the motives to include the senate in the inscription texts, it has been suggested that this perhaps commemorated the senate's role in the Vestal selection process. However, it is difficult to estimate whether the monuments were set up immediately after a priestess was taken into the cult, or after she was promoted to the office of *virgo Vestalis maxima*. In other words, if immediate events were a motive for setting up the monuments, this is referred to only very rarely in the texts.⁶¹⁴ All in all, formulations about the senate's approval come close to references to the goddess Vesta celebrating and approving the priestesses' office holding. I propose, then, that mentioning the senate was a commemorative action celebrating the senate's part in the Vestals' selection process, and was done to emphasize the senate's authoritative role in the priestess's office holding. The senators approved the office holding and authorized the priestesses to act on behalf of the Roman public. At

⁶¹³ *CIL* VI 2133; 2132; 2138.

⁶¹⁴ For assessments of the occasions on which inscriptions were set up, see Mekacher 2006, 125. See also Frei-Stolba 1998, 243. Mekacher emphasizes that her interpretation is merely a possibility, since the inscriptions cannot be connected to the particular year of the Vestals' inauguration. The inscription (*CIL* VI 32420) for Coelia Claudiana, dedicated by her client and *candidatus* Aurelius Fructosus, celebrates her twentieth anniversary as a *virgo Vestalis maxima*. This type of formulation, which gives a specific reason for the monument, was articulated only rarely.

the same time, the senate's prominence in the inscriptions also reflects the contemporary political situation, wherein the equestrian emperor Maximinus Thrax challenged the senate's authority.

Although it was not a common convention to refer to the senate in the Vestals' honorary monuments, the practice nevertheless requires more discussion. This recognition was reserved for inscriptions dedicated to three chief Vestals (Flavia Mamilia, Campia Severina and Coelia Claudiana), and was not applied to all priestesses uniformly. Although Flavia Publicia, the *virgo Vestalis maxima* who succeeded Flavia Mamilia, received seven inscriptions – a large number compared to the other chief Vestals – there are no references to the senate in her laudatory texts. Instead, the goddess Vesta appears in her inscriptions and the deity's approval is declared.⁶¹⁵ Despite the fact that the formulations about the senate's and the goddess's approval were used in the same context (in an honorary monument), it can be plausibly suggested that they invoked entirely different associations. The goddess Vesta or *numen Vestae* — i.e., her divine will — referred to celestial powers, while the senate was associated with earthly administration. Thus, the Vestals' public image was moulded in the laudatory texts that connected the priestesses to the divine or to earthly powers, or to both as was the case with some chief Vestals.⁶¹⁶

In addition to direct references, the *senatores* are present in the Vestals' monuments in other ways. Most of the Vestals' inscriptions bear consular dating that mention the consuls of the year. Consular dating was, of course, a common habit and convention to formulate dating of the monuments. However, as a recent study of E. Dench shows, consular dating was a sign of authenticity, authority and had a large impact on the citizens of the provinces.⁶¹⁷ Why this manner of dating was chosen for the Vestals' monuments is worth of considering, especially since it reflected political, cultural, regional, or religious identities.⁶¹⁸ Even though the *senatores* do not appear in the Vestals' monuments as such, except as relatives who belonged to this class, consular dating associates the monument to the 'senatorial' sphere of life.⁶¹⁹ Appearing in these texts gave an individual senator social prominence and his consular year was memorialized on a monument situated in one of the

⁶¹⁵ *CIL* VI 2134; 32414.

⁶¹⁶ The chief Vestal Coelia Claudiana received laudatory inscriptions praising her approval by both Vesta and the Senate; *CIL* VI 2138.

⁶¹⁷ For significations of consular dating, see Dench 2018, 144-45.

⁶¹⁸ For conventions of consular dating and the idea that the manner of dating inscriptions reflected political and cultural identities, see Cooley 2012, 405, 407.

⁶¹⁹ For senators appearing in the inscriptions in various ways, see Bruun 2015, 206-207.

city's most important locations. Consular dating on the Vestals' monuments highlighted their formal and public character and convinced the audience of their value. In the end, a chief Vestal and consul were two socially distinguished persons in Roman society, and perhaps one's prominence bolstered the other's standing.

The third century senate was challenged by military emperors whose administration the senate held in contempt and who were unfamiliar with senatorial culture. As a consequence, these emperors perhaps did not favour traditional cults and those that were usually in the hands of the senatorial families. Whether the formulations in the Vestals' monuments reflected the need to appeal to the senate when their authority was disputed certainly comes to mind. However, it is difficult to determine this for certainty on the bases of this rather small amount of evidence (*CIL* VI 2134, 2138, 32414). For an individual Vestal, the senate was an authoritative institution, one that probably shared the same cultural background and that authorized her office holding. If the three Vestals (Flavia Mamilia, Campia Severina and Coelia Claudiana) had especially close connections to the senate, remains speculative although one can suppose that there were differences of treatment and appreciation between the different chief Vestals and the senate. Ultimately, the senate took care of profane affairs, whereas the Vestals communicated with the sacral world. Therefore, the priestesses had authority of their own that the senate could not dispute. The inscriptions communicated this overlapping cultural background and promoted both the senate's religious and political role and the priestesses' successful office holding (that the senate approved).

The Equestrian Order – Supporters of the Severans

The dedicators whose inscriptions are found in the House of Vestals varied in their social status. The equestrian rank appears especially prominent in the early-third-century inscriptions.⁶²⁰ Unlike the *senatores*, the equestrians were active dedicators, and their activities were not connected to the priestesses. The extent to which the equestrian dedicators appearing in the *Atrium* can be connected to the social developments of the Severan era is another gap in the scholarship that demands further study.

⁶²⁰ The monuments donated to the Vestals are discussed in the previous chapters.

One special group of officials appearing in the *Atrium Vestae* is the *vigiles*, Rome's fire and police brigade. Although the *vigiles* were unarmed and were not soldiers by profession, they played an important role in maintaining law and order and occasionally were involved in attempted coup d'états and civil wars.⁶²¹ In 211, the *tribunus cohortium vigilum* and *tribunus cohortium urbanarum* (the tribune of the urban *vigiles* and tribune of the police force) dedicated a large honorary monument to the emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla.⁶²² Although the dedicators presumably wanted their monument in a place in which their public prominence would be guaranteed, it is possible that they wished specifically to connect themselves with the goddess Vesta and her tamed fire.⁶²³

The *vigiles* and the police force presumably participated in the civil war in 193 by supporting Severus's attempt to gain the throne by helping him to suppress opposition in the city area. After ascending the throne, Severus increased the number of *vigiles*.⁶²⁴ The emperor also paid attention to the *vigiles*' barracks by reconstructing old ones and building a new one, which can be seen today in Trastevere.⁶²⁵ The honorary monument was likely their reaction to the emperor's recognition. The words *auctis beneficiis* in the last line of the text refers to the relationship between the patron, i.e. the emperor, and his clients, the *tribunus cohortium vigilum*. The office of tribune of the fire brigade and police force was a step in the equestrian *cursus*, leading a capable man to next take the office of *tribunus cohortium urbanarum* and then that of a praetorian cohort. Promoting men of equestrian rank was part of Severan politics, through which the emperor rewarded the equestrians in order to

⁶²¹ The *vigiles* were a paramilitary group of men, being slaves in the early empire who were organized by the emperor Augustus so that fire hazards would be efficiently dealt with. Only the pretorian guards could carry arms inside the *pomerium* i.e. inside the city walls, which was a sacral area. This being the case, the importance of the non-military groups, such as the *vigiles* who were trained to secure law and order, increased and in cases of civil war or political unrest gaining their support was significant.

⁶²² The monument was found in the *Atrium Vestae* in four large pieces. The dating is the middle of the text and refers to the year 211 when Terentius Gentianus and Pomponius Bassus were consuls. *CIL* VI 31321=36898. On Severus increasing the number of *vigiles*, see Birley *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 1999, 103.

⁶²³ Vulcanus was the god of destructive fire, while Vesta was associated with tamed and beneficial fire. There was some interesting linkage between these two deities; for example, the second century triple dedications to Mars, Vulcanus and Vesta have been found in the ancient Agedincum in central Gaul (the area of the modern-day city of Sens). Apparently the deities formed a tutelary triad in the city. For the dedications, see *CIL* XIII 1676; 2940. For discussion about this finding, see Debatty B., 2006, 159-180.

⁶²⁴ The office of *tribunus cohortium vigilum* was one significant step in equestrian career development. From 193 to 196-97, a certain G. Fulvius Plautianus, the emperor's keen supporter and kinsman, took the office of prefect of the *vigiles*. For the career of Plautianus, see Birley 2002, 121, 221; Southern 2001, 39-40. Eventually, his position in the court grew too powerful and he was ordered to be executed on the grounds of treachery in 204. Severus increased the number of *vigiles*, Birley 2002, 103.

⁶²⁵ On the building activities and the new barracks in Trastevere, see Lusnia 2014, 185-186.

make them favourable towards his rule. By creating a career path for the equestrians, he also ensured that these men would not challenge his position because they would stay busy in their own offices.⁶²⁶

The equestrians continued to appear in the House of Vestals during the late Severan period. At this point, their activities in the *Atrium* could be associated with the changing security system within the city of Rome. During the administration of Alexander Severus (222-235), a certain *speculator legionis* named Titus Flavius Domitianus donated a monument to honor the emperor, his mother Julia Mamaea, and his grandmother Julia Maesa.⁶²⁷ As often occurred in the inscriptions in the House of Vestals, the dedicators' office and military division were declared in detail. Titus Flavius Domitianus is addressed as the *speculator legionis*, which refers to a specialized military official.⁶²⁸ Along with the *pro salute* formulation, he venerated the *genius sanctus* of the *castra peregrina*, the military camp located in Caelian hill that accommodated soldiers from the provincial armies. Although the inscription lacks exact dating, Titus Flavius Domitianus likely made the dedication between Alexander's seizure of power in 222 and 226, when Julia Maesa died and was deified. According to recent research of C. Ricci, Domitianus's monument demonstrates that there possibly was a *statio peregrina* in the *Atrium Vesta* at that time. The purpose of this *statio* was to secure the imperial palace; it also functioned as a place where the *speculatores* operated.⁶²⁹ Thus, the *Atrium Vestae* was an important place to secure the imperial palace and its access. The inscription of this Domitianus declared his responsibilities, which he executed from the Vestals' residential area.

Regarding the cases of the *tribunus cohortium vigilum et urbanarum* and the *speculator legionis* T. Flavius Domitianus, both dedicators seem to have risen socially and specialized in the military, and their advancement indicates how the equestrians and the Severan emperors had almost a symbiotic relationship. This was put on display in the Vestals' residence. Flavius Domitianus had provincial

⁶²⁶ For the equestrian *cursus* and Severan politics towards this rank, see Southern 2001, 256; Mennen 2011, 228, 243.

⁶²⁷ The marble base was found in the southern wing of the *Atrium Vestae* in 1882. *CIL* VI 36775. Alexander Severus ascended the throne at the age of fourteen, following his cousin, the emperor Elagabalus (218-222). Arranging for her second grandson to seize power, Julia Maesa, Augusta, *avia Augusti*, an influential grandmother, is assumed to have been behind many of the political decisions and actions of the Severan house. Evidence of her powerful position in the court can be seen by the fact that her name is mentioned in this inscription before her daughter's (the emperor's mother Julia Mamaea, *Augusta*).

⁶²⁸ *RE* II (1929, Halbband 6), 1585, s.v. *speculatores*. The *speculatores* acted in different positions. They were literally the watchmen spying on the public, and under the command of the praetorian guard they acted as the emperor's bodyguards. In the first century CE, their task was described as bodyguards; see Tac. *Hist.* 33.1. In the case of the third century Titus Flavius Domitianus, his duty was perhaps to secure the imperial residence.

⁶²⁹ Ricci suggests that this inscription demonstrates changes in the urban security system. Ricci 2018, 152.

origins and his activities can be interpreted as a signal of the growing importance of the periphery at the expense of the center and Rome. Originally from Nicomedia, Bithynia (modern-day Turkey), and serving as a foreigner in the *castra peregrina*, he represented the provinces and the periphery in the capital. In the House of Vestals, at the hearth of Rome, his provincial identity and relevance to the imperial family was manifested publicly, which reflects particularly well the developments and attitudes of that time. Thus, different individuals who aspired to have their share of social prominence used the *Atrium Vestae* and its splendor. The activities of this *speculator* also indicate the development of new imperial palace security measures during the late Severan era: the *Atrium* had become a *statio* for the equestrian officials whose duty it was to protect the imperial palace and the emperor's personal safety.

Worshipping the Emperor in the *Atrium Vestae*

A public monument manifested the achievements of an honored person, but it also celebrated the devotees' own contribution and social prominence. Next, I examine through the early-third-century cases intentions behind the setting up of monuments for the members of the imperial house. Was there a link between the Vestals (and the *Atrium Vestae*) and the identity or purposes of these dedicators? E.A. Mayer has already noted that these monuments mediated both the idea of the emperor, and how his subjects and officials saw him. As a consequence, an emperor participated as an object of admiration in the process of dedicating the inscription. This was also part of his self-presentation. During the Severan dynasty, however, the emperors began to distance themselves from their citizens, focusing more on establishing good relationships with the army.⁶³⁰ An emperor was seen to be above all the citizens, and during the third century he was more and more often called an emperor who was above all the preceding emperors (*super omnes retro principes*). In this context, why did his officials set up monuments to him when the object of their honor was merely a distant figure?

First, we have the officials called *mancipes viarum* and the *iunctores iumentarii* who donated the inscriptions to the honor of the emperor Caracalla in the summer of 214. The first-mentioned group refers to the contractors who took care of the road network, while the second were the suppliers of

⁶³⁰ For this idea see Mayer Elizabeth A. 'Epigraphy and Communication' in Peachin M. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*. Oxford University Press 2011, 191-226.

the beasts of burden (mules). After celebrating the emperor, whom they praised as the most vigorous and blessed of all other emperors (*super omnes principes fortissimo felicissimoque*), the dedicators own position is explained through reference to their subordination to the three *praefectus vehiculorum* Claudius Severianus, Mamilius Superstitis and Modius Terventinius.⁶³¹ Each of these three *praefecti* administrated or were responsible for the three roads mentioned in the inscription (*Via Appia, Via Traiana, Via Annia*).⁶³² These officials and professionals were necessary for Caracalla's military success. Thus, the donators and their identity were well suited to his public image. As to why they chose the cultic center of Vesta to display their monument, perhaps it was because of its immediate proximity to the imperial palace.

This inscription clarifies how the dedication initiatives proceeded in the *Atrium Vestae*. The third group of men mentioned in the text included two senators in the capacity of the *curator operum publicorum* and the *curator aedium sacrarum*. As we have seen, the *senatores* were a prominent group in the *Atrium* and their relationships with the Vestals unfolded in multiple ways. In addition to sharing the same social rank as the priestesses and authorizing their consecration and office holding, the *senatores* also administered the public and sacred locations and gave permission to build monuments. As such, public monuments set up in the *Atrium* had to follow the state officials' regulations. Recent studies of Z. Várhelyi had demonstrated that the *senatores* achieved prominence through these administrative offices, as their names were displayed on the religious monuments. The *aedes sacrae* included religious buildings that had a public character and that were associated with the state instead of specific families. The *curator aedium sacrarum* seems to have supervised the property of the religious buildings, at least according to first-century evidence.⁶³³ Finally, the phrase *locus adsignatus* catches our attention, leading us to understand that the two *senatores* assigned or bestowed the place for the inscription monument that probably contained a complimentary work of art, for example a statue or a portrait of the emperor. Regarding the consular dating, the inscription was set up in 214 when the emperor might have stayed in the capital for a short period before going to the East. The priestesses apparently had little to say when it came to granting permission to set up

⁶³¹ Excavated in 1884, this marble base was found walled up in the colonnade of the *Atrium*. *CIL* VI 31338a.

⁶³² For an explanation of the inscription *CIL* VI 31338a and the officials' position, see Eck 1979, 100.

⁶³³ On the significance of the senators' administrative offices and curatorial jobs, see Várhelyi 2010, 99-100.

an inscription. Although it was their residence, it was the senatorial official who was responsible for these matters.⁶³⁴

The activities of the same group of professionals, the *mancipes viarum* and the *iunctores iumentarii*, continued in the late Severan period, when they dedicated an inscription monument to the emperor Severus Alexander (222-235). This time, one supervisor is mentioned, a certain Ulpus Celerianus, *praefectus vehiculorum*, and again there are three roads mentioned: *Via Histria*, *Via Venetia* and *Via Transpadania* which had been probably recently repaired.⁶³⁵ Since the *mancipes viarum* and the *iunctores iumentarii* returned to the *Atrium Vestae*, I suggest that it was due to the suitability and practicality of the place. It was situated practically in the backyard of the imperial palace! The dedicators could not get any closer to the emperor.

The early-third-century *mancipes viarum* and *iunctores iumentarii* utilized the *Atrium Vestae* to make an impression on the emperor and to manifest their own professionalism and importance. In addition to the two above-noted monuments, a third one was excavated from the area between the *Atrium Vestae* and the arch of Titus. Again the dedicators were *mancipes et iunctores iumentarii viarum* but the date cannot be asserted due to the fragmented state of the marble tables.⁶³⁶ The gap in the honoring practices of the *mancipes viarum* and the *iunctores iumentarii* is challenging to explain, although it is possible that if they also honored the emperor Elagabalus, the monument was destroyed due to the *damnatio memoriae* that was carried out after his assassination in 222. Elagabalus had carried out many religious reforms, including moving the sacral objects away from the temple of Vesta. Cult life was in disarray during his era, and possibly the donators were unable to dedicate the monuments to

⁶³⁴ The Vestals' own authority regarding the setting up of monuments comes to mind. From late-fourth-century sources we learn that it was not considered suitable for the priestesses as a group to take the initiative in dedicating monuments. Considering their independence and social influence, it seems peculiar that they were prevented from acting in this manner. However, there is an honorary monument from Octavia Honorata, *virgo Vestalis*, for her chief Vestal Coelia Claudiana (see *CIL* VI 2138). Thus, one individual Vestal from the late third century was able to carry out such a project. Perhaps there were political reasons why their activities were looked down upon in the fourth century, when the keen conservative Q. Aurelius Symmachus opposed their actions. For this case, see Symm. *Ep.* 2.36.

⁶³⁵ Two tablets of marble constituted this monument found in the *Atrium*. *CIL* VI, 31369. The fragmented state of the inscription does not allow us to postulate whether there was more than one supervisor for the *mancipes et iunctores iumentarii*.

⁶³⁶ The third inscription dedicated by the same group of officials was found so near the *Atrium* that it is probable that it was originally situated there or that it constituted a series of donations with *CIL* VI 31338a and 31369. The *mancipes et iunctores iumentarii viarum* do not appear in any other inscriptions found in the city of Rome. Their actions as the dedicators concentrated on the area of *Atrium Vestae*. *CIL* VI 31370. The dedicators are *mancipes et iunctores iumentarii viarum Appiae, Anniae Traianae (?) Aureliae Novae* and there are traces of the cognomen *Iuniani*.

the emperor because the function of the House of Vestals was different during his short but eventful regime. The rule of Alexander Severus restored the priestesses' sacral functions and the tradition continued.

During Severus Alexander's reign, there seems also to have been some other activity around the *Atrium Vestae* related to the area's restoration. In 223, the *vicomagistri* restored an *aedicula*, a small altar of region XIII at *vicus Vestae*. It has been estimated that this altar, as well as the numerous other similar altars around the city area, was dedicated to the *laribus Augustis et genio* (for the household spirits of the emperor and his *genius*). If the theory about the purpose of this kind of altars is true, and it was set up to honor the imperial household spirits and emperor's *genius*, its location near the hearth of eternal fire is significant.⁶³⁷ Regarding religious sentiments and politics in general, Alexander Severus cancelled Elagabalus's religious reforms and drastic inventions; the activities of the *vicomagistri* can be seen as related to this process. The hearth of Vesta was also a state hearth, and this ensured the close connection between the cult and the imperial household, both physically and metaphorically.

In this section, I analysed how the imperial house and the dedicators utilized the *Atrium Vestae* to propagate their position or to gain public prestige. When compared to other imperial houses, the members of the Severan house are numerous represented in the monuments found in the *area Vestae*.⁶³⁸ The dedicators presented an ideal emperor in their honorary inscriptions and – at the same time – declared their own usefulness to the imperial administration. By choosing the *Atrium Vestae* as a place to install the monuments, they wished to get as close as possible to the imperial family. As the third century progressed, the emperor began to become a more and more distant figure to the citizens. Until the era of the emperor Diocletian (284-305), the number of statue bases honouring the emperor declined, reflecting a gap between emperor and dedicators.⁶³⁹ In this situation, the dedicators sought to achieve social prominence and a posthumous reputation for themselves. This was best achieved by approaching the emperor with an honorary monument. The distinguished status of the

⁶³⁷ *CIL* VI 30960. Theories suggested by Lanciani and Coarelli are discussed by Bakker 1994. He compares the Ostian *compita* to those found in Rome (Bakker 1994, 125). Flower disputed the earlier theories, because the closed character of the shrine indicates uses different than those of a compital shrine. See Flower 2017, 133-135.

⁶³⁸ This may be due to the fire disaster in 191, which destroyed the monuments of earlier emperors. However, when we consider the time after the Severans, the lack of dynastic continuity perhaps had an effect on the habit of dedicating monuments to emperors.

⁶³⁹ On the decreasing number of inscriptions, see Mayer 2011, 216.

Atrium Vestae and its priestesses persuaded the dedicators to choose the place. The Vestals represented the state hearth and as such, they were the representatives of the imperial house, or at the very least they could be associated with it. Thus, the *Atrium* and the priestesses were mediators between the emperor and the citizens. For the Severans, the cult of Vesta continued at the core of their politics and religious propaganda throughout the dynasty. By exercising authority over the priestesses, their public propaganda was created and used to achieve political aims of different kinds.

4.2. Persecuted Vestals and Imperial Control

As the previous chapters have noted, Vestals were obliged to keep their oath of chastity and the *pontifex maximus* publicly controlled their moral behavior. However, the moral atmosphere varied, depending on the emperor, as did the politics concerning the Vestals and their chastity. In this section, my aim is to examine the politics of the emperor Caracalla, who executed four priestesses in 212/213 CE. Under what circumstances did this happen, and what motives – political or religious – did the emperor have as he carried out this grave action? The Vestals were both subjects of the emperor's control and the objects of his actions; at the same time, though, they might have been able to influence their treatment in imperial politics. Their identities, i.e., family background, and their political and religious actions perhaps played a role and need to be considered further.

The Context for Caracalla's Politics towards the Vestals

The Vestals were particularly well-represented in the religious propaganda of Severus and Julia Domna. As the visual evidence shows, contemporaries described the relationship between the imperial couple and the priestesses as ideal and peaceful. The empress was closely associated with the cult, and the Vestals participated in *ludi saeculares*.⁶⁴⁰ The actions of their son, emperor Caracalla, towards the Vestals stand in stark contrast. In 212/213, the emperor charged four Vestals for breaking their vows of chastity, convicted them, and sentenced them to death. Caracalla has a very sinister posthumous reputation, but contemporaries also saw him as a cruel tyrant.⁶⁴¹ His alleged cruel

⁶⁴⁰ The priestesses and the empress are closely connected in numismatic evidence, see Rowan 2011, 254-256. The Vestals participated in *ludi saeculares* see *CIL* VI 32328-29.

⁶⁴¹ Caracalla's rule and character are discussed by contemporary historians Cassius Dio and Herodian. Cassius Dio, in his role as senator, was perhaps better situated to analyze Caracalla's politics than Herodian, who apparently was an equestrian or freedman. J. M. Madsen has recently discussed how Cassius Dio blamed Septimius Severus and his soft nature for his son's sinister character. Cassius Dio also seems to have had high hopes for the Severan rulers but was

character and bloodthirsty politics are certainly not adequate reasons or motives to explain his actions towards the Vestals.⁶⁴² Earlier studies have described the chain of events that led to the deaths of the four members of the Vestal *ordo*. Even the authenticity of the events has been questioned, though, and the third-century *incestum* trial has been seen as a replication of the Emperor Domitian's actions (he was also considered to be a tyrant and executed Vestals).⁶⁴³ I will begin by analyzing the context in which the Vestals' executions took place and by considering which interpretations are the most probable for explaining the third-century *incestum*. This analysis, in turn, will reveal more aspects of the *pontifex maximus*'s sacral character and his disciplinary role over the priestesses.

It has been suggested that the Vestals' *incestum* trials reflect an especially strong reaction to the contemporary social and political crisis. Convicting an unchaste (*incesta*) Vestal was perhaps meant to purify society and the altar of Vesta simultaneously.⁶⁴⁴ By having a scapegoat, society was able to ritually drive away evil spirits or powers that endangered the wellbeing of people and society alike. The manner of execution used against the Vestals was very ancient: according to tradition, it had been initiated by King Numa, the legendary second king of Rome who succeeded Romulus. It is likely that unchaste action tarnished the sacral character of the Vestals and demanded the use of such traditional punishment.⁶⁴⁵ In the Late Republic, though, Romans had begun to adopt other means of coping with the period of crisis and misfortunes. The Vestals could be suspected, but they were not condemned.

disappointed with their dynastic politics and with Caracalla (and Elagabalus) in particular. Madsen 2016, 156-158. On Caracalla's posthumous reputation, see also Manders 2012, 226-227. Using numismatics as primary evidence, Manders studies how the emperor himself perhaps wanted to be perceived publicly.

⁶⁴² People of different social classes judged Caracalla's character differently. To the *senatores*, he was a cruel tyrant, but the soldiers appreciated Caracalla and said that he was one of them. For the relationships between the emperor and the army, see Cass. Dio 78.3.2. On Caracalla's character, his popularity or disfavor among the citizens, and his reputation, see analysis of Simelon, 2010, 806-10.

⁶⁴³ In C.R. Whittaker's *Herodian* (Loeb Classical Library 1969) 405-6, note 7. Whittaker suggests that Cassius Dio deliberately cast the emperor Caracalla as a second Domitian. In the revised volume of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, there is a notion that the *incestum* trial during the reign of Emperor Domitian was the last time that the Vestals had been executed in the traditional manner (being buried alive). See Gordon, s.v. Vesta, Vestals, 1591. In Hornblower S. – Spawforth A. (ed.), *OCD*³, Oxford 2003. This is misleading when considering contemporary sources (Cassius Dio and Herodian), which speak about Vestals' live burial.

⁶⁴⁴ For this issue, see Bauman 1996, 74 and Takács 2005, 89. Bauman discusses the imperial times and the incident during the emperor Domitian, while Takács analyses the republican Vestals and charges against them.

⁶⁴⁵ The public execution ceremony of the ex-priestess was actually disguised as public funeral celebrations. Furthermore, the elaborate and festive ceremony included the idea that the gods were present and that the actions were meant to appease them. Despite these elements, the death of the Vestals imitated the death sentence for Roman women. They suffered their punishment quietly and away from the public eye, and the bloodless manner of their execution was connected to their death sentences. For the manner of execution, see Cantarella 1991, 139-140. Those who had committed severe crimes were put to death in a special and traditional manner: they were thrown down from the Tarpeian rock. This punishment was still in use at the beginning of the imperial era, as Tacitus records. The Gemonian stairs were an alternative place where the execution could be carried out. See Tac. *Ann.* 6.19; 6.25. The manner of death was unique, although it was known in mythology. Other people condemned for betrayals, such as adultery, were executed in a different manner.

Above all, their crimes were to be addressed in the secular court instead of judged by the sacral law and court.⁶⁴⁶ In imperial times, there were two reported *incestum* trials; the first took place during Emperor Domitian's reign, and second in Caracalla's reign. Both resulted in the priestesses being executed.⁶⁴⁷ On these occasions, tradition was taken very seriously and the *pontifex maximus*, along with the pontifical college, exercised disciplinary obligations to their severest extent. Considering the principate and later imperial period as a whole, such trials occurred quite rarely. But when they did occur, they raised debate and criticism among contemporaries.

Regarding the *pontifex maximus*'s moral supervision over the priestesses, it seems to have varied from strict control to more liberal laxity. Changing attitudes are evident in the first-century sources in particular. Suetonius leads us to understand that Domitian acted differently with the Vestals than his predecessors, and that his father Vespasian and his brother Titus had neglected their discipline. For his part, Pliny the Younger seems to reflect general opinion by disapproving of the Emperor Domitian's actions.⁶⁴⁸ The Vestal trials orchestrated by Domitian and Caracalla share similar features, and so it is useful to compare them. First, I discuss the context of the third-century trial and then discuss in detail the testimonies of contemporary historians.

Fratricide provides a background for the Vestals' executions. In December 212, Caracalla had his brother and co-emperor murdered; thereafter he began his sole rule. Later he explained that he had only protected himself, for Geta (his brother) had tried to take his life. The emperor also ordered that

⁶⁴⁶ Cancik-Lindemaier 1996, 145. Condemning a Vestal was a way to appease the gods. Before a Vestal was suspected, there were often ominous and sinister signs, such as a catastrophe, or severe crisis, such as famine. For this idea and discussion, see Mustakallio 1992, 57-59. The prosecution process that resulted in the execution of a priestess seems to have been a mechanism that was used to "balance" the situation. For more on the history of incestuous Vestals, see Bauman 1992, 23-24, and development during the imperial era, see Bauman 1996, 71-72

⁶⁴⁷ It is possible that a third *incestum* case occurred during the emperor Trajan's reign. In the *fasti Ostienses* (Kc Ka 3-6) from 115 CE, there is a disputable passage that possibly refers to the execution of a Vestal in the early Antonine period. Alternatively, it could be reporting the natural death of a Vestal. If this was an *incestum* case, it could have been connected to the transfer of power and the conflicts that were taking place between the imperial family and the family of the executed priestess, whose identity is also disputable. This period had been regarded in the scholarship as a peaceful time for the Vestals, who enjoyed harmonic relations with the emperor and the senate. However, if the *fasti* does actually report an *incestum* case, the Antonine period has to be examined anew. For the idea that the Vestals lived in harmony with the emperor and the senate in the Antonine period, see Lindner 2015, 37-38. The outcome of the late-fourth century *incestum* charge (before 382 CE) is not reported by the sources. For this case, see Symm. *Ep.* 9.147-148.

⁶⁴⁸ Suet. *Dom.* 8.3; *incesta Vestalium virginum, a patre quoque suo et fratre neglecta, varie ac severe coeruit, priora capitali supplicio, posteriora more veteri.* See also Plin. *Ep.* 4.1. Pliny was a contemporary of the emperor Trajan. At that point, it was important to demonstrate how cruel his predecessors, and especially the notorious Domitian, had been. Therefore, Pliny's attitudes reflect this situation. On changes in attitudes and control, see Mustakallio 2007, 193; Bauman 1996, 95, 144.

his brother's memory be stricken from the official records; the *damnatio memoriae* was carried through. After Caracalla gained the throne for himself, he started to ruthlessly persecute and slaughter his political opponents, who in most cases had been Geta's friends and supporters. According to Cassius Dio, more than 20,000 people were the victims of this purge and several individuals had their fortunes confiscated.⁶⁴⁹ Other events and developments following Caracalla's seizure of power are also relatively well recorded. During the year 212, there were many kinds of public spectacles in which the emperor rode in a carriage and hunted wild animals. The people, however, were not convinced by their performing emperor and the senate also disapproved. The emperor left Rome at the end of the year or early in 213 to carry out a military campaign in Germania.⁶⁵⁰ Caracalla also enacted a new law that extended citizen rights: the so-called *Constitutio Antoniniana* gave the status of citizen to all freeborn people throughout the empire.⁶⁵¹ Scholars have argued that the public moral and atmosphere changed and become more rigorous during the Severan dynasty. Cassius Dio also discussed the strict attitude of both Septimius Severus and Caracalla towards adulterers, as well as revisions made concerning marriage laws and criminal legislation.⁶⁵²

The tragic fratricide, the seizure of power, purges among the nobility, the tightening of morals in general, public entertainments and new legislation provide the background for the execution of the

⁶⁴⁹ Septimius Severus had left the empire to both of his sons, but soon their relations became more and more strained. During a fight, Caracalla murdered his brother. On Geta's murder, see Cass Dio 78.2.1-5; 78.4.1; Herod. 4.4.2.-5. On Caracalla explaining his actions to the soldiers and the senate, see Cass. Dio 78.2.1-3; Herod. 4.5.1-7. Among his murdered opponents was Pompeianus, the son of the empress Lucilla *Augusta*, who had a right to the imperial throne because of his direct descent from the emperor Marcus Aurelius.

⁶⁵⁰ Potter 2004, 140-141. Potter describes how the emperor had to draw peoples' attention away from the fratricide by giving them bread and circus games. This, however, did not lead to the hoped for result.

⁶⁵¹ Cass. Dio 78.9.4. Cassius Dio presumed that the main motive was to collect funds for the state by taxing an increasing number of citizens. It has been suggested that the emperor could have collected money more efficiently in other ways. By this reform, Caracalla likely also wanted to present himself as a rewarding father figure, much like a *patronus* to his subjects. It has been supposed that the new reform was rather meaningless in terms of citizens' status. It was more important for a Roman citizen to know whether he/she was part of the upper class, *honestiores*, or whether they belonged to the lower class *humiliores*. The latter received very different and even severe treatment in courts compared to the nobility. Campbell 2001, 17-18; Bauman 1996, 133. All in all, it is problematic to explain the reasons behind the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. Although religious motives are certainly possible, it is challenging to point out the primary reasons for the reform. Then again, there are no obstacles to interpreting the reform as a promotion campaign of the Roman state religion. For religious reasons behind the *Constitutio Anotoniniana* see Beard, North & Price 1999, 241.

⁶⁵² On Septimius Severus and Caracalla being strict with adulterers, see Cass. Dio 77.16.4; 78.16.4. There are frequent references to Septimius Severus in the codex of Roman laws, especially given that the practices were rewritten during his reign. The emperor's personal interest in marriage laws could have driven energetic law reforms, as Brian Campbell argues (Campbell 2001, 12). Adultery or the accusation of adultery touched the imperial house when the empress Julia Domna was accused by Plautianus, the emperor's closest counselor. Probably she was a victim of the scheming court. On adultery accusations against the empress and the law against adultery, see Cass. Dio 76.15. Birley 1999, 168; Gilmore-Williams 1902, 268.

four Vestals in late 212 or early 213 AD.⁶⁵³ From these immediate circumstances, the last two mentioned developments probably do not have a connection to the Vestals' case. Three Vestal virgins – Aurelia Severa, Clodia Laeta and Pomponia Rufina – were executed in the traditional manner, by being buried alive in an underground cell. The fourth Vestal, Cannutia Crescentia committed suicide before she was taken to the place of execution.⁶⁵⁴ The emperor was drawn into the case personally when Clodia Laeta claimed that it was the emperor himself who had sexually assaulted her. Cassius Dio narrated this incident but refrained from saying whether the Vestals had broken their vow of chastity. He mentioned the four Vestals and their fates in the same context as he listed Caracalla's other cruel actions. This has raised a question about Cassius Dio's truth-value and whether he deliberately described the emperor as a cruel tyrant.⁶⁵⁵ In a subsequent chapter, Cassius Dio mentioned the emperor's severe attitudes towards adultery and seemed to connect this to the case of the Vestals. Herodian also related briefly the death sentences of the Vestals, including them among Caracalla's victims. Unlike Cassius Dio, however, Herodian referred directly to the Vestals' impure sexual behaviour.⁶⁵⁶ Although these historians held different views about whether the Vestals had committed the *incestum*, they agreed that the priestesses were victims of the emperor's persecution. They both narrated the priestesses' deaths in connection to the murders committed among the nobility and as the result of the emperor's cruel character.

A critical analysis of Cassius Dio and Herodian's narratives renders it plausible that their way of describing the Vestals' cases was a part of a larger topos. Emperors with bad posthumous reputations were often represented as being so generally cruel that they even violated the Vestals.⁶⁵⁷ Finding the truth behind the texts, however, is impossible without other evidence.⁶⁵⁸ When an emperor was

⁶⁵³ The exact date is problematic. The executions are dated at the end of the year 212 or to the first month of 213. Mekacher 2006, 36; Raepsaet-Charlies 1984, 260-267 (*passim*); Parker 2004, 594.

⁶⁵⁴ *PIR*² A 1667 Aurelia Severa; *PIR*² C 400 Cannutia Crescentia; *PIR*² C 1194 Clodia Laeta; *PIR*² P Pomponia Rufina. At that point, the senior Vestal virgin was Terentia Flavola; see Raepsaet Charlier 1984, 264.

⁶⁵⁵ See Cass Dio 78.16.1-3 Herod.4.6.4. In Loeb Classical Library translated by C. Whittaker (1969) suggested that Cassius Dio deliberately made Caracalla the "second Domitian;" see especially note 7, p. 405-406. This kind of statement is troublesome when there is a distinctive difference in the manner of executing the priestesses. Thus, the emperors' characters are presented differently when the sources are examined more closely. The terminology used by both Cassius Dio and Herodian referred to the traditional manner of execution (buried alive): Cass Dio 78.16.1-3; Herod.4.6.4. However, Domitian let the priestesses choose the manner of their execution, and by this action he was said to have manifested his *clementia*. It was only Cornelia who was executed by live burial and this created opposition.

⁶⁵⁶ Cass. Dio 78.16.1-3; Herod. 4.6.4. In addition to the death of the Vestals, Cassius Dio recorded the death of Cornificia, the respected lady and daughter of Marcus Aurelius. She was forced to perform suicide in 212. Her fate is narrated in the same context as the Vestals. Cass Dio 78.16.6a.

⁶⁵⁷ In addition to Domitian and Caracalla, the emperor Nero had allegedly violated a Vestal virgin named Rubria. For this case, see, Suet. *Ner.* 28.1. It also seems that republican rhetoric referred to the Vestals as victims, and how they were threatened by violent and wicked men. For this, see the examples from Cicero; Cic. *In Catil.* 4.12.6; *de Dom.* 144.10.

⁶⁵⁸ Mekacher 2006, 37.

connected to disciplinary actions, his character and ability to show *clementia* was evaluated by contemporary and later historians and biographers.⁶⁵⁹ In these cases as well, language and vocabulary are coloured with formulations of so-called tyranny topics. Clearly, the emperors classified as tyrants were unable to show *clementia* as well as other imperial virtues.

Of the two writers, Cassius Dio was more sceptical of the emperor's actions. He seemed to have thought that the emperor used the supposed immorality of the priestesses as an excuse to execute them. In general, Cassius Dio was very hostile towards Caracalla and this is characteristic of his work. He wrote his history probably after Caracalla's own death, and consequently he might have exaggerated. It is possible, however, that he wrote without fear of punishment or trouble in publishing Caracalla's misdeeds.⁶⁶⁰ Either way, Cassius Dio did not offer a motive to explain why the executions took place. Herodian by contrast did not judge the emperor's character, but simply made his remarks about the Vestals' executions in the same context as the other murders and persecutions that followed Geta's murder.

When it comes to the suggestion that contemporary evidence was only an exaggeration or gossip, and that Cassius Dio deliberately made Caracalla resemble the first-century tyrant Domitian, we need to consider his motives as a historian. For example, if Cassius Dio was only telling fiction, it is difficult to understand why he should have bothered to mention the full names of the Vestals. It is plausible to presume that he would have been later prosecuted for falsity and staining the names of the Vestals, if he had fabricated the event.⁶⁶¹ Besides being accurate with the names, he also gave particular details that support the unique nature of the events. The suicide of the Vestal Cannuntia Crescentia is one such detail that gives a certain characteristic nature to the case. Therefore, I believe that the executions took place, and that they were connected to the political purge carried out after the assassination of the emperor's brother. What was the emperor's motive for killing the Vestals?

⁶⁵⁹ Van Haepelen 2002, 104-105, discusses the Vestals' case during the reign of Emperor Domitian.

⁶⁶⁰ For an analysis of Cassius Dio, see Millar 1964, 150-151; Madsen 2016, 158.

⁶⁶¹ On Cassius Dio's truthfulness, see Bauman 1996, 188, n. 4.

Sweeping away the Opposition – The Vestal Purge

Although each *incestum* case had its own historical context, there are some similarities between the third-century Vestals' trial and that of the first century. A brief comparison is thus useful. First, both emperors were faced with an unbalanced political situation in which they had to legitimize their position. The public trial and execution of the Vestals offered a convenient way to shift public attention from the struggling imperial house to the public figures of the Vestals.⁶⁶² Considering the family background and origins of the four Vestals accused and condemned by Domitian, it is possible that this was a case of being caught in the middle of power struggles. Similar issues perhaps also concerned earlier republican Vestals who were caught in the middle of political power struggles between families, but now the conflict was between leading families and the emperor himself. The Vestal Cornelia, in particular, was a member of a distinguished and old family whose members had enjoyed success from the Julio-Claudian era.⁶⁶³ Contemporaries generally disapproved of Cornelia's execution, and it seems to have been shocked members of the nobility.⁶⁶⁴ When the emperor attacked one of the most venerated priestesses and one of the distinguished and ancient families of cult life, the foundations of the rank order were shaken. The fact that the emperor Domitian himself initiated the trial and acted in autocratic way over the senators further troubled his contemporaries.⁶⁶⁵

By eliminating disloyal members from the nobility, by contrast, the emperor strengthened his own power and position, enabling him to build his court anew by appointing individuals from families that supported his rule. In the case of the Vestals, their actual role in the political battle was minor, but the public esteem they enjoyed made them important tools of imperial rule and religious politics. This required that the Vestals be faithful to the emperor, and that they or their family not pose any threat

⁶⁶² This idea is particularly pursued by D'Ambra 1993, 9-10.

⁶⁶³ S. Dixon discusses the possibility that the republican Vestal were caught in the middle of clashes between leading families, and this might have cost their lives. See Dixon 2001, 150. Similar issues seem to have occurred in during Domitian's reign, when he purged the *ordo* of the Vestals Varonilla and the sisters of the *Oculatae* family. After these events resulted in the execution of *virgo Vestalis maxima* Cornelia, *ex familia Cossorum*, it seems that the *gens Licinii* gained influence within the Vestals' *ordo* when Licinia Praetextata advanced as *virgo Vestalis maxima* and later, at the turn of the century, her niece Calpurnia Praetextata became *virgo Vestalis*. Licinia Praetextata Crassi f., see Rüpke 2008, 765, no. 2220, and Calpurnia Praetextata, see Rüpke 2008, 592, no.1046. For Cornelia, see Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 263, no. 14.-15. and also *RE* 1901, 4., halbband 7-8, s.v. *Cornelius* 1598, no. 425. Cornelia's grandfather Cn. Cornelius, *Cossi filius*, Lentulus Gaetulicus lived through the troubled political situation of the Tiberian era; see Tac. *Ann.* 6.30. See also *RE* 1901, 4., halbband 7-8, s.v. *Cornelius* 1384, no. 220, and father of the Vestal Cornelia 1386, no. 222.

⁶⁶⁴ At her execution, Cornelia was said to have bitterly resisted her fate and her alleged partner also pleaded not guilty when flogged in the Forum. For contemporary and later evaluations, see Suet. *Dom.* 8.3-4; Plin. *Ep.* 4.11.6-9. The *pontifex* Helvius Agrippa, horrified by the emperor's cruelty, died from a heart attack (?) during Cornelia's trial; on this, see Cass. Dio 67.3.3.

⁶⁶⁵ On the emperor's autocratic manner in carrying out the trial, see Van Haepere 2002, 104-105.

to the imperial house. The two emperors' attempts to carry out a moral campaign (*correctio morum*) might have also necessitated the actions against the priestesses on the basis of their real or fabricated sexual immorality. Finally, the executions were meant to be deterrents for political opponents. When the people witnessed the *pontifex maximus*' extreme measures, they both feared and respected their emperor.⁶⁶⁶

The extremely strained relationships within the imperial house offer another significant background context. Although Septimius Severus is said to have appealed to his sons to be on good terms, the break in their relationship almost immediately followed their father's death. The nobility and the military were also divided into separate parties, each supporting a different brother and his politics. The younger brother Geta's position seems to have been more powerful or prominent than has been recognized in earlier research, argues F. Kemmers in her article. Thus, he and his party formed a relevant threat to Caracalla. Geta shared the same honorary titles with his brother, including *Augustus* since 209, and this made them equal in status.⁶⁶⁷ The brothers' rivalry also strained their relationship with their mother. Julia Domna made useless efforts to reconcile her sons. The relationships between Julia Domna and Caracalla likely suffered further after Geta's assassination, when Caracalla forbade his mother to mourn her son.⁶⁶⁸ By clearing away his brother and his supporters, Caracalla definitively ended the old rule and began his sole rulership. Critically, though, his actions were also directed against his parents, and particularly his mother, who had long propagated her role as an empress through the cult of Vesta. Thus, the emperor's actions were a rebellion against his parents' religious politics, and in the background of those actions were strained family dynamics. After Geta's death, Caracalla was finally able to act independently and to reinforce his own political agenda. Reorganizing the cult of Vesta was part of this political programme.⁶⁶⁹ From then on, the cult and its members represented families loyal to Caracalla and his sole rule. If the Vestals had committed the

⁶⁶⁶ Pliny the Younger wrote his analysis about Domitian's motives during the emperor Trajan. He states that to make his ruling more memorable, Domitian was keen to show severity as in his role as *pontifex maximus*. Moreover, his cruel nature (*immanitas*) encouraged the emperor to charge Cornelia. See Plin. *Ep.*4.1. Bauman 1996, 94, 96. A certain Antonius Saturninus revolted, and this shook the emperor's position. For more about the Domitian Vestals and the emperor's politics, see Jones 1992, 102; Southern 1997, 110; D'Ambra 1993, 9-10.

⁶⁶⁷ For one of the latest studies on the relationships between Geta and Caracalla, see F. Kemmers, 2011, 270-290. On Geta's position, see Kemmers 2011, 283.

⁶⁶⁸ On Geta not being mourned see Cass. Dio; on relationships between the brothers, see Herod. 4.1-2.

⁶⁶⁹ In terms of the Severans' internal relationships, there evidently were tensions between the brothers, and they could not get along despite their father's deathbed wishes. This conflict resulted in competition between the brothers, and eventually Geta's murder. The empress's public role reflected that of her predecessors, from the empress Livia to Antonine women, whose position in court was prominent and who took their share of imperial power. For the position of Julia Domna and other imperial women and their relationships with their male relatives, see Levick 2007, 59.

crime with which they were charged, the emperor showed his religious leadership – and piety towards the religious rules – by convicting errant priestesses.⁶⁷⁰ Thus, I propose that if this was the case, Caracalla acted as a dutiful *pontifex maximus* whose priority was to maintain good relationships with the gods. Cruel or not, from this viewpoint Caracalla was a religious leader who took tradition and religious rules seriously.

It is clear from the perspective of religious laws and practices that the *pontifex maximus*'s cultic role entitled him to remove priestesses who were incapable of holding their office. It was actually his obligation as a dutiful high priest to maintain good relationships with the gods. Errant Vestals posed a severe risk to the *pax deorum*, which was a key to the Roman state's success. In this particular case, the preceding emperor had selected the executed priestesses for their office, and this played an important role in their ultimate deaths. By changing the entire composition of the *ordo*, an emperor indicated either that he did not approve his predecessors' ability to appropriately select suitable priestesses or that the priestesses themselves had proven to be untrustworthy. Therefore, his duty was to replace them with Vestals whose office holding would not endanger the continuity and prosperity of the state. The prosecution and the Vestals' executions were done publicly, allowing the emperor to manifest his power and capability to act as a *pontifex maximus*. The executions actually suited well other public spectacles that Caracalla organized at the beginning of his sole rule. They marked a new start for the cult of Vesta, and the replacement of key elements of the old rule — his father's, mother's or even the Antonines' — with individuals and practices that he favoured.⁶⁷¹

The identities and family backgrounds of the executed priestesses offer further grounds for explaining the executions and the *pontifex maximus*' motives. Prosopographical studies suggest that Aurelia Severa was the daughter or grandchild of Annia Aurelia Galeria Faustina, herself the daughter of the emperor Marcus Aurelius. In other words, the Vestal was the grandchild or great-grandchild of a previous emperor. After murdering Geta and becoming the sole ruler, Caracalla was obsessed with

⁶⁷⁰ Caracalla was considered as pious and respectful towards the religions. See the study of Oliver 1978, 381–382.

⁶⁷¹ Apparently the executed Vestals had already reached adulthood, and therefore it can be assumed that they had been consecrated as priestesses during the Antonine dynasty. On dating the Vestals' periods in office, see Rüpke 2008.

executing all members of the preceding dynasty in order to protect his own position. Aurelia Severa was clearly a victim of this political struggle.⁶⁷²

Pomponia Rufina presumably belonged to the *gens Pomponii Rufii*, which had produced many consuls during the second century but which became extinct in the 220s. Even so, its members seem to have played an important role in the succession crisis that followed the death of the emperor Commodus (and from which Septimius Severus managed to emerge as the successor).⁶⁷³ Although the *gens Pomponii Rufii* originally supported the Severans, something changed during Caracalla's emperorship and the Vestal representative of this family was charged, convicted, and executed. Another theory suggests that she may have had family ties to the emperor Marcus Aurelius, which also made her a target of the new emperor's suspicions.⁶⁷⁴ The family backgrounds of the two remaining Vestals, Cannutia Crescentina and Clodia Laeta, are attested with less detail, suggesting that their families were politically less important.⁶⁷⁵ Perhaps they were just convenient scapegoats.

There are some final remarks to note about Emperor Caracalla's role as a *pontifex maximus*. During the Vestals' trial, the chief Vestal, Terentia Flavola, remained as the *virgo Vestalis maxima* and enjoyed her honoured position long afterwards. It is thus equally interesting to analyse who stayed intact during this ordeal. During Domitian's reign, it was the chief Vestal whose integrity was questioned; under Caracalla, Terentia Flavola remained above suspicion.⁶⁷⁶ Her family members

⁶⁷² Nina Mekacher discusses the familial backgrounds of the four Vestals. The prosopographical studies of M.-T. Raepsaet-Charlier (1984) also offer us information about their family backgrounds, while Jörg Rüpke's study (2008) presents mini-biographies of the Vestals. Aurelia Severa *CIL* XV 7415. As the inscription indicates, she possibly owned a factory producing lead pipes. If she indeed is the same person mentioned on the pipe, the probability increases that she was an adult during the legal process. Mekacher 2006, 111, n. 952; Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 261. Mekacher refers to the study of F. Chausson 1998, 177-213. See also Mekacher 2006, 37, especially note 253. About the identification of Aurelia Severa, see Rüpke 2008, 555, n. 4.

⁶⁷³ Champlin 1979, 298-299.

⁶⁷⁴ On Pomponia Rufina, see Mekacher 2006, 112, n. 955; Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 267. It has also been suggested that she would have been a relative of her contemporary Vestal, Terentia Flavola, *virgo Vestalis maxima*. To be more precise, she might have been a relative of Terentia Flavola through her brother's wife, Pomponia Paetina. Although the two women share the same name, further identifications are difficult to draw.

⁶⁷⁵ For Cannutia Crescentina, see Mekacher 2006, 111, n. 953; Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 262. She was very probably a relative of Cannutius Modestus, the legion's legate in the 220s. Q. Aiadius Modestus Crescentius, consul in the year 228, was also supposedly her relative. For Clodia Laeta, see Mekacher 2006, 111, n. 954; Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 262. It has been suggested that she possibly was the aunt of Publius Clodius Laetus, who acted as the legion's legate in Lusitania in the 250s. Further identifications are difficult to conclude.

⁶⁷⁶ Terentia Flavola's career was spectacular. She participated in the *ludi saeculares* in 204 and was in contact with the sun priest Iulius Balbillus, who in turn was a representative of the Emesian sun cult, close to the empress Julia Domna. She seems to have created useful contact with the imperial house and apparently exceeded expectations. See the

continued to be esteemed by the imperial house and enjoyed successful political careers.⁶⁷⁷ Although impeccably performing one's official duties was important for a Vestal, her personal loyalty and political alliance with the emperor appears to have been just as crucial. The fact that Terentia Flavola stayed above all charges reinforces my belief that the Vestals' family backgrounds affected how they were treated in imperial politics and religious propaganda. The executed priestesses, and their families in particular, were unable to secure their position because they failed to give sufficient support to the emperor's power. In other words, interaction between the priestesses and the *pontifex maximus* operated at both cultic and political levels. Next, I explore how the ideal *pontifex maximus* carried out his duty as supervisor of the Vestals.

Emperor Controlling the Vestals – Ideal and Practice

The emperor Augustus created the original link between *the pontifex maximus* and the Vestals: his religious propaganda promoted the idea that he was a descendant of this venerable goddess.⁶⁷⁸ Moreover, the *pontifex maximus* was described as a '*sacerdos Vestae*' in the Augustan poetry, namely in Ovid's *Fasti*.⁶⁷⁹ Finally, it is beyond dispute that the Vestals were associate members of the pontifical college and that their co-optation and surveillance was entrusted to the *pontifices*. In this sense, the head of the college, the *pontifex maximus*, formed a special relationship with the Vestals' *ordo*. In contemporary literature, whether histories or biographies, the emperor was judged by his actions in executing that office and in the ways he exercised his authority.

Caracalla's Vestal politics reflect both ideal and strained relationships between the cult and the emperor. After the four Vestals' executions, a new emblem depicting the sacrificial scene in front of the temple of Vesta was issued. These coins can be dated to 214 at the earliest, when the emperor

inscription from the Sun priest Iulius Balbillus *CIL* VI 2130. It has been suggested that Terentia Flavola passed away in the 240s at the latest; see Rüpke 2008, 914, no. 3219; *FOS* no. 411 Terentia Flavola.

⁶⁷⁷ The family's success can be seen for example, in the *cursus honorum* of her father, *PIR*² H 42 Q (Hedius) Rufus Lollianus Gentianus.

⁶⁷⁸ The emperor Augustus as a descendant of Vesta, see Ov. *Fast.* 3.421-8. Also the fact that Augustus created the shrine of Vesta in the Palatine speaks on behalf of associating his house and family to the cult.

⁶⁷⁹ Interpreting Ovid, see Herbert-Brown 1994, 125-126. Since the *pontifex maximus* possessed the fifth place in priestly ranking (after *rex* and the *flamines*) and since the goddess Vesta also held the fifth and final place in public prayers, it has been concluded in the modern research that the high priest was in fact the priest of Vesta, or at least that he had a special relationship with the goddess. However, ancient sources give no indication of such a relationship; instead, there are indications that the *pontifices*, including the *pontifex maximus*, were viewed as priests of all the divinities. This theory of a link between the high priest and the cult of Vesta was originally presented by G. Wissowa. For a discussion and analysis of this theory, see Van Haepen 2002, 91.

seems to have been temporarily visiting the capital before returning to battlefields (see fig. 9).⁶⁸⁰ The coin issues indicate that the cult of Vesta still suited the emperor's religious propaganda, despite the recent *incestum* trials. Caracalla seems to have taken personal control over the cult, appearing himself in the emblems as a sacrificing high priest.⁶⁸¹ By issuing these representations, he created his own model of presenting Vesta and the Vestals publicly; from that point forward, the cult represented his ideas and his preferences. On his mother's coinage, Vesta became one of the most popular goddess during Caracalla's sole rule.⁶⁸² The emperor had now his own religious programme concerning the cult of Vesta, and visually presenting himself as an active member of the cult (seen sacrificing on the emblems, for example) reflected the innovative and new relationship that was being created between the *pontifex maximus* and the cult.

In contrast to the happy and serene scene in front of the temple of Vesta, Caracalla has also been presented as severe and cruel in his role as *pontifex maximus*. The sources highlight his personal actions and their impact on the events that followed. The emperor is the one who brought the charge against these priestesses and he was, according to Dio, allegedly responsible for corrupting one of the accused priestesses. Thus, his personal presence, his alleged physical seizure of a priestess, and his following actions are strongly emphasized as elements of his character.⁶⁸³ In other words, the emperor's role as *pontifex maximus* and his control over the Vestals is clearly a key component of the events. In contrast to their relationship with emperors of good repute, i.e. the emperor Augustus under

⁶⁸⁰ On Caracalla's early coinage, two Vestal virgins appear on the opposite side of the altar, and one has raised her arm to make a sacrifice. Between the two Vestals there is a third figure, a child, who is veiled similarly to the adult Vestals. The *flamen Dialis* stands with the emperor, alongside a third adult male (?) figure. The other child figure is among them. Due to his victorious battle on the frontiers of Germania, Caracalla added the text *Germanicus (Maximus)* to his coinage. The sacrificial scene in front of the temple of Vesta was a familiar emblem already from the times of the Antonine empresses and on earlier coins struck for Julia Domna. However, the *flamen* priest is a new element, as well as the children. The children could very well be connected to new members in the Vestal organisation. On sacrificial scenes in numismatic evidence, see for example *RIC* VI no. 271. Mekacher 2006, 256; Mattingly 1950, 194, 205. Mattingly refers to the ancient or old ritual that is depicted on the coins, but does not define more closely what is going on in front of temple of Vesta. For more on the symbols and figures on the coins struck in 214-215, see Mattingly 1950, 205-207. Judging from his armour, it can be very well supposed that the victorious emperor had come almost straight from his triumph to perform a sacrifice with the Vestals and *flamen* priest. The children are associated with a new beginning and happy future. Or, perhaps the children are the new Vestals, recently inaugurated to their offices. In this sense, the picture narrates the new and reshaped relations between the emperor and the Vestals.

⁶⁸¹ Septimius Severus issued Vestal emblems on his wife's coinage, but he also apparently minted coinage depicting a sacrificial scene in front of the temple of Vesta at which his entire family is gathered together and in which the two Vestals and possibly a *flamen* participate. This *aureus* is an uncertain mint, and an unpublished reverse type. Although this mint resembles Caracalla mint struck in 215, it is plausible to suppose that the Severan mint is genuine. The four year gap between the death of Septimius Severus and the sole rule of Caracalla does not allow the conclusion that the Severan coinage was actually produced by his son in 215.

⁶⁸² On Vesta being popular on the coinage of Julia Domna, see Rowan (2011).

⁶⁸³ Herod. 4.6.4; Cass. Dio. 78.16.1-2.

whose influence the Vestals devotedly performed their sacral duties over the hearth of Vesta, the priestesses suffered at the hands of tyrants like Caracalla who executed his control over the Vestals in an excessive manner. The Augustan Vestals, on the other hand, perform devotedly their sacral duties over the hearth of Vesta with the approval of the *pontifex maximus*, as it can be learnt from the descriptions of Augustan poetry.⁶⁸⁴

Caracalla's actions are seen here against a turbulent political situation when opponents of the emperor were removed. In the post-Severan era, the social and political situation was even more chaotic as power struggles continued to weaken social stability. The mid-third century was a particularly challenging time for Roman society, and the empire nearly collapsed when the provinces separated from Rome's control. This could have been fatal to the Vestals' inviolability. During the earlier republican era, bad luck in warfare or threats to state continuity occasionally produced accusations against the Vestals.⁶⁸⁵ However, there are no indications that there were difficulties in the Vestals' *ordo* in the 240s and 250s, or that the priestesses' chastity was under suspicion. With this comparison between the case of Caracalla and the mid-third century, I want to emphasize that a difficult social situation alone did not automatically result in charging the Vestals. At the same time, peaceful or prosperous times did not guarantee that the Vestals could not be accused of *incestum*. If the fragment of *Fasti Ostienses* does indeed signify that a Vestal (her name is fragmentary, ---ida) was executed, this happened during reign of the emperor Trajan, the *optimus princeps* who ruled in relative peaceful times.⁶⁸⁶

One significant point that has not yet received much attention is the manner by which the Vestals were charged. Whether they were charged by the secular court or by the religious court influenced their fate. In the late republican era, the procedure of charging the priestesses changed such that secular officials took care of the process. They did not have the authority to pass a sentence that would result in execution in the traditional manner (being buried alive). The last case before the emperor

⁶⁸⁴ See, for example, Ov. *Fast.* 6.460.

⁶⁸⁵ Controlling the Vestals was used to restore peace to society, which was in imbalance after an unchaste priestess caused the *ira deorum*. Thus, the priestesses could be used as instruments to return to the status quo although they were, at the same time, the sources of misfortune. On priestesses' crimes occurring moments of crisis or catastrophe, see Cornel 1978, 30-31; Mustakallio 1992, 58-59.

⁶⁸⁶ *F. Ost.* fr. 35. Rüpke considers that *incestum*, resulting in a Vestal's execution, was the most likely reason for mentioning her in the *Fasti Ostienses*. See Rüpke 2008, 495, no. 314. Interpreting *Fasti Ostienses*, see also Frascchetti 2000, 153 and Cèbeillac-Gervasoni M. – Caldelli M. L. – Zevi F. 2010, 213, 216.

Domitian that resulted in this traditional punishment was carried out in 114-113 BCE when the pontiffs condemned the Vestals Marcia, Licinia and Aemilia.⁶⁸⁷ The source describing the mid-third century situation refers to the secular court being in charge of this matter. The biography of the emperor Valerian (253-260), included in the *Historia Augusta*, includes a discussion about the censor's position and his sphere of control. In this much-debated source, dated presumably to the late fourth century, the censor passed judgement on all, except for the senior Vestal virgin (among other important officials) as long as she was unpolluted.⁶⁸⁸ This passage implies, should it be true for the mid-third century world, that the censor could charge the senior Vestal after she was accused and found to be impure. Thus, the religious elements were dispelled from the trial. The fact that the emperor Caracalla (and Domitian before him) carried out the trial himself, in the capacity of *pontifex maximus*, posed a threat to the nobility, i.e., the senators, who saw themselves as the counterforce to the *imperator*. The emperor's prominent exercise of power annoyed the representatives of the secular court, and the image of the autocratic emperor/high priest reflected the sentiments of the nobility.

After the end of the Severan dynasty, imperial power fell into a crisis that immediately affected religious office holding as well. In 238, after the short reign of Maximinus Thrax and the co-rulership of Gordian I and II, the senate elected Pupienus and Balbinus as co-emperors. The two men shared not only the emperorship, but also the office of *pontifex maximus*.⁶⁸⁹ Their time in office was short, and the year 238, later called the Year of Six Emperors, marked the difficult crisis of the third century. The Vestals, and other religious officials, had to deal with the fact that their religious leader might change in a moment, and that numerous rivals claiming the supreme pontificate disputed his power. For example, the emperor Postumus (260-269), the ruler of the so-called Gallic empire, proclaimed the title. On his coinage, the sacrificial scene in front of the temple of Vesta was reproduced after the model created by Caracalla, and the title *pontifex maximus* appeared as part of his nomenclature (see fig. 10).⁶⁹⁰ His case reveals the fact that usurpers saw it necessary to claim the title of high priest, since it was considered to be an important part of imperial power.⁶⁹¹ Furthermore, the reproduction of the sacrificial scene with the Vestal virgins on his coinage implies that the ruler of the Gallic empire

⁶⁸⁷ For this case, see Cass. Dio 26.82. Bauman 1999, 71-72.

⁶⁸⁸ *SHA Val. 6.6. (...)excepto denique praefecto urbis Romae, exceptis consulibus ordinariis et sacrorum rege ac maxima virgine Vestalium (si tamen incorrupta permanebit) de omnibus sententias feres.* For dating *Historia Augusta*, see Cameron 2011 and most recently Savino 2017. When analyzing this source, it comes to mind whether the author describes his contemporary practices or those of the third century.

⁶⁸⁹ For the shared office of *pontifex maximus*, see Van Haepere 2002, 159.

⁶⁹⁰ For the coinage, see Cohen monnaies 236.

⁶⁹¹ Van Haepere 2002, 160.

used the symbolic value of the priestesses to legitimize his own position far away from the capital. Individual emperors may have been challenged, but the prestige and religious authority connected to the office of the *pontifex maximus* was not in crisis. The organization of the pontifices was then changed after the emperor Aurelian created a new ordo for the Sun god in the later third century. After this, the old pontifices were called the *pontifices maiores*; in the first half of the fourth century they became the *pontifices Vestae*, the *pontifices maiores Vestae*, or more rarely the *pontifices Vestae matris*. The fourth-century honorary inscription for an unidentified chief Vestal is an indication of these new relationships that were manifested between the chief Vestal and the pontiffs. The inscription celebrates – differently from the usual laudatory virtues – the Vestal’s *castitas* and *pudicitia*. On this basis, I propose that pontiffs controlled the Vestals’ behaviour and purity at that point, and that it was considered to be an important part of the priestesses’ character.⁶⁹²

4.3. The Priestesses as Instruments of Change and Continuity

After the strict and controlling politics of the emperor Caracalla, the Vestals, and the entire cult life of Rome, experienced a change during the emperorship of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (better known as the emperor Elagabalus (or Heliogabalus)), who reigned 218–222 CE. The cult of the unconquered Sun, *deus Sol Invictus*, was introduced to the Romans and was elevated by the emperor to the top of cult life. His extreme and unpredictable actions were then replaced by the last Severan emperor, Alexander Severus (222-235), whose religious politics were once again based on traditional values. Concerning the cult of Vesta, these two emperors, Elagabalus in particular, invented new ways to use the cult and the priestesses for imperial religious politics. My objective here is to analyse how the rule of the late-Severan emperors marked a transition in the cult’s social development. Were Elagabalus’s cultic changes too much for the distinguished position of the Vestals, and did Severus Alexander’s actions restore the public position and the religious importance of the cult of Vesta?

The posthumous reputations of these two emperors reflect their politics: while Elagabalus is viewed as one of the most unpleasant emperors in Roman history, Alexander Severus enjoys the reputation of a well-educated and good ruler. Although his term in office was relatively short, Elagabalus’s

⁶⁹² *CIL* VI 32422. Although one could presume that *pudicitia* was celebrated often in the inscriptions, it occurs only twice in third-century inscriptions: for Campia Severina in the 240s (*CIL* VI 2132), and for Terentia Rufilla in 299 CE (*CIL* VI 2141). In the late-fourth century the last known chief Vestal Coelia Concordia was also celebrated for her *pudicitia* (*CIL* VI 2145). For this subject see also Mekacher 2006, 123.

religious politics had very long-term effects on Roman religious thinking. Since the cult of Vesta and the priestesses were among those that experienced many changes during his term, the consequences of the Elagabalus' politics deserve further study here. Modern research suggests that some of Elagabalus' alleged actions were pure fiction – the emperor could not really have taken a Vestal virgin as his wife – and it has been asserted that his character was exaggerated by the hostile historians of his successors. These views suggest that there was a certain *topos* used to discuss tyrants, and therefore Elagabalus can be considered to have been the “victim” of this literary style. My aim, then, is to examine how the religious and political actions of this exceptional emperor should be understood, especially in terms of how he used the Vestals as instruments for his political aims.

The Emesian Sun Cult and Vesta Merged

Caracalla's assassination was followed by the short reign of Macrinus, who then was removed from leadership by Elagabalus (218-222), a young member of the Severan dynasty. Thanks to his grandmother, Julia Maesa, sister of Empress Julia Domna, who spread the rumor that her grandchild was the illegitimate son of the deceased Caracalla, Elagabalus was quickly placed on the throne.⁶⁹³ When army began to support Julia Maesa and Elagabalus, their position was secured. At this point, the young emperor had not really revealed his passionate attitude towards the Emesian Sun-cult. His young age – he was hardly fourteen or fifteen – probably facilitated his family members' influence over his rule.⁶⁹⁴ He did not launch his religious program until after 220 CE; it aimed to make connections between the sovereign and the sun-cult more intense than ever before. Elagabalus took the title *sacerdos amplissimus dei invicti Solis Elagabali* to demonstrate the new religious order. Supported by his grandmother and mother, Julia Soaemias Bassiana, he first had used the entirely traditional titles of the Roman emperor before adopting this new title.⁶⁹⁵ As we shall see, in his new religious politics, the cult of Vesta was to receive a position unparalleled to that of the earlier dynasties, including the Severans.

The emperor's character — strange and whimsical, and tyrannical and perverted — was described in the narratives of his contemporaries as well as histories written afterwards. The most referenced

⁶⁹³ Julia Maesa, *FOS* no. 445; Julia Soaemias Bassiana *FOS* no. 460.

⁶⁹⁴ Beard, North & Price 1999, 255-256. An interest in foreign cults and especially in oriental culture seems to have been common among the Severan dynasty. In this sense, Elagabalus was not an exception.

⁶⁹⁵ Icks 2005, 173.

author of the era, the historian Cassius Dio, apparently never met Elagabalus or was not in direct contact with him by correspondence or any other means. The histories of Herodian and the *Historia Augusta* conveyed a colorful and reckless image of the emperor. Particularly his alleged perverted sexual behavior and extravagant religious politics have been dominating features of his reputation. The lack of primary sources, and the *damnatio memoriae* which Elagabalus later suffered, seem to be the main reasons why his image has remained fictitious and biased. Only recently has his short period as Roman emperor been discussed with a new and extensive perspective; there have also been attempts to separate the inventions from the facts and presumed historical reality.⁶⁹⁶ Concerning the cult of Vesta, the consequences of the emperor's religious reforms have seldom being fully analyzed, even though the cult seems to have been an important part of Elagabalus' new reform.

The Sun-cult was not new phenomenon, having already been cultivated by Iulius Balbillus, *sacerdos Solis*, and by the emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla.⁶⁹⁷ The propagation of a particular deity or favoured cult was likewise not a new phenomenon in Roman culture.⁶⁹⁸ However, Elagabalus' Sun deity was noticeably different. Iulius Balbillus acted in Rome as a *sacerdos Solis*: this office was traditionally handed down to members of the Emesian royal house. The Emesian Sun cult, as was the case for many other cults, was bound to some specific place; in this case, to the city of Emesa.⁶⁹⁹ However, Elagabalus changed these circumstances and made the cult more flexible, allowing it be officially brought to Rome. As his contemporaries Cassius Dio and Herodian recorded in their histories, the emperor Elagabalus brought the sacred stone from his hometown to Rome so that the deity could be properly worshipped, and he also built an official temple for the deity.⁷⁰⁰ Similarly with the cult of Vesta, whose sacred fire was bound to a certain place in the city of Rome, the Emesian cult was attached to the whereabouts of its cult object. This similarity might have increased the

⁶⁹⁶ Cassius Dio apparently based his history of Elagabalus on secondhand sources that he learned about during his stay in Asia. Following the emperor's death, he came back to Rome and there wrote down the stories he had heard. Millar 1964, 168-169.

⁶⁹⁷ Iulius Balbillus has been studied in the previous chapter. On Balbillus, see Rowan 2012, 202-203. Halsberghe suggests that Aurelius Iulius Balbillus was a relative and successor of Titus Iulius Aurelius. See Halsberghe 1972, 55.

⁶⁹⁸ For example, the emperor Domitian considered Minerva to be his personal guardian deity and the emperor Commodus was often connected to the cult of Hercules, and even depicted in the same costumes as the deity.

⁶⁹⁹ The most important cult object, a black stone, was located in Emesa.

⁷⁰⁰ Dio 80.11.1; Herodian 5.5.7; 5.6.6-7. By the year 221 CE, the Sun-god gained a temple of its own in Palatine. The other temple was situated in the suburban area, namely in the section of Transtiberim. Among the imperial buildings was the *templum Elagabali et Vestae*, which was built, supposedly, in vicinity of the original temple of Vesta. However, the date of its completion is unknown. On the temple of the sun cult, see Herod. 5.5.8; *SHA Heliogab.* 3.4. Icks 2005, 176; Chausson 1995, 713; Benario 1958, 720.

emperor's growing interest in the cult of Vesta, although there is no evidence to show how he chose the course of his actions, which played out in a very practical manner.

After building the temple for his deity, Elagabal began to transfer other sacred objects to the temple of the Sun. According to Dio and Herodian, the Romans' horror and astonishment was extensive, as among those objects and religious elements was the eternal Vestal fire. The *Historia Augusta* also claimed that the emperor intended to merge Christianity and Judaism under the cult of the Sun god.⁷⁰¹ However, contemporary sources do not mention such project at all. The *Historia Augusta* should be considered as an expression against the monotheism, which was under intense discussion at the point when author wrote his history of Elagabalus. However, even if Elagabalus did not attempt to completely turn Roman religion into a monotheistic cult, he seems to have been expressing very strong views about his Sun-deity's superiority amongst the traditional Roman cults.⁷⁰² By transferring all sacral objects from the temples in Rome to his sun god's temple, Elagabal created a new sanctuary while forcing the traditional ones to give up their cult objects and prestige. This activity certainly changed the topography of the Roman city considering the distinction and "rank order" of the cultic places. Old cult places, such as the *Atrium Vestae*, had a different significance for the emperor, whose aim seems to have been to build a new city as well – or maybe a replica of his hometown.

Other new practices were also introduced concerning the sacral world and the deities. The emperor wanted to combine other cults and deities with his *El-gabal*; for example, he saw it fit to marry the masculine Sun god to the feminine Pallas Athene. As a consequence, the statue of Athene, the *palladium*, was transferred to the imperial palace. Some time later, he decided that the Sun god should marry Urania, the female goddess from North Africa.⁷⁰³ These actions have been interpreted as the whims of a boy emperor, but these connections between feminine and masculine deities can be seen as attempts to create a new divinity that contains complementary aspects and that best serves the needs of worshippers.

⁷⁰¹ It is said that he wished to extinguish the everlasting fire; on this, see *SHA Heliogab.* 6.7.

⁷⁰² On Elagabalus and other cults, see *SHA Heliogab.* 3.4-5. For the views of the *Historia Augusta* and contemporary sources such as Cassius Dio and Herodian, see Icks 2005, 176; Turcan 1996, 180; Chausson 1995, 715. On the emperor not wanting to dedicate himself to other inferior cults, see Potter 2004, 157, n. 157.

⁷⁰³ Cass. Dio 80.12.1; Herod. 5.6.4-5.

Perhaps the marriages between the different deities can be seen as foreshadowing what happened next. After he had already taken the sacral objects and the eternal fire from the temple of Vesta, Elagabal purportedly married a Vestal virgin, a certain young Aquilia Severa, and made her his empress by giving her the title *Augusta*. As expected, the event, which occurred some time in 220-221, outraged the Romans. Cassius Dio records that the emperor dared to explain his actions by stating he wanted to have god-like children with the honored and holy virgin of Vesta. He continued that the worst thing in Romans' opinion was that the emperor aimed to replace the supreme god, Jupiter, with his sun god. According to Herodian, Elagabal also wrote a letter to the senate to explain his actions.⁷⁰⁴ Whether Elagabal fully knew Roman habits and that he would offend the city's citizens, or whether he – as a foreigner – was not familiar with Roman culture, remains debatable.⁷⁰⁵ However, what if marriage between the emperor and a Vestal was a carefully calculated political manoeuvre instead of random mistake? The evidence provided by Herodian, Elagabal's letter to the senate, appears to have been an attempt to please the senate and to act as an ideal emperor. Elagabalus trusted the power of the written word and acted as an ideal ruler who communicates with the senate, instead of engaging in overtly despotic policy.⁷⁰⁶ Furthermore, the emperor presumably had adopted the title *flamen Dialis* at this point, as Cassius Dio's testimony suggests.⁷⁰⁷ He therefore sought a wife who would be suitable for a *conferratio* marriage, the traditional form of marriage for the priestly couple of Jupiter. Aquilia Severa represented the nobility and she allegedly was a descendant of the regal dynasty of Asia Minor.⁷⁰⁸ As the *conferratio* was a form of marriage among the nobility, Aquilia Severa suited well as a wife of an emperor who was himself not only an emperor and religious leader of the state, but a representative of royal house of Emesa. On the basis of this evidence, I suggest that the emperor and his court were not ignorant of Roman habits and culture. Furthermore, his family had already been at the center of imperial administration for more than two decades, and his grandmother Julia Maesa had been part of her sister's, the empress Julia Domna, entourage.⁷⁰⁹ If the idea of selecting a wife for the *conferratio* marriage was correct, taking a Vestal for a wife makes sense. *Confarreatio* was the only form of marriage which required the religious celebrations and rituals. Thus, the *confarreatio* suited well to the religious ideas of the emperor and it was also required form of marriage for the

⁷⁰⁴ Herod. 5.6.2.

⁷⁰⁵ Elagabalus himself seemed to have been convinced of the acceptability of his marriage to the Vestal virgin, and his nearest family members apparently did not warn him against marrying a woman consecrated to Vesta and thus to virginity. It is amazing that the imperial family seemed to have no knowledge or consideration of Roman traditions and customs. For this discussion, see Mekacher 2006, 191–192.

⁷⁰⁶ On Elagabalus and the power of the written word, see Hope 2000, 38.

⁷⁰⁷ Cass Dio 80.11.1. Rüpke concludes that Elagabalus married Aquilia Severa since he was *flamen Dialis*; see Rüpke 2008, 541 no. 695. For Elagabalus' biography and his priestly career, see Rüpke 2008, 556 no. 801.

⁷⁰⁸ On familial background of Aquilia Severa, see Raepsaet-Charlier 1985, 265, no. 20; Mekacher 2006, 112.

⁷⁰⁹ For Julia Maesa and her experience in court, see Herod. 5.8.3.

flamen Dialis – an office which the emperor had achieved at that point. After the marriage, Aquilia Severa was given the family name Julia and the title *Augusta*.⁷¹⁰

The actions of the emperor can be judged by his desire to inseparably unite the Emesian sun cult with the Roman state cult. Rather than suppressing the traditional Roman cults, then, his politics perhaps aimed to elevate or recreate them, even if contemporaries perceived that the opposite was happening.⁷¹¹ The marriage, however, proved to be a severe miscalculation. To calm general opinion, Elagabalus divorced or gave up Aquilia Severa and married a more suitable woman. The next empress was Annia Faustina, a maiden from a noble family and a descendant of the respected emperor Marcus Aurelius. Behind this turn was more likely the imperial family, rather than the emperor himself.⁷¹² This second marriage connected the Severans yet again to the Antonines, who provided Elagabalus with a valuable instrument by which to legitimize his power. Septimius Severus had adopted himself into the Antonine family, while Emperor Caracalla had stood against possible rivals from the former leading dynasty.⁷¹³ Now Elagabalus looked for legitimacy by marrying one of the dynasty's descendants.

It seems that the Vestals, along with astonished citizens, were mere objects of the emperor's actions and did nothing while he realized his religious ideas. However, an anecdote in the *Historia Augusta* narrates that the *virgo Vestalis maxima* prevented the emperor from plundering sacred objects from the temple of Vesta, presumably the secretive *pignora imperii*. Instead, she gave the emperor a replica, and when he found nothing in it, he threw it away.⁷¹⁴ This story suggests that the officials preferred to hold on to their traditions, and that they were fully aware that the emperor used his supreme power inappropriately regarding Roman religious rules or traditions.⁷¹⁵ Thus, the Vestals' professionalism was challenged in the new and unexpected situation, and perhaps their religious duties changed in the face of the new order in cult life.

⁷¹⁰ For her titlature, the coinage of Aquilia Severa is a helpful source, see Rowan 2011, 259-260.

⁷¹¹ Cass. Dio 80.9.3-4; Herod. 5.6.2. For an interpretation of religious reform and the marriage, see Icks 2005, 174-175; Beard, North & Price 1999, 256.

⁷¹² On his marriage to Annia Faustina, see also Icks 2011, 38.

⁷¹³ Caracalla's political thinking and his antipathy towards the members of Antonine dynasty are presented in an earlier chapter.

⁷¹⁴ *SHA Heliogab.* 6.8.

⁷¹⁵ The *virgo Vestalis maxima* is identified as Terentia Flavola, whose term had started in the 210s. For suggestions of the identified Vestals of the early 220s, see annual lists compiled by J. Rüpke. See Rüpke 2008, 352-355. See also Mekacher 2006, 191, especially note 1587.

By his actions and religious program, Elagabalus followed his family traditions; by his devotion to Sun cult, he also tried to achieve dynastic continuity. His adoption of the name of the Sun deity into his sovereign title revealed his profound commitment to the cult.⁷¹⁶ Herodian noted that he was also keen to train his cousin Alexander Severus in the habits of the Sun cult; sharing the priesthood with him was also part of his agenda.⁷¹⁷ This can be interpreted as an attempt to strengthen the cult's position. It also implied that the emperor wanted to follow the tradition of passing the priesthood to male members of his family. However, there is a contradiction between contemporary literary sources and the numismatic evidence. The official coinage of Aquilia Severa shows no traces of the new cult, nor is there any indication of altered politics regarding the Roman state, meaning the conversion of the principate into a new government ruled by a Sun priest.⁷¹⁸ Yet both Cassius Dio and Herodian seem to imply that the emperor's aim was to create a dynasty of rulers with a sacral character. If Elagabalus did seek to have god-like children with Aquilia Severa, one would presume that her coinage would have provided an excellent medium through which to propagate the new politics. Of course, the empress lasted only for a very short period as Elagabalus's consort, which might explain the limited selection of emblems on her coins. It is challenging to estimate why certain emblems were chosen and the more obvious ones were not. Neither the goddess Vesta nor *Sol* appeared on Aquilia Severa's coins.⁷¹⁹ Instead Elagabalus propagated his religion through epigraphical sources: after 220 CE, the title *sacerdos amplissimus dei invicti Solis Elagabali* took precedence over the *pontifex maximus* in his official titulature.⁷²⁰

C. Rowan recently analyzed Elagabalus's marriages and argued that they were linked to the marriages of the god Elagabal.⁷²¹ By this thinking, the motive for the emperor's actions can be traced to his religious thinking and to his ideas of how to increase his political and religious prestige. I would go further by proposing that Elagabalus wished to achieve a new theocracy in which the ruling couple

⁷¹⁶ On Elagabalus's following of family tradition, see Chausson 1995, 711.

⁷¹⁷ For the emperor Elagabalus and Alexander Severus, see Herod. 5.7.4.

⁷¹⁸ The Empress Aquilia Severa's coinage focuses almost entirely on propagating the values symbolized by *Concordia*. For this conclusion, see Rowan 2011, 259-261.

⁷¹⁹ There are examples from earlier dynasties of a similar kind of disconnect between religious politics and visual representation. For example, the emperor Augustus did not focus on Vesta on his coinage at all, although he was associated with the cult through art; the literature also contained many references to his connections with the cult.

⁷²⁰ Icks 2011, 73. (*The Crimes of Elagabalus: The Life and Legacy of Rome's Decadent Boy Emperor*. New York 2011.)

⁷²¹ Rowan 2012, 214-215.

represented the principal deities and were professional priest and priestess.⁷²² Considering the identity of Aquilia Severa as a Vestal virgin, it was very reasonable to marry such a special and religiously professional maiden. From this perspective, Elagabalus's actions and justification, narrated to us by Cassius Dio, seem to make sense. The available traces about Aquilia Severa's family background provide further validation. Her family was presumably from Asia Minor, and had produced consuls since the second century. More importantly, she might have had royal ancestors.⁷²³ This familial background and the fact that she held a Vestal office complemented Elagabalus' own identity as a Sun priest and as an emperor. Perhaps it was this symmetry between his religious thinking and his political objectives that the ruling couple should be as prestigious and noble as possible. After all, the emperor Septimius Severus had also chosen his wife from a family that had royal background. I thus conclude that the Severan dynasty increased its dignity and social importance by marrying women whose identity and social status was high-ranking and more esteemed than its male members.

Damage Control and Restoration – The Cult of Vesta during the Late Severan Era

Army officers murdered Elagabalus and his mother Julia Soaemias Bassiana in 222. Through a previously performed adoption, his cousin Alexander Severus came to the throne. Julia Maesa, Alexander Severus's influential grandmother, and his mother Julia Mamaea arranged the affairs for their underage boy-emperor and both took the title *Augusta*. The character of young Alexander Severus is depicted in an utterly different tone than his older cousin Elagabalus.⁷²⁴ The fate of Aquilia Severa is unknown, but it has been supposed that she was murdered alongside the emperor, who had re-married her after his short union with Annia Faustina. It is reasonable to suppose that the time of

⁷²² Without going into a deeper exploration of Roman bureaucracy and administration, I want to state here that Rome was a kind of theocracy, ruled by a divine emperor, although there was no exactly defined form of government or constitution.

⁷²³ Among Aquilia Severa's earliest ancestors was a certain Gaius Iulius Severus, who reached his position as *consul suffectus* in 138/39, during the emperor Hadrian's reign. He was Galatian in origin and belonged to the governing dynasty of the Ankara area. His wife of royal descent, Claudia Aquilia, was his distant relative. On Gaius Iulius Severus, see *PIR*² I 573. For more about the family background of Aquilia Severa, see Settapani 2000, 454; Mekacher 2006, 112. Alternative interpretations also exist. It has been suggested that one of her ancestors was a consul from the year 155 CE, M. Iulius Aquilius Tertullus. Further, during the third century a certain C. Iulius Aquilius Paternus, a consul in 267 or 269, could have been her relative. Settapani 2000, 454. Raepsaet-Charlier 1984, 265, no. 20. It has also been suggested that Aquilia Severa was somehow related to Septimius Severus. For this theory, see Prado 2010, 63.

⁷²⁴ According to Herodian, Julia Mamaea guided her son away from the influence of Elagabalus and the Sun cult, believing that it included rituals unsuitable for an emperor. She instead put her son in contact with capable teachers and philosophers. He was also praised for ruling without bloodshed and for sparing the lives of some people guilty of serious crimes. In fact, Herodian compares Alexander's rule to that of Marcus Aurelius. On the education of Alexander Severus, see Herod. 5.7.5; 6.1.5. On the image of the emperor Alexander Severus being totally opposite than that of the emperor Elagabalus, see also Campbell 2005, 24.

his fall, she was living in the palace as part of the imperial household.⁷²⁵ Once again the Severan dynasty found itself led by a young emperor and a strong grandmother (Julia Maesa), who apparently struggled to keep her family on the throne.

The withdrawal of Elagabalus's reforms began immediately once Alexander Severus came to the throne. The black stone was taken back to Emesa and the sacral objects removed from Roman temples were returned to their original sites. Elagabalus suffered the *damnatio memoriae*.⁷²⁶ His followers and the members of his immediate circle were persecuted. The traditional religion of Rome regained its support and respect. The emblems of *Iuppiter Ultor* became popular on coins and Juppiter reclaimed its Palatine temple from the Sun god.⁷²⁷ These actions demonstrated a need to erase Elagabalus' memory, and start a new rule. That this memory erasing occurred within the same imperial family seems to have been a serious and unparalleled action. The Severans gave up commemorating one of their own members, but were able to continue their rule. Considering Roman thinking and ideas, the abandonment and destruction of one's memory were probably the worst thing to happen to an individual. In terms of the Vestals, one of their members probably suffered this same fate. Indeed, the Vestals' institution had gone through two major setbacks during the Severan rule. First, Caracalla took the lives of four priestesses, and then Elagabalus almost ruined the cult and its practices by taking one of its priestesses as his wife and stealing the Vestal fire away from the cult center. How did the cult and the Vestals survive? What did the emperor Severus Alexander's restoration signify for the cult?

The impact of Elagabalus's actions reverberated far into later decades. The people demonstrated their reaction by turning to traditional religion and cults as it is suggested in the study of A.D. Nock.

⁷²⁵ On the life of Aquilia Severa, see Rüpke 2008, 541, no. 695. A bronze statue depicting a Severan lady is supposed to represent Aquilia Severa, but this assertion has been disputed. The state of the statue with the mutilated face might refer to the *damnatio memoriae*. The statue was found at Sparta Lakonia, and is at present in the collection of the National museum, Athens. For this statue and its identification, see Riccardi 1998, 259-269. Considering that Elagabalus was only four years in power, the temporal intervals between his marriages can not be long. First wife Cornelia Paula was married to him in 219. Then the emperor took Aquilia Severa as his consort only to divorce her soon and marrying the third, fourth and fifth wife before returning to Aquilia Severa again. For the marriages see Cass. Dio 80.9.1-4. Herodian gives information only about three marriages, namely Cornelia Paula, Aquilia Severa and Annia Faustina, respectively see Herod. 5.6.1-2.

⁷²⁶ The memory of Elagabalus was destroyed: his name and pictures were erased and removed away from public monuments. Erasure of the memory was also applied to his mother the empress Julia Soaemias.

⁷²⁷ For an interpretation of the *Iuppiter Ultor* as a reaction against the emperor Elagabal and his religious reforms, see Rowan 2012, 223 and Chausson 1995, 713.

Feelings about the continuity of Rome and its eternal existence were declared through the text *Roma aeterna* and in the emblems depicting goddess Vesta on the coinage of the empresses Herennia Etruscilla (249-251) and Cornelia Salonina (260-268). A.D. Nock suggested that these manifestations were a consequence and opposing reaction to the radical changes that Elagabalus had directed towards the cult. Decades after his rule, Romans continued to demonstrate against his politics by cherishing the traditional cults, of which Vesta remained one of the most important.⁷²⁸ This theory seems correct, considering the strong reaction to the emperor's reforms: he suffered *damnatio memoriae* which guaranteed that his posthumous reputation was an extremely sinister one and that all his actions were considered as having harmed the Roman state. Thus, it is plausible to conclude that there was a counter-reaction. However, there is rather long time gap between his rule and the re-emergence of the emblems of *Vesta Aeterna/Roma Aeterna*, which suggests that the emblems (and the ideas they represented) were not an immediate reaction against the 'horrors' of Elagabalus' rule. A much closer event, and a happier one, was the *ludi saeculares* of April 248 organized by the emperor Philip the Arab (244-249) that was celebrated by thousands of people in the capital. This celebration also happened to coincide with the one thousandth anniversary of the Roman state, which explains the emblem *Roma Aeterna* not only on the coins of Philip the Arab, but also on those of later emperors. The empresses Herennia Etruscilla and Cornelia Salonina were public figures when the continuity of the state of Rome was endangered, and the goddess Vesta and aspirations of perpetuity can be seen against this background. On this basis, I suggest that rather than remembering the unsuccessful politics of the Elagabalus, the mid-third-century enthusiasm for presenting the cult of Vesta on imperial coinage had its roots in celebrating the City and in expressing a request for its continuity during critical times.⁷²⁹

The actions of the emperor Severus Alexander reflected the need to emphasize restored values, which the next case shows particularly well. The small sanctuary located close to the area of Vesta, *Aedicula Vici Vestae*, was restored in 223 to celebrate the *Lares* of the *Augustus* and the *genius* of the emperor. Apparently, there was a special shrine (*compita*) where the worshippers could pay their respects and

⁷²⁸ Nock 1930, 258 - 259.

⁷²⁹ Furthermore, there was nothing unique in representing the *Roma Aeterna* emblem on imperial coinage. On the coins of the emperor Hadrian, *Roma Aeterna* was apparently connected to the building program. As such, it was not an innovation of the mid-third-century emperors. At the turn of the third century, opponents of Septimius Severus used this representation during the civil war. Septimius Severus and Julia Domna used *Roma Aeterna* on their coins from 193-195 CE onwards. For the use of the *Roma Aeterna* emblem during the early Severans, see Nadolny 2016, 34; Lichtenberger 2011, 308.

this monument was now restored.⁷³⁰ The *compita* along with another (*CIL* VI 30961), was, as far is known, the latest in the city of Rome.⁷³¹ Considering the cult of Vesta, this was a return to the tradition in the area of *Atrium Vestae*. After all, the *lares* protected not only the roads or cross-roads, but also the hearth and home altars. The emperor's nomenclature likewise indicates changed religious politics: the traditional title *pontifex maximus* was listed first, but the notions of the Sun priest's office had been removed. Alexander was Elagabalus' cousin, and one can assume that the priesthood should have been passed on by inheritance to a male family member.⁷³² However, this seems not to have been the case, or least Alexander did not go public with the unfortunate priesthood. Alexander's supreme religious power was acknowledged by the traditional title, *pontifex maximus*.⁷³³

In addition to restoring the buildings attached to the House of Vestals, the habit of dedicating monuments to the priestesses seems to have been well established during the late Severan era. Three sculpted busts and one life size statue can be dated to the late Severan era or even to the post Severan years. Three portraits represent young-looking priestesses wearing the headbands typical of the Vestals. The statue represents a posing figure of a priestess that once had some jewelry around her neck, as markings in the marble indicate. These sculptures are the latest ones found from the area that represent the priestesses in their official dresses as they appeared in the early third century.⁷³⁴ Concerning the inscriptions, there is an unfortunate gap of some thirty years (between the mid-210s and early 240s) when there are no surviving inscriptions dedicated to the priestesses. Terentia Flavola *virgo Vestalis maxima* was honoured in 215 CE and the next inscription can be dated to the year 240 CE.⁷³⁵ It is challenging to estimate what caused the break in the habit of producing dedications, but

⁷³⁰ Benario 1958, 722. *CIL* VI 30960. *Laribus Aug(ustis) et [Genio] / [Im]p(eratoris) Caes(aris) [[M(arci) Aureli] Alexandri P]ii Felic[is] Aug(usti) pont(ificis) max(imi) trib(unicia) pot(estate) II co(n)s(ulis) p(atris) p(atriciae)] / aediculam reg(ionis) VIII vico Vestae v[etustate] conlapsam] / a solo pecunia sua restituer[unt] magistri anni CCXXX 3]nius Pius L(ucius) Calpurnius Felix [3 per] / C(aium) Iulium Paternum praef(ectum) vigil(um) em(inentissimum) [v(irum) 3 L(ucio) Mario Maximo II] / L(ucio) Roscio Ael[iano] co(n)s(ulibus)] / curantibus M(arco) Servilio Crispo et M(arco) Servilio.* See also *CIL* VI 30961.

⁷³¹ The *compita* was built at the crossroads, as the word implies. The household gods and the *genius* of the emperor became part of peoples' daily life when their worship was so prominently present in the streets and roads. During *Compitalia*, household deities were honoured and later the emperor's guardian spirits were also celebrated in this connection, see Bakker 1994.

⁷³² About the family's right to hold the priesthood of the Emesian Sun god, see Herod. 5.3.

⁷³³ In fact, the study of G. Halsberghe suggests that the family of Alexander Severus controlled the priesthood of the deity also after the emperor Elagabalus, and the city of Emesa continued to stand out as a religious centre, see Halsberghe 1972, 106.

⁷³⁴ One of these late-Severan statues seems to have gone through the *damnatio memoriae* or intentional damage. Its eyes have been mutilated, and this has been interpreted as an intentional action. For this idea, see Lindner 2015, 158. However, I suggest that perhaps the eyes were made of some precious stones or jewels, and recycled later.

⁷³⁵ See *CIL* VI 32412; 2131. It is verified from the inscription set up in the sanctuary of the Sun god (*CIL* VI 2130) that Terentia Flavola was still a chief Vestal in 215 CE.

religious changes — and especially the experiment with the Sun cult as a supreme cult — provide some explanation. However, the Vestals received inscription monuments all the way to the end of the century and even beyond, even though the other Sun cult, *Sol Invictus*, was introduced in the 270s. A possibility that monuments in the *Atrium* suffered the *damnatio memoriae* cannot be excluded, and the period after Elagabalus saw the erasure of commemorations.⁷³⁶

For the late Severan emperors, the Vestals were instruments by which the ruler could achieve his political aims. Elagabalus's dramatic religious politics and Alexander Severus's conservative actions establish an interesting contrast for studying the late Severan era and its effects on the cult of Vesta. For Elagabalus, the cult of Vesta seems to have been a very important religious organization, one that was suitable for his own political and religious purposes. When considering the sources that describe his religious activities, other cults do not emerge with such intensity. Perhaps his intention was to rule as divine couple with his *Augusta* and, by marrying the Vestal Aquilia Severa, he succeeded in combining earthly power with celestial power. Therefore, for the emperor Elagabalus, the imperial couple was also a priestly couple with religious professionalism and who ruled together with a divine mandate. And further, if the theory that he married the Vestal in the capacity of the *flamen Dialis* is correct, he needed a wife suitable for such a marriage (*confarreatio*).⁷³⁷

The emperor Alexander Severus, by contrast, sent a clear message of traditionalism to the cultic organizations in Rome as he restored the state religion. The emperor's household deities and his *genius* received attention in the restored *aedicula* at the flank of the *Atrium Vestae*. The imperial dynasties seemed always come to an end in the hands of tyrants (Nero, Domitian, and Commodus), but the last Severan emperor Alexander Severus enjoyed a relatively good posthumous reputation. In spite of his young age, he was considered to be a reasonable and traditional ruler. His good posthumous reputation clearly indicates that contemporary historians and later generations respected him — perhaps this was done in order to dissociate from Elagabalus. His politics and character as *pontifex maximus* was accepted as he propagated traditional values. For the cult of Vesta and for the

⁷³⁶ Although her era as empress was short, one could speculate whether Aquilia Severa received honorary monuments in the *Atrium*. Considering the spectacular public building projects for the Sun deity, I find it very probable that the same splendor and contribution was applied to the publicity of imperial women in the Elagabalian court. After the probable *damnatio memoriae* of Aquilia Severa, these monuments were destroyed. Generally speaking, the practices of honouring the Vestals were perhaps in disorder after Elagabalus's rule. Thus, the cult struggled to return to its earlier practices.

⁷³⁷ See discussion above, page, 216-217.

priestesses, the last Severan emperor provided restoration.⁷³⁸ Even so, his actions to restore the tradition and cult of Vesta were perhaps too weak to repair the damage caused by Elagabalus. After all, religious politics had attacked most severely the cult of Vesta, and contemporary sources convey the citizens' horror at the actions of Elagabalus.⁷³⁹ Thus, the sacrilege caused by him apparently remained in the cultural memory of the élite for a long time. However, alongside the Severan emperors were notably active and prominent empresses and other imperial women. Occasionally their religious and political participation was connected to the cult of Vesta, and their activities brought publicity and respect to the cult. Thus, the Severan women increased the value of the cult and the priestesses. These themes are my next topic.

4.4. The Vestals and the Imperial Women

From the time of the Julio-Claudians, the Vestal priestesses provided a role model for imperial ladies and *matronae* of the upper class.⁷⁴⁰ There presumably were other role models as well, such as the wives of high-ranking priests.⁷⁴¹ Studying the relationships between the Vestals and the imperial women is complicated by scanty evidence that prohibits us from reaching concrete conclusions. By using all available evidence and by making cautious determinations on the basis of circumstantial evidence, I am able to exceed this challenge. Numismatic material is an essential part of my analysis, while literary sources offer contemporary views about the imperial women's public image — although admittedly they occasionally are biased by hostility. This was due to the negative relationships between the Severan emperors, particularly Caracalla and Elagabalus, and the senators.

⁷³⁸ If the prosopographic studies are correct, Terentia Flavola was chief Vestal up to the turn of the 240s. Thus, the cult was in the hands of an experienced and high-ranking priestess.

⁷³⁹ Both of the sources discussing Elagabalus (Cassius Dio and Herodian) represent the viewpoint of élite and inner circle of imperial politics. How the religious politics and changes in religious practices were perceived by the larger public, remains undetermined.

⁷⁴⁰ It has been seldom discussed whether the early empresses adapted their role directly from the Vestals or also from other priestesses. Of course, the social position of contemporary Vestals is relevant. For a discussion of the late-republican and early-imperial Vestals and their social role, see Wildfang 2006. The latest research questions whether the relationships between the Julio-Claudians and the Vestals were as intense as scholars have assumed; for this, see Foubert 2015, 187-204. The relationships between imperial women and the Vestals have been studied from many perspectives. On the Julio-Claudian empresses and the Vestals, see Hemelrijk 2005, 309-317; Foubert 2015, 187-204. On imperial women and their patronage of the cult of Vesta, see Lindner 2015, and also Mekacher 2006. On numismatic evidence, the Severan women and their relationships with the Vestals, see Rowan, 2011, 241-273. The public role of the Severan women on the bases of numismatics and epigraphics is examined in Nadolny 2016. For biographic studies of individual empresses and their relationships with the Vestals, see, for example, Barret 2002; Langford 2013; Levick 2007.

⁷⁴¹ The public role of the consort of the *pontifex maximus* also might have functioned as a model for imperial women, but there is extremely scanty evidence of the wife of the high priest and her public duties. The wife of the *rex*, the *regina sacrorum*, was likewise a relevant model for the empresses' public role. It has also been argued that imperial women identified with the *flaminica Dialis*, the wife of the priest of Jupiter. On this idea proposed by, see Lindner 1996, 150.

As such, the posthumous reputation of the Severans must be taken into consideration when analysing their activities.

N. Kampen has argued that art in the Severan period presented women, both imperial and élite, with a new way to emphasize a complementary relationship between the genders and sliding borders of identity.⁷⁴² Furthermore, the empress Julia Domna had – occasionally at least – a role as co-ruler, who exercised imperial jurisdiction.⁷⁴³ However, this suggests permissive politics that clashes with the severe moral campaign that both Septimius Severus and Caracalla apparently supported. This campaign emphasized the importance of upright moral behaviour and condemned adulterous activity. Even the empress Julia Domna was subjected to suspicion, which tells us much about the vulnerability of her position. However, the case against her was apparently put together by a malevolent opponent, Gaius Fulvius Plautianus. I shall discuss the reactions to this accusation — and how the cult of Vesta was possibly used to help rehabilitate the empress's reputation — shortly.⁷⁴⁴ The point here is that there prevails a dichotomy concerning social attitudes towards women during the Severan rule. Diocletian's reign (284-305) and the early-fourth century have been characterized as the age of morality, when attitudes towards female chastity were particularly strict and governed through legislation.⁷⁴⁵ What, then, was the public image of Severan women, and how were the Vestals used in this project? Honorary inscriptions of the late-third-century Vestals provide us with some information about what the ideal priestess was at that point, and whether the empresses were connected to this ideal. A further question concerns the disputed role of the empress in the restoration of the temple of Vesta. The scholarship assumes that the empress participated actively in the restoration, and numismatic evidence includes numerous emblems showing her as a patroness of the cult. However, there is no direct evidence of Julia Domna being personally in charge of any

⁷⁴² Studying the changing representations of Omphale from the first through third centuries offers an opportunity to detect changes in values and ideas. Representations of this mythological queen of Lydia and mistress of Heracles increased in funerary and honorific monuments during the second and early third centuries. While Heracles received positive interest in the religious politics of Commodus and later Septimius Severus and Caracalla, Omphale ceased to be a warning example of female power and eastern corruption, and her representations were accepted as a 'complex signifier for cultural, political and spiritual ideas', as N. Kampen proposes. See Kampen 1996, 233-246. For further discussion of Severan ideas of gender and their connections with representations of Omphale, see Van Keuren - Gromet, 2009, 187-206.

⁷⁴³ Julia Domna taking care of imperial correspondence see, Cass. Dio 78.18.2-3. For analysing her role in imperial administration, see Tuori 2016, 267.

⁷⁴⁴ On Septimius Severus' views about adulterous persons, see Cass. Dio 77.16.4. On Julia Domna and the case against her, see Cass Dio.76.15; Langford 2013, 108-109. For Caracalla and adultery, see Cass. Dio 78.16.4.

⁷⁴⁵ For the position of women at the turn of the third and fourth centuries, see Harries 2012, 258-259.

restoration work related to the temple and *Atrium Vestae*. What then was manifested by emblems that connected the empress so closely to the cult of Vesta?

Imperial Women, the Vestals and *Amicitia*

M. Lindner has recently argued that in addition to using the Vestals in their religious propaganda, imperial women also acted as *patronae* to the cult and its priestesses.⁷⁴⁶ Mekacher, by contrast, refrains from making any conclusion about the relationships between the Vestals and the *Augustae*, although she acknowledges the link between them. Before accepting or rejecting either viewpoint, it is necessary to closely examine the sources. Tacitus indicates that the Vestals acted occasionally as mediators between the empress and the emperor, as the example of the empress Valeria Messalina reveals. During the conflict caused by her frantic behaviour, the empress asked the chief Vestal Vibidia to speak to the emperor Claudius on her behalf. The incident not only reflects the relationships between the Vestals and the empress but it also tells us about the right of a Vestal to seek an audience with the emperor. Furthermore, imperial women and the Vestals spent time together in the theatres and at the games, since they sat in the same row.⁷⁴⁷ The Vestals' economic privileges were, at least occasionally, also given to imperial women. In the third century, the privilege of being exempted from taxes was bestowed on Julia Domna, although it is not clear whether every empress received this prerogative.⁷⁴⁸ Overall, though, the same socio-economic status was an important element that brought these women closer. Imperial women and the priestesses also acted together in several public festivals and religious celebrations. The cult of deceased members of the imperial family, such as the cult of the deified empress Livia, was entrusted to the Vestals.⁷⁴⁹ The cult centre of Vesta furthermore

⁷⁴⁶ See Lindner M., *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins, Priestesses of Ancient Rome* University of Michigan Press, 2015. Although direct evidence of the relationships between the empresses and the Vestals is lacking, Lindner plausibly argues her hypothesis. Artistic evidence and physiological likenesses in the statues and portraits of imperial women and Vestals also speaks to their relationships. For this idea see Lindner 2015, 122-123.

⁷⁴⁷ For the case of Messalina, see Tac. *Ann.* 11.32-34. On the Vestals and the empresses sharing seats in the theaters, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.16.7.

⁷⁴⁸ Augustus gave the Vestals the same rights as women with three children; Dio 56.10.2. Furthermore, the Vestals' economic privileges were granted to the empresses. In the case of Julia Domna, the exemption was evident, see *tabellae immunitatis* CIL VI 2149: *Iuliae Au/g(ustae) dominae / matri cas(trorum) / it(us) im(m)unis*.

⁷⁴⁹ On the cult of deified Livia being entrusted to the Vestals, see Dio. 60.5.2. After Livia, numerous female members of the imperial house were deified, but we cannot be certain if the Vestals were again those who attended their cult. Deifications of the Julio-Claudian dynasty include (year): Livia (42), Julia Drusilla (wife of Caligula); Poppea Sabina (wife of Nero); Flavian dynasty; Flavia Julia Titi (91); Flavia Domitilla Minor (Domitian reign). Antonine dynasty: Plotina (123); Sabina (137); Faustina I (141); Faustina II 176. Severans: Julia Domna 217; Julia Maesa 224. In addition, the Vestals were possibly linked to the birthdays of the members of the imperial family. During birthday celebrations, a person's guardian spirit, *genius* for men and *iuno* for women, was venerated. The linkage between these guardian spirits and Vesta is understandable, since both occupied the household altar together with the *lares* and *penates*. For the *genius*, *iuno* and the household altar see, for example, DiLuzio 2016, 46-47. The religious festivities of Bona Dea or Vestalia were taken care of by the empress and the Vestals together.

represented the home altar of the imperial house, and the priestesses were thereby in immediate contact with the imperial family. In the case of the early-third-century Vestals, the imperial family's strong link to the Emesian Sun cult came to define the priestesses' religious duties. This is an important contextual element regarding their relationships with the Severans. Finally, the Vestals were needed to settle the estates of deceased emperors, since they kept the emperors' testaments and it was their duty to read it out to the senate.⁷⁵⁰

As numerous sources indicate, the priestesses were present at several different occasions with the imperial family, and the female members of the court were associated with the Vestals through their common social status. However, as Nina Mekacher has rightly noted, we cannot be certain how exactly the Vestals and the imperial women interacted, since there is no direct evidence about the quality of their relationships. Likewise, it is beyond our knowledge whether privileges similar to those enjoyed by the Vestals were granted only to some individual empresses.⁷⁵¹ And lastly, over time the nature of the relationships between the empresses and the Vestals changed. The priestesses were not automatically taken as role models, and emphasis on the cult of Vesta varied during the principate. Despite scanty direct evidence, I consider the evidence to be strong enough to indicate that there existed a linkage and that there was interaction between these women. Therefore I put forward here an idea that the relationships between imperial women and the Vestals were based on *amicitia*, friendship. Their social status was very similar, which made them equals, and *amicitia* was generally based on interaction between equals (although it sometimes included friends of various rankings).⁷⁵² Finally, *amicitia* reinforces my idea that the priestesses were considered to be associate members of the imperial family.

The last major restoration works at the temple and at the *Atrium Vestae* have been interpreted as Julia Domna's independent efforts. Several numismatic examples bearing the emblem of a sacrificial scene in front of the Temple of Vesta seem to support this idea that the House of the Vestals as well as the

⁷⁵⁰ On the Vestals keeping the emperors' documents, see Suet. *Aug.* 101.1; Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.2.; Cass. Dio 56.32.1.

⁷⁵¹ Mekacher 2006, 31; 194.

⁷⁵² As it was in Roman society more generally, age was perhaps an important issue between friends, with older ones being superior to the younger. However, D. Konstan argues that friendship was a relationship between equals, and it did not include aspects of dependency or clientage. See Konstan 1995, 329. (Konstan D. 'Patrons and Friends', *Classical Philology* vol. 90, 1995, 328-342.)

temple were restored under her building patronage.⁷⁵³ Despite this strong connection, however, her direct involvement cannot be attested for certainty since there are only a fragmentary inscriptions found from the area implying her contribution.⁷⁵⁴ In fact, S.S. Lusnia has lately proposed that it was the emperor Septimius Severus, rather than the empress herself, who was responsible for the reconstruction work at the *Atrium Vestae*. This would have allowed him to compare himself to emperors like Augustus, Trajan and Hadrian, who had previously rebuilt and renovated the area.⁷⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the empress was present in the *Atrium* through the *pro salute* inscriptions made by the priestly assistants. Julia Domna is addressed in the dedication of a certain *factor* Eutyches who set up an inscription in the area of *Atrium Vestae*.⁷⁵⁶ This inscription is one of the few preserved texts that mention the empress alone, without her husband or son(s), and that bears a wish for her wellbeing alone. The inscription does not prove that the empress was a patron of the cult, but it creates, in my mind, a linkage or association between the priestesses and the empress, since the Vestals' residence was considered to be suitable site for honouring the empress.⁷⁵⁷ The inscription monuments set up on behalf of the empress in the *Atrium* reinforce her presence there, and connect her and her name to the cult. Thus, it was the empress and her name that occupied the Vestals' residence, and not the emperor.

In addition to epigraphic evidence, numismatic emblems link Julia Domna even more strongly to the cult of Vesta and its priestesses. Even if recent conclusions are correct about her having had a secondary role in the area's restoration work, what was being suggested by the empresses' coinage emblems depicting the Vestal virgins in front of the temple? This suggests that there was a political need to present the Vestals alongside the empress, and the coin's dating is crucial in this light. Apparently the emblem depicting the sacrificial scene in front of the temple dates to 205-207.⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵³ On Domna's building patronage, see Rowan 2011, 251. B. Levick finds it possible that the restoration was undertaken by the empress; see Levick 2007, 63.

⁷⁵⁴ For the two fragmentary inscription suggesting that the Julia Domna restored the *Atrium Vestae*, see *CIL VI 883: Livia [D]rusi filia ux[s]or [Caesaris Augusti 3] / Imp[er]atores C[ae]s[ar]es Severus et Anto[n]inus Aug[ust]i et Geta nobilissimus Caesar / et [Iulia] Aug[ust]ae mater Aug[ust]orum 3 restituerunt* and *CIL VI 997: Iulia Aug[ust]a mater Aug[ust]orum et castrorum / Matronis restituit / Sabina Aug[ust]a / Matronis*. For the idea that the restoration of the building complex was actually the responsibility of an emperor in his capacity as *pontifex maximus*, see Lusnia 2014, 68. The pictorial motifs (jug and knife) also indicate the pontiffs and the *pontifex maximus*; a *patera* is also depicted in the temple's frieze. Thus, the pontiffs supervised the Vestals and their presence was therefore included as a reminder of their power over the priestesses. For an analysis of the frieze, see Lindner 2015, 16.

⁷⁵⁵ Lusnia 2014, 65–66, 68.

⁷⁵⁶ *CIL VI 786: Vestae donum pro salute / Iuliae Aug[ust]ae matris / M[arc]i Antonini Aug[ust]i n[ost]ri p[ont]ificis m[at]ris / Eutyches Factor cum filiis / voto suscepto*. The inscription was found at the Basilica Iulia and it is thought to have been once situated in the *Atrium Vestae*.

⁷⁵⁷ For a discussion of the inscriptions for Julia Domna, see Gilmore Williams 1902, 294-295.

⁷⁵⁸ Before 205-207 CE, there were several pictorial motifs of Vesta on Julia Domna's coinage, but the temple was absent. For dating the temple-scene emblem, see Lusnia 2014, 67; Mekacher 2006, 255-256.

Undoubtedly, the sacrificial scene reflected the completion of the reconstruction work of the temple and *Atrium Vestae* in 201, but there was also another event that explains the appearance of the Vestals. In the Severan court, the cousin of the emperor Gaius Fulvius Plautianus had gained the powerful position of pretorian prefect. According to Cassius Dio, Plautianus “cordially” hated the empress always speaking ill of her in emperor’s company. Apparently by his initiative the empress was accused of adultery, and her friends were violently compelled to testify against her. In the end, the charges were dismissed, but much damage had been done.⁷⁵⁹ As S.S. Lusnia concludes, after this ordeal, the empress’s public reputation needed to be improved and therefore the Vestals were associated closely to her image.⁷⁶⁰ I suggest further that the message of the virtuous empress was directed to Roman nobility in particular. Among the coins with a sacrificial-theme there were silver and bronze medallions that were issued to celebrate specific occasions. These medallions were used as gifts and commemorations, although they also had a monetary value (see fig. 7. and 8.).⁷⁶¹ In this light, I suggest that the “audience” of the medallions was probably members of the nobility. After Plautianus’s attack, the Severans had to ensure the nobility of the legitimacy of their rule and the empress’s capability. Using the Vestals in the process of rehabilitating the empress’s reputation was therefore a political manoeuvre.

Considering empress’s womanhood and prestige, the pictorial motif selected for this commemorative coin issue is remarkable. The goddess Vesta and her priestesses were associated with absolute chastity and virtue. However, the Vestals were also recognizable figures and publicly active. Julia Domna’s imperial role was far from a retreating or modest wife and mother; rather, she and the imperial couple’s sons were present at almost every public act of the imperial house.⁷⁶² The sacrificial-scene in front of the temple connects the empress to the activities of the Vestals, to their dynamic and public position, and to their sacral responsibilities. According to M. Lindner, the Vestal on the right side (from the angle of a viewer) is sprinkling incense, which was done to please the gods.⁷⁶³ Thus, the empress participated through this pictorial motif in worshipping Vesta and in ensuring good relationships with the gods. The *amicitia* of these women served imperial politics well, by reinforcing

⁷⁵⁹ On Plautianus, see Cass. Dio. 76.15.6.

⁷⁶⁰ For the view that her reputation was improved by close associations with the Vestals, see Lusnia 2014, 67-68.

⁷⁶¹ For medallion use in general, see Lindner 2016, 228-229; Grant 1950, 123-124.

⁷⁶² For the development of the empress’s public role, see Langford 2013.

⁷⁶³ For a thorough analysis of the sacrificial scene used on the coinage, see Lindner 2016, 228-232. As Linder rightly observes, the Vestal sprinkling the incense holds a small box, or container, in her left hand from which she had taken the substance. See Fig. 7-8 in Appendix II. This object is also held by the Vestal statues, which depict the so-called Vestal sprinkling the incense. For this statue type, see Lindner 2016 from p. 235 onward. The Vestals’ sacral activities were important to manifest in public art.

the idea that the imperial family had good relationships with the cult of Vesta, and that the *Augusta* was as impeccable in her character as were the Vestals.

The *amicitia* of the imperial women and the Vestals was reinforced also by grand public events. As I shall show next, the *ludi saeculares* in 204 CE provided an arena in which their interaction gained public attention, and that included other elite women. Concerning these celebrations, I discuss in the next section what the priestesses represented in the celebrations, and why their presence was required on the occasion.

Vestals' Supporting and Empowering Role

Already celebrated in the Augustan era, the *ludi Saeculares*, the anniversary of the Roman state, was a massive public occasion presenting imperial ideology and religious politics.⁷⁶⁴ In 204 CE, the celebrations continued for three days and nights, during which the empress and the *matronae* performed rituals for Diana and Juno. Two Vestal virgins also participated in the rituals. Their contributions are mentioned in two inscriptions that were set up as reminders for future generations. The Vestals are said to have been standing by or assisting with (*adstantibus virginibus Vestalibus*) the ritual.⁷⁶⁵

It is worth noting who was entitled to perform the rituals and by whose authority or suitability the gods could be pleased. Cassius Dio, for example, enumerated the primary group of mourners at the funeral of the emperor Pertinax.⁷⁶⁶ During the *ludi Saeculares*, the empress and *matronae* performed

⁷⁶⁴ On the *ludi saeculares*, see Rantala 2017.

⁷⁶⁵ For the Vestals in the inscriptions of *ludi saeculares*, see *CIL* VI 32328; 32329. *Adstantibus virginibus Vestalibus* see *CIL* VI 32329. It seems that their role was not very active, or they that they were letting the empress perform the leading role. Earlier research concluded that their passive role was due to the fact that women's participation in public sacrifices was restricted in any case, so the Vestals part could not be prominent. For this conclusion, see Scheid J., 1992. Without entering deeper into this discussion about women's capability in the sacral field, the Vestal virgins along with other female participants did have several sacral duties that they were capable of and suitable for performing. In fact, some of the rituals and religious obligations were assigned to the females, just as some were exclusively for male priests and male participants. In the Roman world, both women and men were equally needed when the *pax deorum* had to be achieved or maintained. The idea that women were excluded from the sacral field is therefore absurd. For more about the gender-specific aspects of Roman religious life, see, for instance Mustakallio, 2007, 185-203, and Hemelrijk, 2007.

⁷⁶⁶ The emperor, senators and their wives mourned together and participated in the funeral rituals. See Cass Dio 75.4.1-5. This description shows me that the persons present at the occasion formed a community that reinforced its togetherness through rituals and celebrations. At the occasion, the relationships between the emperor and the senators – who are

rituals with the Vestals. This was the same group of female citizens who took care of the celebrations of the Good goddess, *Bona Dea*. These celebrations were held in extreme privacy and male participants were strictly forbidden. During the public rituals of *Vestalia*, again the same participants, the priestesses and married upper-class women, celebrated the main festival of Vesta.⁷⁶⁷ During the *ludi saeculares*, the empress led the prayer for Juno Regina and had the central role, which seems to have been the case also in the celebrations of *Bona Dea*. Judging from these two occasions, which had different natures —one being carried out publicly and the other in the private household — it seems that the roles of the lady of the house/empress and the Vestals had similar characteristics. The empress or a wife of the most distinguished official of the state had the central and active role on both occasions, while the Vestals stood by her and honoured the occasion with their priestly presence.⁷⁶⁸

How can their presence in the *ludi* be justified? Why did the priestess of the goddess Juno Regina not lead the celebrations, rather than the Vestals, the empress and hundred and one *matronae*? In a thorough study of the Severan *ludi*, J. Rantala explains their presence by their involvement with the City itself. After all, the *ludi* were held to honour the City, and its birth and continuity were linked in the celebrations. The Vestals' presence also increased the emperor's credibility and prestige, since he benefitted from being connected to important priestesses.⁷⁶⁹ However, their relevance or purpose went even beyond these motivations. On the basis of the inscription, I suggest that the sacral procedure itself, and protecting the ritual from errors, was their important task. When considering the actions of the Vestals in different cultic celebrations, it seems that the Vestals were required to be present for multiple reasons. On those occasions where they seem to participate without any specific duty, such as in the *ludi*, their presence was required in case something unexpected happened. Such being the case, they stepped in and took care of the situation. What is even more interesting is that

supported by their wives – seem to be ideal and harmonious. Thus, society functions, from the perspective of a senator, as it should.

⁷⁶⁷ For the celebrations of *Bona Dea*, see Mekacher 2006, 66-67. The festivities were held only by female participants, and all men had to leave the house before the Good goddess could be celebrated. In addition to the Vestals, the lady of the house was present to perform the rituals, to be a hostess, and to be responsible for the preparations, which included removing any references to the male sex from the interior and decorating the house with vine leaves. On preparations for the celebrations, see Versnel H. S., 1993; Brouwer H. H. J., 1989. The Vestals were present when the women gathered at the house of the official who had *imperium*, which refers of course to the emperor and the *pontifex maximus* in the imperial era. Thus, during the imperial era, the perpetual *imperium* of the proconsul was in the hands of the emperor. However, the *imperium maius* could be given to other persons, but only exceptionally. Judging from this detail, we can assert that the rituals of the Good goddess were almost without exceptions celebrated in the imperial residence and that it was the empress who acted as hostess. The other women who were present were the *matronae honestissimae*, the married upper-class women.

⁷⁶⁸ For more discussion about the role of the empress in the *ludi Saeculares*, see Rantala 2017.

⁷⁶⁹ For the significance of the Vestals, see Rantala 2017, 68.

the Vestals, together with the pontiffs, decided if a sacrilegious act had occurred.⁷⁷⁰ Therefore, it seems that they held an authoritative role, not merely one as a witness. Furthermore, their religious professionalism and ability to interpret the divine were needed to guarantee the successful sacrifice.⁷⁷¹ Thus, I suggest that one religious function of the Vestals was to be present in case of the unexpected and miraculous events, so that the procedure would not turn the deities against the devotees. The Vestals are seemingly passive in the *ludi saeculares*, but their presence was in fact bound to their religious professionalism.

In Roman religious culture, sacrifices had to be performed impeccably; if a mistake occurred, the entire procedure had to start again from the beginning.⁷⁷² This matter was extremely important, and Romans were familiar with many cases in which priests or priestesses made slips during the sacral procedures. The severest outcome was resignation from the office, compensation for one's damaging actions (*piaculum*), or some other punishment. In the case of the Vestals, the punishment was physical.⁷⁷³ However, during their many years of education, the Vestals received careful instruction about how to fulfil the requirements of their duties, so that the public could have confidence in their abilities. Therefore, I understand the Vestals' role as being not entirely passive, but rather an essential and empowering one since it was their religious professionalism that was needed. Their ability to judge the significance of miracles and to act as religious authorities was considered so important, that it is no wonder that their qualities are repeated so continuously in honorary inscriptions.⁷⁷⁴ Without their presence, the celebrations would not have achieved the deities' approval, and possibly even the *pax deorum* would be endangered if the rituals were not carried out in the correct manner.

⁷⁷⁰ Considering their role in the ritual, I point to the example of the famous Bona Dea scandal in 62 BCE. According to the story, Publius Clodius Pulcher had interfered, dressed as a woman – allegedly his motive was to seduce Caesar's wife Pompeia – and the priestesses had to repeat the rituals. On the Bona Dea scandal, see Cic. *Att.* 1.13.3; Plut. *Vit. Cic.* 27; Cass. Dio 37.45.1-2.

⁷⁷¹ Their character as religious experts is present also in the other case connected to the celebrations of Bona Dea. When the festivities took place in the house of Cicero in 63 BCE, the fire burnt miraculously, startling the participants. The Vestals took charge of the unexpected situation. As a result and due to their judgment, it was decided that the incident was a divine message. As a result of the Vestals' judgment, the master of the house, i.e. Cicero, was entitled to act in the political crisis. See Plut. *Vit. Cic.* 20 Cass. Dio 37.35.3-4.

⁷⁷² Scheid, 2007, 263-271.

⁷⁷³ Val. Max. *Flamen Dialis* had to resign when his headpiece was displaced in the middle of the ceremony. In the mid-fourth century, failure during a sacrificial occasion resulted in the rejection of the entire procedure, see Amm. Marc. 24.6.17

⁷⁷⁴ Religious professionalism is declared in several third-century inscriptions. For more about this subject, see the previous chapter.

The hierarchy of the Vestal *ordo* influenced how the priestesses were divided, working in teams of three, *tres maximae*, or in pairs, as it is shown in *ludi Saeculares* of 204. The chief Vestal of that time, Numisia Maximilla, came from a senatorial family. Her career had started during the reign of emperor Marcus Aurelius. The family background of Terentia Flavola was also distinguished, and she became Numisia Maximilla's successor in 209 at the latest. It is impossible to know for certain if these priestesses were actually the two eldest in the order, or if they were chosen because of their professional experience. However, at this point (204 CE), it seems probable that the average age of the priestesses was higher and that there were no newly recruited members.⁷⁷⁵ We can assume that Numisia Maximilla and Terentia Flavola were the most experienced priestesses and had served the cult for the longest period; therefore, they also had the most prestigious characters and the best expertise required for the celebrations of the secular games. At the same time, in both cases their family background helped them, since the Severans preferred participants who supported their administration. Thus, they were favoured and chosen to appear in the *ludi*.

Compared to the Severan secular games in 204, possibly even bigger and more lavish celebrations took place in 248 CE when Rome celebrated its millennium.⁷⁷⁶ The emperor Philip the Arab (244-249) and the empress Marcia Otacilia Severa probably used the program of the Severan *ludi* as a model for these magnificent millennium rituals and festivities. The *Historia Augusta* offers a detailed description of the exotic animals that were brought to Rome for the celebrations. The senior Vestal virgin of that time was Flavia Publicia, who received numerous honorary inscriptions in the mid-third century.⁷⁷⁷ Apparently her acquaintance with the emperor had begun already in the late summer of 244 when the emperor arrived in Rome (*adventus*) and received the title *Augustus*.⁷⁷⁸ Thus, co-

⁷⁷⁵ We have testimonies from Cassius Dio and Herodian that four Vestal virgins — likely in their late teenage years or early adulthood — were put to death by the emperor Caracalla in approximately 213 CE. It seems impossible that the child Vestals of young age could have been punished for *incestum*; Even if girls of twelve years were considered as adults, they were not treated as such in practice. In my opinion, there exists too narrow a window between 204 and 213 CE if we start from the assumption that these four Vestals, or anyone of them, were taken to the cult later than 204. If this was the case, the four Vestals were simply too young to have been charged with *incestum* in 213. Rüpke estimates that the four Vestals were taken to the cult in mid 190s, while Numisia Maximilla and Terentia Flavola were recruited slightly earlier. For me, this seems reasonable conclusion that allows us to have an idea about the differences in the Vestals' ages.

⁷⁷⁶ At that time, the secular games were also celebrated because of the tenth *saeculum* of Rome.

⁷⁷⁷ For a discussion of the career of Flavia Publicia and her probable participation in the millennium celebrations, see Ruggeri 2015, 180. One short comment about the millennium festivities comes from the historian Eutropius in the 360s; see Eut. 9.3.: ...*His imperantibus millesimus annus Romae urbis ingenti ludorum apparatu spectaculorumque celebratus est*. In *Historia Augusta* there is an apparent lacuna, and the rule of the Philip the Arab is not discussed at all. However, the description of the secular games and the millennium of 248 CE is described during the era of Gordiani; see *SHA Gd.* 33.1-3.

⁷⁷⁸ P. Ruggeri asserts that Flavia Publicia was already the *virgo Vestalis maxima* when Philippus became emperor. The earliest honorary inscription for her is from July 247 CE (*CIL VI 32414*). On the dating of Flavia Publicia's career, see Ruggeri 2015, 179.

operation between the imperial family and the Vestals was likely to continue. Philip the Arab probably gathered the supporters of his administration to celebrate the magnificent public occasion. Loyal and supportive Vestals appearing next to the imperial family were useful symbols for the project of legitimizing the emperorship.

My conclusion is that the Vestals presence at the Severan *ludi saeculares*, as well as in the millennium celebrations of Philip the Arab in 244 CE, was critical for two reasons at least. Their religious expertise was required, and the Vestals' authority to act as interpreters of divine signs entitled them to participate in the festivities. Secondly, Numisia Maximilla and Terentia Flavola – and Flavia Publicia during the millennium celebrations – seem to have belonged to that group of supporters who accepted the rule of the new dynasty. For her part, the empress Julia Domna benefitted from the presence of the Vestals, whose character reinforced her status, and associated her with the one of most venerated cults in Roman religion. The Vestals stood by her, adopting a somewhat secondary role in the performance of rituals. At the same time, their religious professionalism made them indispensable officials in the most important religious event of the early Severan rule.

Continuity of the Vestals' Public Role?

Julia Domna's actions are narrated in the same tone used to remember the empress Livia: a powerful woman who tirelessly helped her husband and son with their administrative duties by giving them advice.⁷⁷⁹ C. Rowan's recent quantitative analysis concludes that during the reign of Septimius Severus and the sole rule of Caracalla, 17% and 18%, respectively, of coinage was struck in the name of the empress. The coins struck in the names of the Severan empresses, Domna and her sister in particular, constitute just under one fifth of the coinage produced. The goddess Vesta and the Vestales were used as emblems, depending on what the empress's public image was meant to emphasize.⁷⁸⁰ Numismatic sources support the idea emerging from the literary material that the public image of Julia Domna and other Severan empresses were important for the male rulers. Following the Severans, however, attitudes as well as practices seem to have changed, and powerful female figures

⁷⁷⁹ For Julia Domna, see Cass. Dio 78.18.2. For Livia, see Cass. Dio 57.12.1-3. Whether Livia was a paragon for the empress is an interesting question, but one that is beyond the scope of this work.

⁷⁸⁰ Rowan 2011, 246-247. On the division of deities represented in her coinage during the sole rule of Caracalla, see Rowan 2011, 255-256.

disappear from the public eye. The Vestals and Vesta also disappear from imperial coinage. Obviously, the third-century crisis severely affected imperial continuity and social stability, but can this explain the disappearance of these powerful women from the public? When considering changes in the public image of imperial women and the Vestals, it is less lucrative to trace reasons for their absence than it is to consider what made the Severan women, while they were in power, so successful in keeping the throne. And further, what happened to the public image of the Vestals after Julia Domna?

M. Lindner argues that imperial discontinuity meant that the Vestals' imperial patrons disappeared, and the golden age of the second and early third century never returned. Thereafter, the dedicators stepped into their place and continued to promote and decorate the *Atrium Vestae*.⁷⁸¹ This suggestion is, however, problematic because it raises the dedicators – the Vestals' clients, family members and others – to the place of patrons of the cult. This seems not to have been the case when considering the cult's financing, which came from public funds and occasionally from the emperors directly.⁷⁸² Imperial patronage and state-provided allowance did not necessarily disappear, although there may have been interruptions during the unstable decades of the mid-third century.⁷⁸³ Furthermore, if we are precise, there already was a breakage in dynastic continuity during the Severans – or at least a threat of such. By this, I refer to the transitory rule of Macrinus (217-218), which was suppressed by swift and efficient intervention of Julia Maesa, the sister of Julia Domna. Thus, the unstable political climate was not necessarily a severe threat to the cult's functioning. In fact, inscription monuments were dedicated to the Vestals more often during the crisis of the mid-third-century than during the Severan dynasty itself.

Julia Domna passed away in 217 CE leaving her sister Julia Maesa as a leader of the family. With her two daughters and young grandsons she proceeded to gain back the throne for the Severans. Her

⁷⁸¹ For the idea of dedicators as continuators of imperial patronage, see Lindner 2015, 74-75.

⁷⁸² Furthermore, in the late fourth century there was some discussion about cancelling Vestal financing by the state. This came as a shock to the supporters of the traditional cults, and they pleaded that the cult and the priestesses had been maintained by the state for ages. Therefore, I conclude that until this point the Vestals, and the cult, enjoyed state-provided economic allowances. For the fourth-century case, see Symm. *Relat.* 3.15 and Ambr. *Ep.* 18.11-12.

⁷⁸³ From late third century, evidence about the contribution of the imperial house is missing. This may be related to changed practices, or the fact that evidence has been destroyed. Moreover, the social situation was troublesome and it was only in 280s that the political *status quo* was reached. Furthermore, production of the statues went through a great change from the early third century onwards. Thus, the culture of producing statues reached its peak in the second century, but during the third century a different culture emerged that represented individuality. This change might have resulted in altered honorary practices in the *Atrium Vestae*. About the changed visual culture, see Trimble 2011, 333-335.

success seems to have been based on her massive wealth. She had the means to gain the army's support, since it favoured those who took care of maintaining the troops. Apparently Julia Maesa believed that she could exploit Caracalla's popularity within the army, and so circulated the story that the young Elagabalus was actually his child. This propaganda was effective and the position of Macrinus weakened further. Although he was able to persuade the senate to declare war against Maesa, the troops turned against him instead and hailed Elagabalus as a new emperor.⁷⁸⁴ As her public position was attacked by Macrinus and by the senate – even the war was declared – her ambitions and actions could have resulted in disaster. Public opposition towards imperial women was not unusual: Julio-Claudian women had already had their share of public smear campaigns – often carried out posthumously. Maesa's wealth was so considerable that she gained a notable position among the social and political élite. She was apparently considered as an active political figure and an important member of the Severans.⁷⁸⁵ Most importantly, it seems that she was able to transfer her political skills and authority to one of her daughters – namely to Julia Mamaea, the mother of Alexander Severus (222-235 CE), the last Severan emperor.⁷⁸⁶ Julia Mamaea is an interesting figure, as it was through her public image that traditional values were restored after the unsuccessful rule of the emperor Elagabalus. In the literature, she was praised for her ability to raise her son to be a good ruler, a man who then became one of the 'good emperors' of the third century.⁷⁸⁷ The goddess Vesta appears on more than one-quarter of the coins struck in her name, either with the Palladium or participating in a sacrificial scene.⁷⁸⁸ The religious politics of Julia Maesa and Julia Mamaea thus emphasized their return to traditional Roman religion. While the emperor Elagabalus had presented

⁷⁸⁴ See Herodian: Julia Maesa at court when Julia Domna was empress 5.3.2-3; narrating that Elagabalus was a son of Caracalla and gaining the support of the army 5.3.9-11; counseling Elagabalus not to make citizens angry with religious reforms 5.5.5; 5.7.1-2; death and deification 6.1.4. On war being declared not only against Elagabalus and his cousin, but against his grandmother and her daughters, see Cass. Dio 79.38.

⁷⁸⁵ Strong but disgraced Julio-Claudian women, for example, Julia the Elder, Livilla or Valeria Messalina, suffered *damnatio memoriae* or at least the very memory of their existence was suppressed after their executions. H.I. Flower concludes that the case of Livilla, for example, reflects her importance at the Julio-Claudian court. She was the wife of Drusus, and the mother of the twins Germanicus Gemellus and Tiberius Gemellus. However, after she died the senate publicly voted that her statues and memory should be damned. See Flower 2006, 175. In the case of Julia Maesa, her political power and leadership in the Severan clan must have been acknowledged by the senate and the emperor Macrinus, who began to restrict her power and advancement – all in vain, though.

⁷⁸⁶ Julia Maesa had two daughters Julia Soaemias and Julia Mamaea, the first mentioned was the mother of Elagabalus. Julia Soaemias is mentioned only a few times by Herodian. See Herod. 5.3.3 for her familial relations; 5.8.8-10 for her death and disgrace. Was she drawn more to religious activities than her son, such that she ignored political realities and administrative obligations? If so, her authority or public image was not perhaps as strong as her mother's or sister's.

⁷⁸⁷ For Julia Mamaea as mother of a young emperor, educating her son, see Herod. 6.1.5; for her faults – her greediness and domineering conduct towards her son, see 6.1.7-10; for her death, 6.9.6-8.

⁷⁸⁸ For the coinage of Julia Mamaea, see Rowan 2011, 268-269. Depicting the *Palladium* might refer to events during the rule of Elagabalus. According to historians, the emperor stole away the sacred *Palladium*, which was kept in the *penus Vestae* and which was only seen by the priestesses. For the *Palladium* see Herod. 5.6.3-4.

the new cult of Vesta in his religious politics, his successors maintained traditional ideals about Vesta, whose sacred fire burned in the temple and whose priestesses stayed in their sacred profession.

It was thanks to their female members that the Severans survived and stayed on the throne for such a considerable period of time. Julia Maesa created the lineage that legitimated the Severans' rule after Macrinus's brief takeover.⁷⁸⁹ Julia Mamaea's public image also shows how the cult of Vesta was useful in the process of restoring political and religious life. Perhaps the example of these Severan women was exploited again in mid-third century by the empress Annia Cupressenia Herennia Etruscilla, commonly known as Herennia Etruscilla.⁷⁹⁰ One particular inscription from Africa Proconsularis evokes interest, since it calls the empress *neptis*, which means 'granddaughter', or 'female descent.'⁷⁹¹ The fragmented state of the inscription prevents us from drawing exact conclusions, but the reference to her family connection and to her being a granddaughter indicates perhaps the aspiration of creating or continuing a distinguished family tree tied to dynastic continuity. After several decades, the sacrificial scene in front of the temple of Vesta appeared again on the empress's coinage.⁷⁹² The cult of Vesta was perceived as something that could help to create a dynasty, and perhaps an emblem used by the earlier imperial houses – both Antonine and Severan – was seen to be useful for achieving these ambitions.

The early Severans' moral campaigns was perhaps used as an example in late-third-century and early-fourth-century Rome. The political climate of this time was reflected both in the public image of the Vestals and in the position of the empresses. In 295, the emperor Diocletian put into force a

⁷⁸⁹ In this context I wish to note that Julia Maesa perhaps followed the politics of Septimius Severus, who created familial relations with the Antonines, by exploiting the example of successful predecessors.

⁷⁹⁰ Known only from the scanty number of mints struck in her name, and from some laudatory inscriptions, Herennia Etruscilla was consort of the emperor Trajanus Decius, who ruled in 249-251. She was bestowed with the title *Augusta* and named as a consort of our emperor (*coniux/uxor Augusti/domini nostri*). Honorary titles invented by the Antonines, such as *mater* of the camps, *mater castrorum*, were used in her honorary inscriptions.

⁷⁹¹ *AE* 1942/43, 55. The empress's name Etruscilla refers to Etruscan origins. However, further family relations remain difficult to settle. The emperor, by contrast, took the name Trajanus immediately after gaining the throne in late 249 CE; he obviously wished to create a positive message by associating himself with the *princeps optimus*, Ulpian Trajanus who had ruled almost 150 years earlier (98-117 CE). Thus, there are signals of dynastic ambitions and the empress was apparently part of this scheme.

⁷⁹² Decius for Herennia Etruscilla, Aes-Medaillon, Cohen monnaies 33. In the emblem, six women, apparently Vestals, are performing a sacrifice while the temple of Vesta is seen in the background; see fig. 11. There has been discussion about the authenticity of this coin. It resembles very much the medallion of Julia Domna, which bears the legend *Vesta mater* whereas only *Vesta* is written on the medallion of Herennia Etruscilla. Either it is a modification of the Severan medallion, or it may be a modern creation. For a discussion of its authenticity, see Mekacher 2006, 169. The fact that the hairstyle and facial appearance do not resemble Julia Domna increases the probability that the mint is authentic.

prohibition on incestuous marriages, i.e., marriages between close kin.⁷⁹³ Later in the early fourth century, modesty, *pudor*, became the foundation of Constantine's legislation. Female citizens in particular were expected to represent Roman virtues through their feminine chastity (*matronalis pudor*) and their husbands' duty was to preserve their pureness by control and care. The imperial women of this era were not exempt from strict control.⁷⁹⁴ Whether because of changed political practices, or because of changes in public art – or both – there are very few linkages to be found between the empresses and the Vestals by that time.⁷⁹⁵ In this climate of heightened morality and stricter female ideals, it makes sense that *pudicitia*, chastity, was connected to the late-third-century and fourth-century Vestals. The *virgo Vestalis maxima* Terentia Rufilla ruled during Diocletian's reign and her honorary monument in 299 CE celebrates her being *pudicissima*.⁷⁹⁶ The associations with female virtuousness continued the fourth century: an unidentified chief Vestal was also praised in 363 for her *castitas* and *pudicitia*.⁷⁹⁷ The last known *virgo Vestalis maxima*, Coelia Concordia, was yet again celebrated for her female virtuousness, *pudicitia*, in mid-380.⁷⁹⁸ These Vestals of late antiquity reflect female virtues in a manner that was rare for the earlier priestesses. Thus, they were now promoted as moral examples of female virtues that embraced sexual chastity and pureness in particular. Thus, the manner of evaluating the Vestals publicly reflected ideals originating in the imperial house.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹³ The relationships are specified in the text, and for the sake of emphasizing the Roman tradition the lawbreakers are threatened with the wrath of the Roman gods. This law, 'Codex of Gregorius and Hermogenian', was a collection of legal cases from the reign of Emperor Hadrian to 290s, and functioned as a guide for legal scholars and as a book of reference for governors in their legal capacity. Harries 2012, 70-71.

⁷⁹⁴ Imperial women were celebrated as important generators of the imperial dynasty, as had been the case with the preceding empresses. But early-fourth-century imperial women suffered from conflicts in court and their female virtue was questioned, which could cost their life in the worst case as possibly happened to the empress Fausta, wife of Constantine, in 326. For the position and the course of life of imperial women in Constantine's court, see Harries 2012, 258-259.

⁷⁹⁵ The story of the empress Galeria Valeria (died in 315 CE) includes a reference to a friend whose daughter was obligated to hold her Vestal office in Rome. According to the narrative from Lactantius, the mother of this anonymous Vestal fled with Galeria Valeria from the hostile court to Thessalonika, the residence of the empress's son-in-law. The story does not give any more details, but it reflects the close relationships between imperial women and the Vestals' families. Lact. *de Mort. Pers.* 40.2.

⁷⁹⁶ See *CIL* VI 2141=32406.

⁷⁹⁷ *CIL* VI 32422.

⁷⁹⁸ For inscription for Coelia Concordia; *CIL* VI 2145=32408.

⁷⁹⁹ In 240s, the chief Vestal Campia Severina was acknowledged by the senate for her *sincera pudicitia*. See *CIL* VI 2132. For a discussion of *pudicitia* missing from the 'vocabulary' of the Vestals' inscription, see also Mekacher 2006, 123. Later in fourth-century Rome, imperial women began to seek role models and ideals in Christian culture. There was, for example, St. Agnes, who became a guardian saint for imperial ladies of the mid-fourth century. Harries 2012, 266-267. Interestingly, St. Agnes was 'victorious virgin' who triumphed over paganism and earthly temptations. Perhaps this case demonstrates an attempt to dissociate from traditional religion and to stand out from the pagan virgins, the Vestals.

In the third century, contemporaries seem to have connected the terrible cases of the errant Vestals to the current political distress. In 212/213 CE, when the emperor Caracalla ordered four Vestals to be executed, there had been a bloody power struggle between him and his brother P. Septimius Geta. In fact, Caracalla ordered that all the supporters of his brother, whom he had murdered, to be executed and their property to be confiscated. It is plausible to conclude that the Vestals represented those individuals who chose the wrong side in the two brothers' power play, and that this miscalculation cost them their lives and reputation. In striking contrast to the condemned Vestals, there is the case of Terentia Flavola. It is likely that her family connections and imperial favor protected her from suspicion. Thus, the personal relations between the emperor and a priestess, and her family background in particular, influenced the career development of an individual priestess. The interaction between the Vestals and the *pontifex maximus* was therefore political in its nature, although they evidently also had religious duties and activities that they performed together.

In a way, Caracalla legitimated his own power at the Vestals' expense. When it came to making the cult of Vesta suitable for one's administration, the sole rule of the emperor Elagabalus proved drastic. The Vestal virgin Julia Aquilia Severa received the title of *Augusta* when she married the emperor, whose motive seems to have been no less than to re-organize cult life. However, these changes were a short-lived experiment, and the Vestals' role as professional priestesses and virginal officeholders was restored. The chief Vestals of the post-Severan era – Campia Severina, Flavia Mamilia, Flavia Publicia, respectively – lived through the crisis of the mid-third century, when the empire was almost divided due following provincial separation movements. This critical time seems to have had no impact on their priestesses' office holding, but rather they were rewarded as capable benefactresses. Thus, their professionalism and impeccable character were very strongly manifested, and the cult organization did not face a crisis even as Rome itself became increasingly unstable. Even so, the Vestals' priestly role and symbolic value was no longer celebrated publicly on coinage or in public art. This suggests that public interaction became less important – or not possible – for the mid-third century emperors. Perhaps, their short-lived administrations had no ability, and not enough time, to establish relationships with the cult organizations, including the Vestals.

Interaction between imperial women and the Vestals was particularly well represented on the public coinage of the Severan women. These *Augustae* were great examples of female participation in the process of creating dynastic continuity. The *amicitia* of the Vestals and the empresses helped with these efforts. The priestesses gave their symbolic value to the imperial women's use and therefore helped to legitimize their power. Although relationships with the cult of Vesta and the Vestals were established by the emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla, it was the *Augusta* Julia Maesa and her daughter Julia Mamaea whose political skills enabled the dynasty to continue to the 230s.

Filia – Patrona – Sacerdos: The Many Sides of the Vestals

In imperial Rome, few individuals could achieve as many social roles as the Vestals. In this study, the Vestals' active roles as daughters of their birth families (*filia*), as benefactresses (*patrona*), and as priestesses (*sacerdos*) were examined within the framework of third-century society. A. Nock's early study examined the third-century Vestals from the viewpoint of general developments in religious life.⁸⁰⁰ As such, it does not touch on changes in their social influence or in the benefits of their religious office holding. Nor has subsequent research on the Vestals discussed the impact of third-century political crises on the Vestals' office holding. These issues have been the objectives of this study. Regarding their social agency, my study shows that their relationship categories overlapped, allowing the Vestals to use their influence for the benefit of several different kinds of individuals. They interacted not only with their clients and families, but also with the emperor, the imperial family, and with contemporary society as a whole. In third-century society, when social circumstances and structures such as rank orders were in constant flux, there was a need for strong and well-established institutions. The Vestals' agency and influence, within the framework of their office holding, were a response to this vacuum of permanence and order.

The most important legal premise that enabled them to act independently was their freedom from *patria potestas*. Their social influence was also based on privileges, such as exemption from taxation, and certain qualities – *clementia* and *sacrosanctitas* – that were otherwise associated only with high-ranking individuals and officials. When a new Vestal was selected, it was important to separate her

⁸⁰⁰ See Nock 1930, 225-274.

from her father's control for practical reasons. Earlier research has emphasized the Vestals' separation from their birth families and the fact that they ceased to be their fathers' heirs, but here I propose that it was the fathers who were kept away from the cult and from their daughters' finances and business.⁸⁰¹ This arrangement secured the continuity of the cult and the Vestal's independent life. As I have shown using epigraphic and literary evidence, financial issues played a major role in the Vestals' daily lives. They received a public stipend, and occasionally donations, and they had perpetual sources of income that increased both their personal and collegiate wealth. Thus, their noteworthy wealth was an important motive for families to have a daughter as a Vestal. The sacral office holding was very much an economic issue, and the priestesses' office enabled them to act in profitable businesses. Without undermining the sacredness and religiosity of the Vestals' office, the priestesses were attached to mundane and financial issues that increased – and in no way stained – their social status.

There was, by contrast, no immediate compensation for the families of Vestals, or for their fathers, since the daughter-Vestal was no longer a member of her biological family or an heir of her father. She certainly was no longer under his control. Despite these circumstances, the families' social honour and status increased when they had a family member in the cult. A father could increase his social and political value by giving his daughter to the cult of Vesta. During the selecting process of a new Vestal, a girl's family and the imperial house were in direct contact and the family that succeeded in offering an impeccable daughter to the cult was raised above its social peers. As numerous epigraphic monuments show us, the siblings of a Vestal and their families – nieces and nephews – were the actual beneficiaries. The latest finding from Sardinia reveals how the chief Vestal Flavia Publicia sent her ship (and servant) to undertake business transactions on her behalf while she herself remained in Rome. The chief Vestals' ability to interact and do business was significant, and very much comparable to that of the empresses and elite women. Thus, even if the Vestals' official residence and duties were in Rome, the sphere of their economic influence and capacity to do business extended across a significantly larger area. Because a Vestal held her office for life, or for at least thirty years, expectations for her financial assistance were of long duration. Regarding this system of the families' contribution and their expectations, I conclude that pursuing membership in the cult of Vesta demonstrates future-oriented thinking and decision-making among high-ranking families.

⁸⁰¹ For further discussion of the Vestals's financial position with regard to their birth families, see pages 45-46 of this study.

The many sides of the Vestals' social prominence become especially evident when studying their role as *patronae*. They used both their religious competence and their financial wealth for the benefit of their clients. An individual Vestal's public image was formed in various ways, depending on her level of expertise or professionalism. Some Vestals were celebrated for their good office holding and their religious professionalism, while others were praised above all for their role as benefactresses. Religious capacity and chastity were essential components of the Vestals' social status and priesthood, and therefore variations in the inscriptions cannot be explained merely as changes in epigraphic habits. The Vestals were always expected to be chaste, and this is declared continuously. However, when qualities such as careful office holding are declared in the texts, emphasis on their superiority originates in their religious professionalism. The inscriptions dedicated to Coelia Claudiana provide a good example. She was viewed as the chief Vestal who exceeded all previous chief Vestals, *super omnes retro maximas*. Her predecessor Flavia Publicia, by contrast, was celebrated for her role as the *dignissima ac praestantissima patrona*. When dedicators were family members, these two capacities were often connected together and both of their roles were celebrated. Sisters and brothers typically used the word *pietas* to indicate a sense of duty and (familial) responsibility. Client-oriented dedications often referred to a Vestal's superiority, since the interaction between a priestess and her client typically resulted in some specific result, such as a nomination for office or a client's social rise. In practice, the Vestals were apparently able to give recommendations on behalf of their clients directly to the imperial administration or to the emperor himself. For example, as chief Vestal in the 240s, Campia Severina was able to successfully recommend her client, a certain Q. Veturius Callistratus, for the lucrative position as financial official in the emperor's private library.⁸⁰² This reflects considerable influence and the Vestal's opportunity to act at the centre of the imperial government.

An influential position near the imperial family brought an immensely prominent position, but also unstable conditions for the Vestals. This is evident in Chapter Four, where I discuss the relationships between the emperors, empresses and the Vestals. Changes in imperial politics, such as the moment a new emperor rose to power, were reflected directly in the Vestals' treatment in public politics and religion. It also affected how prominently they were displayed in public religion, and how severely their chastity was controlled. This uncertainty originated in the fact that the individual emperor, in

⁸⁰² For the case of Campia Severina and Q. Veturius Callistratus, see page 158 of this study.

his capacity as *pontifex maximus*, was in charge of the cult and of the priestesses. The Vestals were an excellent ‘display window’ for imperial politics: through the priestesses, the emperors could manifest their political and religious agenda. The role of *pontifex maximus* was an important part of the emperors’ public image and his reputation – both contemporary and posthumous – very much relied on how he had acted in this capacity. In the third century, the intensity of interaction between the Vestals and the imperial house varied. On one hand, there was the strong Severan dynasty with four emperors during the early-third century. On the other hand, the emperors were often absent from the capital and their rule was short-lived, especially during the critical mid-third century. The actions of the Severan dynasty towards the cult and the Vestals were conspicuously different than those of their predecessors and successors. Their politics and religious activities, the Emesian Sun cult in particular, put the Severans in an important interaction with the cult and the priestesses. Consequently, I conclude that the Severan emperors – Septimius Severus, Caracalla, Elagabalus and Alexander Severus – engaged in exceptionally strong leadership in their role as *pontifex maximus*.

Emperors were connected with the cult of Vesta since the reign of emperor Augustus, who appointed the goddess as his tutelary deity. The Antonines used the symbolic value of the cult and the priestesses on their coinage and in their politics. However, for the Severans, Vesta and the priestesses were important instruments for their politics – both power politics and religious activities. In this respect, the role of an individual Vestal varied greatly. For example, in 213 CE the Vestals Aurelia Severa, Cannutia Crescentina, Clodia Laeta and Pomponia Rufina were eliminated as harmful and corrupt priestesses by the emperor Caracalla, who got rid of his political opponents at the same time. These Vestals represented families whose loyalty was questioned at the critical moment when the emperor rose to power. By contrast, the *virgo Vestalis maxima* of the time, Terentia Flavola from the noble family *Hedii Lolliani*, kept her position. Under her leadership, the cult of Vesta was reinforced by assistant officials, the *fictores*, whose institution became more and more sophisticated and bureaucratic during the third century. Her position was strengthened and protected by the fact that, in 213, the cult morphed into a cult of child members. The four children, aged six to ten years, were taken in to replace the eliminated priestesses. Terentia acted as their *Vestalis maxima* and teacher. In practice, she had no rivals and the cult developed under her guidance.

Regarding these practical circumstances, I conclude that the very structure of the Vestals’ thirty-year career development made the cult vulnerable to change. The institution’s structure inevitably created

competition — both internal and external — and this sometimes resulted in priestesses being eliminated. In other circumstances, the strong mutual relationships between the priestesses could create an exceptionally strong Vestal institution. Several third-century priestesses grew up together and formed a family-like community of *sacerdotes Vestae*. The question of their age and career development — and their final retirement from office — has not yet been fully discussed in the scholarship, and future studies of the Vestal institution of the early and later imperial period would benefit from further considering these issues.

The Severans' often-drastic policies towards the Vestals, such as eliminating priestesses, were balanced by countermoves. After examining Severan politics towards the Vestals across the entire dynasty — as yet untouched by earlier research — my study shows great differences between the four Severan emperors, and even within the reign of an individual emperor. This is particularly true of Caracalla's politics. His posthumous reputation and image paints him as a cruel and tyrannical emperor. His politics towards the Vestals at the beginning of his reign reinforces this image. However, his actions make sense when they are explained as being the elimination of political rivals and disloyal families. Here, it needs to be remembered that the cult and the priestesses were deeply connected to the imperial household, and that emperor's mother's (the empress Julia Domna) public image promoted her as an associate member of the cult. Therefore, the Vestals had to come from politically trustworthy families. After securing his position, Caracalla began to reconstruct the cult, promoting Vesta in his religious politics and connecting himself closely to the cult in his capacity as *pontifex maximus*. Interaction between them reflects the ideal relationship between emperor and priestesses. Visual evidence produced at this time reflects cooperation and interaction, rather than the emperor's controlling and hostile religious politics and suppressed priestesses. The image of the fully despotic emperor thus needs to be studied more carefully in Caracalla's case.

While Caracalla's politics towards the Vestals was motivated by the idea of an ideal cult and ideal interaction between the high priest and the Vestals, the politics of the emperor Elagabalus were something totally new and radical in Roman society. From the beginning of his term in 218, all other cult organizations were assimilated into the Sun cult, which he represented as its high priest. The Vestal fire was taken away from the temple, and the emperor took Aquilia Severa, a *virgo Vestalis*, as his consort. Here too, there apparently was a purpose in connecting the cult of Vesta more closely to the imperial house and to the Sun cult. After all, there was a common temple for both cults, of the

Sun god and of Vesta. Elagabalus and Aquilia Severa, who received the name Julia after marriage, formed a ruling couple that represented powerful deities and whose religious professionalism was to be channeled for the benefit of the people. Thus, Elagabalus's actions can be comprehended against his familial background, which was dominated by the Emesian Sun cult. To summarize Severan politics, particularly those of Caracalla and Elagabalus, the emperors used the cult of Vesta as an instrument to gain credibility and political power. Behind Elagabalus's ideas was also religious motivation, deriving from the familial cult on his mother's side. When considering the idea that the priestesses were associate members of the imperial house, the motivation of the Severan emperors was to reinforce this familial connection. Thus, they selected Vestals from the suitable families to participate in their imperial household.

Interaction and *amicitia* between the Vestals and imperial women increased the social influence of both. In the end, the Severan women appear as the keys when discussing the third-century Vestal institution. Through Julia Domna, her sister Julia Maesa and her daughters, interaction between the Vestals and the imperial house gained its most publicly visible forms. After the Severan women, this relationship broke off, and the empresses of the post-Severan era remain short-lived. Thus, the empresses were unable to establish the relationships with the cult or the priestesses. As the third century came to an end, and the new regime of tetrarchy was established, it was the Vestal institute that continued to produce publicly visible and active women. The rulership of the emperor and empress was not questioned, but their absence from the public sphere created space for the Vestals' agency and patronship to grow. Thus, the third century Vestals had an opportunity to act as dutiful daughters for the benefit of their birth families. They acted as *patronae* for clients whose social rise depended – partially at least – on their ability to use their influence in the process of imperial decision-making. By the authority of a *sacerdos Vestalis*, their social agency was superior to that of other female citizens – or men – of the élite. Their social influence was therefore unique and it was celebrated in the public monuments of *Atrium Vestae*.

Appendix I: Epigraphic sources

Honorific Inscriptions for the Vestal Virgins

The inscriptions are listed here in alphabetical order according to the Vestals' name. Many of the third century Vestals received several inscriptions, and therefore it is convenient to study their cases one by one when they appear here alphabetically. Also the inscriptions from the other centuries are included on the grounds that I have discussed their contents, and they are compared with those of the third century. The place of finding – although the majority of them are from the *Atrium Vestae* – is mentioned, as well as their dating. After each inscription there is translation, which I have worked by using the available translations. Bibliographical information about the earlier studies, which discuss the text or offer a translation are mentioned as well. Concerning these studies, I have selected here those which have been the most important and useful ones for me concerning the translation work.

Anonymous I

CIL VI 32425. Rome, Museo Nazionale, Terme di Diocleziano. Excavation site: *Atrium Vestae* 1883-84. Marble slab for anonymous Vestal virgin. Dedicated in 3rd-4th century.

] / san[ctissimae 3] / ob ex[imi]am eius [erga se benivolentiam] / sincer[a]mque ad [3] / adqu[e] in divi[na altaria pietatem?] / amicitia[e] c[ausa 3] / L[3]ia Aurelia Epi[ph]ana(?) C(ai) f(ilia) / beneficiis ei[us] iuta / adqu[e] prot]ecta

---for most holy as a compensation for her outstanding --- righteousness --- and in sacred --- and for her friendship – L [...]ia Aurelia Epi[ph]ana, lady of senatorial rank, who has benefitted from her (the Vestal's) support and protection

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Iara K., 'Senatorial Aristocracy: How Individual is Individual Religiosity?' in Rebillard E. – Rüpke J. (ed.), *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2015, 165-214.

Calpurnia Praetextata

CIL VI 32410. Rome, Museo Nazionale, Terme di Diocleziano. Excavation site: Rome Via Nova 7. June 1882. Marble slab from late 1st century – early 2nd century (Alternatively this slab could be for the Vestal Licinia Praetextata)

Praete]xtata / [v(irgo)] V(estalis) / [maxi]ma / [

The chief Vestal Praetextata...

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Campia Severina

CIL VI 2131. Excavation site: Rome 1497 in proximity of the Temple of Vesta, now lost. Statue base for Campia Severina. Dedicated in 12. May 240.

Campiae Severinae / v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / sanctissimae benignissimae / pro conlatis in se beneficiis / equestr(is) ord(inis) item secundae militiae / Aemilius Pardalas trib(unus) coh(ortis) I / Aquitanicae petito eius ornatus // Dedicata IIII Idus Maias / Sabino II et Venus[t]o co(n)s(ulibus)

For Campia Severina, the chief Vestal virgin, most holy and most kind. In gratitude for the benefits of equestrian rank and a military post of the second rank that she obtained for him. Aemilius Pardalas, honoured at her request with the command of the first cohort Aquitanica, erected this (monument).

Dedicated 4 days before the Ides of May, when Sabinus was consul for the second time and Venustus for the first time.

Beard M. – North J. – Price S., *Religions of Rome Volume I A History & Volume II A Sourcebook*. Cambridge University Press 1998.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Kajava M., 'Religion in Rome and Italy' in Bruun C. – Edmondson J. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*. Oxford University Press, 2015, 397-419.

Gallia A., 'Vestal Virgins and Their Families', *Classical Antiquity* vol. 34, 2015, 74-120.

CIL VI 2132. Excavation site: Rome 1497 in proximity of the Temple of Vesta, now lost. Statue base for Campia Severina. Dedicated in 3rd century

Campiae Severinae / v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) sanctissimae / cuius sinceram pudicitiam / senatus comprobata aeterna / laude publice cumulavit / Q(uintus) Veturius Callistratus v(ir) e(gregius) / suffragio eius factus proc(urator) rat(ionum) / summ(arum) privatarum bibliothecarum / Augusti n(ostr) et procurator eius

For Campia Severina, the chief Vestal virgin, most holy, whose genuine chastity was confirmed by the senate and publicly celebrated with eternal praise. Quintus Veturius Callistratus, from the equestrian order, who was appointed, thanks to her (the Vestal's) vote, as the financial manager of the private library of our emperor, and as the procurator (of the emperor/the Vestal).

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Kajava M., 'Religion in Rome and Italy' in Bruun C. – Edmondson J. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*. Oxford University Press, 2015, 397-419.

C[-----]?

CIL VI 32422. Rome, Atrium Vestae Inv. 12465. Excavation site: 5.11. 1883 from peristyle of Atrium Vestae, used as a part of the substructure of medieval building. Marble base for the chief Vestal C(-----)?. Dedicated in 10.6. 364.

Ob meritum castitatis / pudicitiae adq(ue) in sacris / religionibusque / doctrinae mirabilis / C[[3]]e v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / pontifices vv(iri) cc(larissimi) / promag(istro) Macrinio / Sossiano v(iro) c(larissimo) p(ontifice) m(aiore?) // Dedicata V Idus Iunias / divo Ioviano et Varroniano / cons(ulibus)

As a compensation for her outstanding integrity and chastity and admirable instruction in sacral sacrifices and religious practices, C----- (Vestal's name erased), pontifices, from the senatorial rank, with promagister Macrinus Sossianus from the senatorial rank, who is the pontifex maior. The monument was dedicated five days before the ides of June, when the divus Iovianus and Varronius were the consuls (9. June 364 AD).

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Lindner M., *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins, Priestesses of Ancient Rome*. University of Michigan Press, 2015.

van Deman E. B. 'Notes on a Few Vestal Inscriptions' *The American Journal of Philology* vol. 29., 1908, 172-178.

Coelia Claudiana

CIL VI 2136. Excavation site: Rome 1497 in proximity of the Temple of Vesta, now lost. Statue base for Coelia Claudiana. Dedicated in 25.2. 286.

Dedicata V Kal(endas) Mart(ias) / M(arco) Iunio Maximo II et / Vettio Aquilino co(n)ss(ulibus) / curante / Fl(avio) Marciano v(iro) e(gregio) fictore v(irginum) V(estalium) // Coeliae Claudianae /

v(irgini) V(estali) maximae / sanctissimae piissimaeque / cuius sanctitatem / et in deorum infatigabilem / sacrorum operationem meritis / suis laudem aeternam adhibita / gravitate numen quoque Vestae / comprobavit / sacerdotes sacrae urbis

Dedicated five days before the Kalendas of Mars when Marcus Iunius Maximus was consul for the second time and Vettius Aquilinus was consul for the first time, (dedicating process) attended by Flavius Marcianus, from the equestrian rank, the fíctor of the Vestal virgins.

To Coelia Claudiana, virgo Vestalis Maxima, for the most sacred and the most devoted, whose exceptional sacredness and untiring service deserve eternal praise and which importance is also acknowledged by the goddess Vesta. Dedicated by the Sacerdotes sacrae urbis.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006

CIL VI 2137. Excavation site: Rome 1497 in proximity of the Temple of Vesta, now lost. Statue base for Coelia Claudiana. Dedicated in 1.3. 286.

Dedicata Kal(endas) Mart(es) / M(arco) Iunio Maximo II et / Vettio Aquilino co(n)ss(ulibus) / curante / Fl(avio) Marciano v(iro) e(gregio) fíctore v(irginum) V(estalium) // Coeliae Claudianae / v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / sanctissim(ae) ac super omnes / retro maximas religiosissimae / cuius sanctimonia a cunctis praedicatur / nunc certe pertinet esse te talem cuius / laudem Numen quoque Vestae honoravit / Fl(avius) Eucharistus Septim(ius) Epictetus i(uvenis) p(erfectissimus) / Aur(elius) Optatus sacerdotes sacrae u[rb]is / de X prim(is)

Dedicated on the Kalendas of Mars when Marcus Iunius Maximus was consul for the second time and Vettius Aquilinus was consul for the first time, (dedicating process was) attended by Flavius Marcianus, from the equestrian rank, the fíctor of the Vestal virgins.

To Coelia Claudiana, virgo Vestalis Maxima, to the most sacred and who is the most pious than all other chief Vestals before her, whose purity was praised by all, now she certainly is reaching such a great praise, which is appreciated also by the goddess Vesta. Dedicated by Flavius Eucharistus, Septimius Epictetus, a youth with high ranking equestrian status, Aurelius Optatus, sacerdotes sacrae urbis from the first ten (of priests).

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Gallia A., 'Vestal Virgins and Their Families', *Classical Antiquity* vol. 34, 2015, 74-120.

CIL VI 2138. Excavation site: Rome 1497 in proximity of the Temple of Vesta, now lost. Statue base for Coelia Claudiana. Dedicated in late 3rd century.

Coeliae Claudianae / v(irgini) V(estali) maxima / religiosissimae benignissimaeque / cuius pios ritus ac plenam sacro/rum erga deos administrationem / urbis aeterna laude de s(enatus) s(ententia) comproba[vit] / Octavia Honorata v(irgo) Vestalis) divinis / eius admonitionibus semper provecta

For Coelia Claudiana senior Vestal virgin for most pious and most friendly, whose pious rites with full of holiness towards the gods, the city approve with the eternal praise by decree of the Senate. Octavia Honorata Vestal virgin who is always impressed by her divine admonitions

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Gallia A., 'Vestal Virgins and Their Families', *Classical Antiquity* vol. 34, 2015, 74-120.

CIL VI 2139. Excavation site: Rome 1549 in proximity of the Temple of Vesta, now lost. Statue base for Coelia Claudiana. Dedicated in late 3rd century.

Coeliae Claudianae / v(irgini) V(estali) maximae / a diis electa merito / sibi talem antistitem / numen Vestae reservare / voluit / Coelia Nerviana soror una / cum Pierio coniuge ac liberis / suis orantes ut per tot(a) saecula / facere dii permittant

To Coelia Claudiana, senior Vestal virgin, who was deservedly chosen by the gods and whom the goddess Vesta wanted to reserve for herself because she is such a great high priestess. Coelia Nerviana, her sister, together with Pierius, her husband, and their children, who pray that the gods will permit her to stay in her office for the whole century.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Gallia A., 'Vestal Virgins and Their Families', *Classical Antiquity* vol. 34, 2015, 74-120.

CIL VI 2140. Rome Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12487. Excavation site: Rome 1868, Palatine hill. Statue base for Coelia Claudiana. Dedicated in late 3rd century.

Coeliae Claudia/nae v(irgini) V(estali) maximae / sanctissimae ac / benignissimae / Coelia Claudianace / soror cu[3] / Nicomede Ve[

To Coelia Claudiana, senior Vestal virgin, most holy and most friendly. Coelia Claudianace, her sister, with Nicomede Ve...

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

CIL VI 32420. Rome Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12469. Excavation site: Rome, 5.11. 1883 from peristyl of Atrium Vestae, used as a part of the substructure of medieval building together with CIL VI 32422. Statue base for Coelia Claudiana. Dedicated in late 3rd century.

Pergamiorum XXX sic // Coeliae Claudianae v(irgini) V(estali) / max(imae) sanctissimae religi/osissimae ac super om/nes piissimae cuius ope/ra sacrorum gubernan/te Vesta matre Maxi/matus sui XX complebit / Aurelius Fructosus cli/ens et candidatus benignitat{a}e eius Probatus / sic XX sic XXX feliciter

To Coelia Claudiana, senior Vestal virgin, most holy, most pious and above all other priestesses most conscientious under whose management of the services in religious rites satisfy the mother Vesta reaching the twenty years of her being the senior Vestal virgin. Set up by Aurelius Fructosus who is her client, and accepted as a candidate due to her benevolence. Such as twenty years, so thirty years happily.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

CIL VI 32421. Rome, Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12482. Excavation site: 13.1. 1884 from Atrium Vestae. Marble slab for Coelia Claudiana. Dedicated in late 3rd century.

] / Coeliae Claudianae / v(irgini) V(estali) maxima[e] / sanc[ti]ssimae / [religio]sissima[e] / [pie]ntis[si]mae / [3] septim[3] / [3]calemi[3] / [6] / [3 sacr]os ritu[s] / [rel]igioni [

To Coelia Claudiana, senior Vestal virgin, the most holy, the most pious, the most dutiful...

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006

Coelia Concordia

CIL VI 2145. Excavation site: Esquiline hill, 1591. Statue base for Coelia Concordia, now lost. Dedicated around 385 AD.

Coeliae Concordiae virgini / Vestali maximae Fabia Pau/lina C(ai) f(ilia) statuam facien/dam conlocandamque / curavit cum propter / egregiam eius pudici/tiam insignemque / circa cultum divinum / sanctitatem tum quod / haec prior eius viro / Vettio Agorio Praetexta/to v(iro) c(larissimo) omnia singulari / dignoque etiam ab huius / modi virginibus et sa/cerdotibus coli statu/am conlocarat

For Coelia Concordia, the chief Vestal Virgin, Fabia Paulina, daughter of Caius, arranged that a statue be made and set up first on account of her distinguished chastity and celebrated holiness concerning the divine cult, and chiefly because she (Coelia Concordia) first had set up a statue to her (Paulina's) husband Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, man of senatorial rank, in all respect a remarkable man and worthy of being honoured even by virgins and by priestesses of this high rank.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Frei-Stolba, R., 'Coelia Concordia, La Dernière Grande Vierge Vestale, et La Participation des Femmes au Discours Politique de IVe S. Apr. J.-C.' *Les Femmes antiques entre sphere privée et sphere publique. Actes du Diplôme d'Etudes Avancées*, Université de Lausanne et Neuchâtel, 2000-2002, Peter Lang, Berne 2003 (ECHO 2) Lausanne 2001, 281-315.

Flavia Mamilia (/Manilia)

CIL VI 2133. Excavation site: Rome 1497 in proximity of the Temple of Vesta. Statue base for Flavia Mamilia, now lost. Dedicated in 21.3. 242.

Collocata XII Kal(endas) April(es) / C(aio) Vettio Attico et / C(aio) Asinio Praetextato co(n)s(ulibus) // Fl(aviae) Mamiliae / v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / cuius egregiam sancti/moniam et venerabilem / morum disciplinam in / deos quoque pervigilem / administrationem senatus / laudando comprobavit / Aemilius Rufinus frater / et Flavii Silvinus et Ire/neus sororis filii a militis / ob eximiam eius erga se / pietatem praestantiamque

For Flavia Mamilia the senior Vestal virgin, whose extraordinary purity and venerable knowledge of the conduct towards the gods and whose ever watchful tendency [of the gods] the senate has acknowledged with praise. Aemilius Rufinus, her brother, and the Flavius Silvinus and Flavius Ireneus, the sons of her sister, military officers, on account of her extraordinary devotion to them and her excellence. Set up 12 days before Kalends of April in the consulship of Caius Vettius Atticus and Caius Asinius Praetextatus.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Flavia Publicia

CIL VI 2134 (=32419). Excavation site: Rome 1549 in proximity of the Temple of Vesta. Statue base for Flavia Publicia, now lost. Dedicated in 3rd century.

Fl(aviae) Publiciae v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / sanctissimae et piissi/mae ac super omnes / retro religiosissimae / purissimae castissimaeque / cuius religiosam / curam sacrorum et / morum praedicabilem / disciplinam numen quoque / Vestae comprobavit / Q(uintus) Veturius Memphius v(ir) e(gregius) / fictor v(irginum) V(estalium) dignationes / erga se honorisque causa / plurimis in se conlatis / beneficiis

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Frei-Stolba R., 'Flavia Publicia, virgo vestalis maxima. Zu den Inschriften des Atrium Vestae', in *Imperium Romanum Studien zu Geschichte und Rezeption. Festschrift für Karl Christnum 75. Geburtstag*. Franz Steiner verlag Stuttgart 1998, 233-251.

van Deman E. B. 'Notes on a Few Vestal Inscriptions' *The American Journal of Philology* vol.29., 1908, 172-178.

CIL VI 32419. Rome, Atrium Vestae Inv. 12488. Excavation site: Rome, Atrium Vestae 27.1. 1884. Statue base for Flavia Publicia. Dedicated in mid-third century.

Fl(aviae) Publiciae v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / sanctissimae et piissimae / ac super omnes retro / religiosissimae purissimae / castissimaeque / cuius religiosam curam / sacrorum et morum praedi/cabilem disciplinam / numen quoque Vestae conprobat / Q(uintus) Veturius Memphius v(ir) e(gregius) / fictor v(irginum) V(estalium) dignationis erga se / honorisque causa plurimis / in se conlatis beneficiis // Coll(ocata) V Idus Mart(ias) / Imp(eratore) Caes(are) [[[Philippo]]] Pio Felic(e) Aug(usto) II et / [[[Philippo]]] nobilissimo Caes(are) co(n)s(ulibus)

For Flavia Publicia, the chief Vestal virgin, who is most venerable and most pious and above all people in her devoutness, chastity, virtuousness and whose scrupulous performance in sacrifices and outstanding way of teaching are also approved by goddess Vesta. Quintus Veturius Memphius of the equestrian rank, fictor of the Vestal virgins for the sake of honoring her and for the sake of her many good deeds.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Frei-Stolba R., 'Flavia Publicia, virgo vestalis maxima. Zu den Inschriften des Atrium Vestae', in *Imperium Romanum Studien zu Geschichte und Rezeption. Festschrift für Karl Christnum 75. Geburtstag*. Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart 1998, 233-251.

CIL VI 2135 (= CIL VI 32404). Excavation site: in 1497 from the proximity of the temple of Vesta, later found near from Circus Maximus. Statue base for Flavia Publicia. Dedicated in 254, 255 or 257.

Fl(aviae) Publiciae v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / merito sanctissimae ac piissi/mae quae rite et pervigili adminis/tratione omnes gradus laude / cumulata sacra sua venerata vi/vit ut saeculari aetate ministerio / adsit et in futuro perseveret / Q(uintus) Terentius Rufus et Caenia / Verissima parentes / Terentiae Rufillae v(irgini) V(estali) / cuius multi temporis bonitatem / et humanitatem eius circa se / in brevi senserunt // Dedicata [3] / dd(ominis) nn(ostris) Vale[riano 3] / Gallien[o 3 co(n)s(ulibus)]

To Flavia Publicia, deservedly the most holy and most devoted senior Vestal virgin, who has passed all grades of distinction according to the sacred rules and with always watchful administration after honourably perfecting her venerated religious rites, in order that she stays and continues in her office in the future for the time of one generation. Quintius Terentius Rufus and Caenia Verissima, parents of Vestal virgin Terentia Rufilla, whose great goodness and gentleness they experienced around them for the short time.

Gallia A., 'Vestal Virgins and Their Families', *Classical Antiquity* vol. 34, 2015, 74-120.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Frei-Stolba R., 'Flavia Publicia, virgo vestalis maxima. Zu den Inschriften des Atrium Vestae', in *Imperium Romanum Studien zu Geschichte und Rezeption. Festschrift für Karl Christnum 75. geburstag*. Franz Steiner verlag Stuttgart 1998, 233-251.

CIL VI 32414. Rome Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12495. Excavation site: Rome, Atrium Vestae 5.11. 1883, used as a part of the substructure of medieval building. Statue base for Flavia Publicia. Dedicated in 11.7. 247.

Flaviae L(uci) fil(iae) / Publiciae v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / sanctissimae piissimaeq(ue) / cuius sanctissimam et /religiosam curam sacror(um) / quam per omnes gradus /sacerdotii laudabili adm/nistratione operatur numen / sanctissimae Vestae matris / comprobavit / Aemilia Rogatilla c(larissima) f(emina) sororis fil(ia) / cum Minucio Honorato Marcello / Aemiliano c(larissimo) p(uero) filio suo / ob eximiam eius erga se / pietatem // Col(locata) V Id(us) Iul(ias) / dd(ominis) nn(ostris) I[[[mp(eratore) Philippo]]] Aug(usto) II et / [[[[Philippo]]] Caes(are) co(n)s(ulibus)

To Flavia Publicia, daughter of Lucius, the chief Vestal Virgin, most holy and most pious. The divine power of mother Vesta has acknowledged her most holy and scrupulous charge of her religious duties, which she showed through all the grades of her priesthood with praiseworthy devotion.

Aemilia Rogatilla, of senatorial rank, her niece along with Minucius Honoratus Marcellus Aemilianus, of senatorial rank, her (Rogatilla's) son, erected this on account of her outstanding loyalty towards them.

Dedicated five days before ides of July, when Philippus, our lord, was consul for the second time, and Philippus Caesar was consul for the first time.

Gallia A., 'Vestal Virgins and Their Families', *Classical Antiquity* vol. 34, 2015, 74-120.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Frei-Stolba R., 'Flavia Publicia, virgo vestalis maxima. Zu den Inschriften des Atrium Vestae', in *Imperium Romanum Studien zu Geschichte und Rezeption. Festschrift für Karl Christnum 75. Geburtstag*. Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart 1998, 233-251.

CIL VI 32415. Rome Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12484. Excavation site: Rome, Atrium Vestae 10.11. 1883, used as a part of the substructure of medieval building. Statue base for Flavia Publicia. Dedicated in mid-third century.

Flaviae L(uci) f(iliae) Publiciae / religiosae / sanctitatis v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / cuius egregiam morum / disciplinam et / in sacris peritissimam / operationem merito / res publica in dies / feliciter sentit / Ulpus Verus et Aurel(ius) / Titus |(centuriones) deputati / ob eximiam eius erga se / benivolentiam / g(ratis?) p(osuerunt)

To Flavia Publicia, the daughter of Lucius, to the chief Vestal virgin, of devout inviolability, whose exceptional moral teachings and whose most skilled divine service regarding religious rites deservedly had constantly been happily perceived by the State. Ulpus Verus and Aurelius Titus, deputy commanders, (set up this monument) as a reward for her outstanding benevolence towards them.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Frei-Stolba R., 'Flavia Publicia, virgo vestalis maxima. Zu den Inschriften des Atrium Vestae', in *Imperium Romanum Studien zu Geschichte und Rezeption. Festschrift für Karl Christnum 75. Geburtstag*. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1998, 233-251.

CIL VI 32416. Rome Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12477. Excavation site: Rome, Atrium Vestae 7.12. 1883 from the southern porticus. Statue base for Flavia Publicia. Dedicated in 30.9. 257.

Fl(aviae) Publiciae v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / sanctissimae ac religiosissimae quae per omnes gradus / sacerdotii aput(!) divina altaria / omnium deorum et ad aeternos ignes / diebus noctibusque pia mente rite / deserviens merito ad hunc / locum cum aetate pervenit / Bareius Zoticus cum Flavia / Verecunda sua ob eximiam eius / erga se benevolentiam praestantiamque // dedicata pr(idie) Kal(endas) Oct(obres) / dd(ominis) nn(ostris) Valeriano Aug(usto) IIII et / Gallieno Aug(usto) III co(n)ss(ulibus)

For Flavia Publicia, the chief Vestal virgin, for most sacred and most pious, who well deservedly achieved this position (and) in the course of time, through all the grades of the priesthood, night and day with devoted mind and solemnly she performed rituals by the altars of every god and by the eternal fire. Bareius Zoticus together with his Flavia Verecunda (set up this monument) for her (Vestal) because of her outstanding benevolence and excellence towards him.

Dedicated a day before the Kalends of October when our lords Valerianus Augustus, was consul for the fourth time, and Gallienus Augustus was consul for the third time.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Frei-Stolba R., 'Flavia Publicia, virgo vestalis maxima. Zu den Inschriften des Atrium Vestae', in *Imperium Romanum Studien zu Geschichte und Rezeption. Festschrift für Karl Christnum 75. Geburtstag*. Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart 1998, 233-251.

CIL VI 32417. Rome Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12483. Excavation site: Rome, Atrium Vestae 20.12. 1883 from the southern porticus. Statue base for Flavia Publicia. Dedicated in mid-third century.

Flaviae Publiciae / v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / sanctissimae / ac religiosissimae / M(arcus) Aurelius Hermes / ob eximiam eius / erga se benivolentiam / praestantiamque

For Flavia Publicia, the chief Vestal virgin, for most sacred and most pious. Marcus Aurelius Hermes set up this monument as a compensation of her outstanding benevolence and excellence towards him.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Frei-Stolba R., 'Flavia Publicia, virgo vestalis maxima. Zu den Inschriften des Atrium Vestae', in *Imperium Romanum Studien zu Geschichte und Rezeption. Festschrift für Karl Christnum 75. Geburtstag*. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1998, 233-251.

CIL VI 32418. Rome Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12486. Excavation site: Rome, Atrium Vestae 29.12. 1883 from the southern porticus. Statue base for Flavia Publicia. Dedicated in mid-third century.

Fl(aviae) Publiciae / sanctissimae / ac piissimae / v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / T(itus) Fl(avius) Apronius / f(ictor) v(irginum) V(estalium) / loci secundi / dignissimae / ac praestantissi/mae patronae / cum suis

For Flavia Publicia most sacred and most pious chief Vestal virgin. Titus Flavius Apronius, ficator of Vestal virgins, who is at the secondary place. (He set up this monument) with his closest (friends/men) to most distinguished and outstanding patroness.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Frei-Stolba R., 'Flavia Publicia, virgo vestalis maxima. Zu den Inschriften des Atrium Vestae', in *Imperium Romanum Studien zu Geschichte und Rezeption. Festschrift für Karl Christnum 75. Geburtstag*. Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart 1998, 233-251.

Iunia Torquata

CIL VI 2127 = 32403. Excavation site: Rome, south side of the housing blocks of ancient Theatrum Balbi. Statue base for Iunia Torquata, now lost. Dedicated in the early to mid- first century.

Iuniae C(ai) Silani f(iliae) / Torquatae vir(gini) Vest(ali) / maximae / Iuvenio l(iberto)

For Iunia Torquata, daughter of Gaius Silanus, the chief Vestal virgin, Iuvenio, her freedman.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

CIL VI 2128. Rome, Vatikan Inv. 6774, Galleria Lapidaria XLVII 21. Excavation site: Rome. First century AD.

Iunoni / Iuniae C(ai) Silani f(iliae) / Torquatae / sacerdoti Vestali / annis LXIII / Caelesti patronae / Actius l(ibertus) /

For Iuno, for Iunia Torquata, the daughter of Gaius Silanus, the priestess of Vesta, sixty-four years, for divine patroness. Actius, her freedman.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Licinia Praetextata

CIL VI 32409. Rome Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12485. Excavation site: Rome, Atrium Vestae 29.12. 1883 from the southern wing of the peristyle. Statue base for Praetextata. Dedicated late first- or early second century.

Praetextatae Crassi fil(iae) / v(irgini) V(estali) maximae / C(aius) Iulius Creticus / a sacris

For Praetextata, the daughter of Crassus, the chief Vestal virgin. Caius Iulius Creticus (set up this monument), for the religious rites/ one of the religious attendants of Vesta.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Lindner M., *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins, Priestesses of Ancient Rome*. University of Michigan Press, 2015.

CIL VI 32410. Rome Museo Nazionale, Terme di Diocleziano. Excavation site: Rome, Via Nova, 7.6. 1883. Marble slab. Dedicated late first-early second century.

Praete]xtata / [v(irgo)] V(estalis) / [maxi]ma / [

For Praetextata, the chief Vestal virgin...

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Numisia Maximilla

CIL VI 2129 Rome, Museo Nazionale, Terme di Diocleziano, Inv. 29302. Excavation site: Rome, 16th century, house of Porcari. Dedicated in 13. January 201 AD.

Numisiae Ma/ximillae v(irgini) V(estali) / max(imae) Ti(berius) Iul(ius) Bal/billus s(acerdos) Solis / ded(icata) Idib(us) Ian(uariis) / L(ucio) Annio Fabiano / M(arco) Nonio Muciano co(n)s(ulibus)

For Numisia Maximilla, the chief Vestal virgin, Titus Iulius Balbillus, the priest of Sun. Dedicated in ides of January, under the consulship of Lucius Annius Fabianus and Marcus Nonius Mucianus.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

CIL VI 32411 Rome, Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12493. Excavation site: Atrium Vestae 29.12. 1883 from southern wing of peristyle. Marble statue base for Numisia Maximilla. Dedicated in 2nd-early 3rd century.

Numisiae L(uci) f(iliae) / Maximillae / v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / C(aius) Helvidius mysticus / devotus beneficiis eius

For Numisia Maximilla, the chief Vestal virgin. Caius Helvidius, one who belongs to the sacred mysteries, devout for her favours.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Terentia Flavola

CIL VI 2144. Rooma Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12494. Excavation site: Rome, 16th century from the proximity of Capitoline hill. Marble statue base for Terentia Flavola. Dedicated before 211 AD.

Terentiae / Flavulae / v(irgini) V(estali) / max(imae) sorori / Terentius Gentian/us fl(amen) Dialis v(ir) c(larissimus) pr(aetor) / tut(elar)is cum Pomponia / Paetina uxore et / Lolliano Gentian[o] / filio frat[ris]

For Terentia Flavula, the chief Vestal Virgin, for sister. From Terentius Gentianus, the priest of Juppiter, honourable man, praetor. With his wife Pomponia Paetina and nephew Lollianus Gentianus.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Eck W., *Monument und Inschrift: gesammelte Aufsätze zur senatorischen Repräsentation in der Kaiserzeit; herausgegeben von Walter Ameling und Johannes Heinrichs*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2010.

van Deman E. B. 'Notes on a Few Vestal Inscriptions' *The American Journal of Philology* vol.29., 1908, 172-178.

CIL VI 32412 Rome Atrium Vestae, Inv. 12481. Excavation site: Rome, 17.12. 1883. Marble statue base for Terentia Flavola. Dedicated in 209 AD or shortly after.

Terentiae Flavolae / sorori sanctissimae / v(irgini) V(estali) maximae / Q(uintus) Loll{1}ianus Q(uinti) f(ilius) / Poll(ia) Plautius Avitus / co(n)s(ul) augur pr(aetor) cand(idatus) / tutel(aris) leg(atu)s leg(ionis) VII / Gemin(ae) Piae Felicis / iuridic(us) Asturicae et / Callaeciae leg(atu)s Augg(ustorum) prov(inciae) / Asiae quaest(or) candidat(us) trib(unus) / laticlav(ius) legion(is) XIII Gemin(ae) / triumvir monetalis a(ere) a(rgento) a(uro) / f(lando) f(eriundo) cum / Claudia Sestia Cocceia Sev<e=L>riana / coniuge et Lolliana Plautia Sestia Servil/la filia

For Terentia Flavola sister most holy, the eldest Vestal Virgin. Quintius Lollianus Plautius Avitus, the son of Quintus, from the tribe of Pollia, consul, augur, candidate to become praetor tutelaris; commander of the Seventh Gemina Pia Felicis Legion, magistrate of Asturica and Gallaecia; governor of the Imperial Province of Asia; candidate to become Quaestor; Tribunus Laticlavius of the XIIIth Geminae Legion; Triumvir moneyer of gold, silver and bronze coinage. With Claudia Sestia Cocceia Severiana, his wife, and Lolliana Plautia Sestia Servilla, his daughter.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

CIL VI 2130 Florence. Museo Archeologico. Excavation site: Rome, the garden of Mattei in Trastevere. A small base for Terentia Flavola. Dedicated in 4. April 215.

Terentiae Fla/volae v(irgini) V(estali) ma/ximae Aurel(ius) / Iulius Balbil/lus sac(erdos) Sol(is) ob / plura eius in se merita // D(e)d(icata) / pr(idie) Non(as) April(es) / Laeto II et Ceriale / co(n)s(ulibus)

For Terentia Flavola, chief Vestal virgin. Aurelius Iulius Balbillus, priest of Sun god set up this monument as a payment for her numerous good deeds.

Dedicated a day before Nona of April under the second consulate of Laetus and the first consulate of Cerialis.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Settipani C., *Continuité gentilice et continuité familiale dans les familles sénatoriales romaines à l'époque impériale: mythe et réalité*. Oxford: Unit for prosopographical research, Linacre College, Oxford University, France 2000.

CIL VI 32413. Rome, Atrium Vestae. Excavation site: Rome, 29.12. 1883, southern wing of the Atrium Vestae. Marble base for Terentia Flavola. Dedicated in early third century.

Terentiae / Flavolae / v(irgini) V(estali) / maximae / Cn(aeus) Statilius / Menander / fictor / v(irginum) V(estalium) / Cn(aei) Statili / Cerdonis / fictoris / v(irginum) V(estalium) / alumnus

For Terentia Flavola, the chief Vestal virgin, set up by Cnaeus Statilius Menander fictor of the Vestal virgins, protégé of Cnaeus Statilius Cerdonis, the fictor of the Vestal virgins.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

van Deman E. B. 'Notes on a Few Vestal Inscriptions' *The American Journal of Philology* vol.29., 1908, 172-178.

CIL VI 32423 Rome, Musei Nazionale, Terme di Dioclezano. Excavation site: Rome, Atrium Vestae. Pilaster for Terentia Flavola (?). Dedicated in early third century.

] / maximae / Cn(aeus) Statilius / Menander / fictor / v(irginum) V(estalium) / [

...for the chief Vestal virgin, set up by Cnaeus Statilius Menander, fictor of the Vestal virgins...

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Terentia Rufilla

CIL VI 2141 = CIL VI 32406: Excavation site: Rome, 1497 near the Temple of Vesta, now lost. Marble statue base for Terentia Rufilla. Dedicated in 19. December 299 AD.

Terentiae Rufillae / v(irgini) V(estali) maximae / sanctissimae religiosissimae / pudicissimae praestantissimae / cuius merita circa me semper sensi / Ael(ia) Ianuaria quae et Leontia / ex voto dignissim(ae) posuit // Dedicata XIII Kal(endas) Ian(uarias) / Constantio III et Maximiano III Caess(aribus) / co(n)ss(ulibus) / curante Aur(elia) Niceta

For Terentia Rufilla, the chief Vestal virgin, for most sacred, most pious, most chaste, most excellent, whose services around me I always acknowledged. I, Aelia Ianuaria with Leontia, set this up out of a vow to the most worthy [Vestal]. [on the side] Dedicated on the 14th day before the Kalends of January, in the consulship of the Caesars Constantius for the fourth time and Maximian for the third time, under the supervision of Aurelius Niceta.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

CIL VI 2142: Excavation site: Rome, this inscription (fragmented slab) was walled up in a wall of Via Florida, near Largo Argentina, now lost. Fragmentary plate for Terentia Rufilla. Dedicated in late third century – early fourth cent.

Terentia Rufilla / v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae)

For Terentia Rufilla, the chief Vestal virgin...

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

CIL VI 2143 Excavation site: 1497 near the Temple of Vesta, now lost. Dedicated in 6. May 301 AD.

Dedicata pri(die) Non(as) Mai(as) / Titiano II et Nepotiano co(n)ss(ulibus) / curante Aur(elia) Niceta // [6] / mirae sanctitatis adque / in cerimoniais antistiti deorum / Terentiae Rufillae v(irgini) V(estali) max(imae) / Aur(elius) Eutyches voti compos redditus / patronae erga se praestantissimae

...of remarkable inviolability, as well as in the ceremonies of the gods high priestess, for Terentia Rufilla, the chief Vestal virgin. Aurelius Eutyches returned to pay again his vow (this monument) to his most excellent patroness.

Dedicated a day before of Nonae of May, under the second consulship of Titianus and first of Nepotianus. Under the curatorship of Aurelius Niceta.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

The *Tabellae Immunitatis*

Calpurnia Praetextata

CIL VI, 2146 = CIL XIV, 4120, 1 = CIL XV, 7127. Rome, Museo Nazionale, Terme di Diocleziano, Inv. 65046. Excavation site: Ager Tusculanus. Second century AD.

Calpurniae / Praetextat(ae) / v(irgini) V(estali) / maxim[ae] / immun[is]

Belongs to Calpurnia Praetextata, the chief Vestal virgin, exempted from taxes.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Flavia Publicia

AE 2010, 620. Porto Torres (Sassari), Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Antiquarium Turritano. Excavation site: Porto Torres 2007. Mid-third century: 247-257 AD.

Flaviae Publiciae v(irginis) V(estalis) maximae immunis in naucella marina cunbus Port(u)ensis parasemo Porphyris Eudromus (servus?).

A harbour-ship/skiff (called) Porphyris of the virgo Vestalis maxima Flavia Publicia is exempted from the duties/taxes. Eudromus (her slave?).

Gasparetti G., 'Una tabella immunitatis dal porto di Turrus Libisonis' in A. Mastino – P.G. Spanu – R. Zucca (ed.) *Naves plenis velis cuntes*. Roma 2009, 266-277.

Mayer i Olivé M., 'Els afers d'una virgo Vestalis maxima del segle III d.C.: Flavia Publicia', *Studia Philologica Valentina*, vol. 13, 10 20012, 141-157.

Ruggeri P., 'La Vestale Massima Flavia Publicia: una protagonist della millenaria Saecularis Aetas' in Cabrero J. – Montecchio L. (ed.) *Sacrum Nexum. Alianzas entre el poder politico y la religion en el mundoromano*. Madrid 2015, 165-190.

CIL VI, 2147 = CIL XV, 7126. Vatikan, Biblioteca Inv. 5398. Excavation site: Rome 1748. Mid-third century.

Flaviae / Publiciae / v(irgini) V(estali) / maximae / immunis / iniugo

Belongs to Flavia Publicia, the chief Vestal virgin, exempted from taxes, in the yoke.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

McC. H., 'Inscriptions in the Classical Collection' *MMABull*, 19 1924, 166-168.

Sossia Maxima

CIL VI 2148 = CIL XV 7128 Rome, Museo Nazionale, Terme di Diocleziano, Inv. 65045. Excavation site: purchased in 1713 from Rome.

Sossiae / Maximae / v(irgini) V(estali)

Belongs to Sossia Maxima virgo Vestalis.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

The Honorary Inscriptions for the Vestals in Athens and in Greek

Aurelia

CIA III 1, 877 = IG II Ed. min. III 1, 3534. Locus adservationis unknown. Excavation site: Athens Acropolis. Marble base for Aurelia. Dedicated in 1st century.

ὁ δῆμ[ος] Αὐρηλίαν ἱερὰν παρ[θέ]νον Κοί Α[ὐρ] θυγατέρα εὐσεβείας ἔνεκα.

The people of Athens for the holy virgin Aurelia the daughter of Cotta, because of her piety.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Kajava M., 'Vesta and Athens' in Salomies O. (ed.), *The Greek East in the Roman Context Proceedings of a Colloquium Organised by the Finnish Institute at Athens. May 21 and 22, 1999*. Helsinki 2001.

Iunia Torquata

CIG XII 5, 920B. Excavation site: Tenos, garden of Demetrios Paganos. Marble slab for Iunia Torquata. Dedicated in year 20 or 21 AD.

ὁ δῆμος [Ἰουν]ίαν Τορκουταν [τὴν σ]τρατηγ[οῦ] [Γαίου Ἰουνίου Σιλανοῦ ἀδελφὴν ---].

The people (made this monument) for Iunia Torquata, sister of Gaius Iunius Silanus, the governor ...

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Valeria

CIA III 1, 876 = IG Ed. min. III 1, 3533. Athens, Epigraphical Museum Inv. 10479. Excavation site: Athens Acropolis. Statue base for Valeria. Dedicated in first century AD.

ὁ δῆμος Οὐαλερίαν ἱερὰν παρθένον εὐσεβείας ἕνεκα.

The people of Athens for the holy virgin Valeria for the sake of her piety.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Vibidia

CIA III 1, 875 = IG Ed. min. III 1, 3532. Athens, Epigraphical Museum Inv. 10483. Excavation site: Athens Acropolis. Statue base for Vibidia. Dedicated in first century AD.

[ὁ] δῆμος [Οὐιβιδίαν, ἱ]ερὰν παρθένον, [Σέξτου Οὐιβιδί]ου Οὐίρρωνος [θυγατέρα, εὐ]σεβείας ἕνεκα.

The people of Athens for the holy virgin Vibidia the daughter of Sextus Vibidius Virro because of her piety.

Mekacher N., *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. 2006.

Kajava M., 'Vesta and Athens' in Salomies O. (ed.), *The Greek East in the Roman Context Proceedings of a Colloquium Organised by the Finnish Institute at Athens. May 21 and 22, 1999*. Helsinki 2001.

Appendix II. Illustrations.

All photographs here, except Fig. 2 and 6, are previously published by Nina Mekacher in Mekacher N. *Die Vestalischen Jungfrauen in die Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom. Palilia Band 15. Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag 2006.

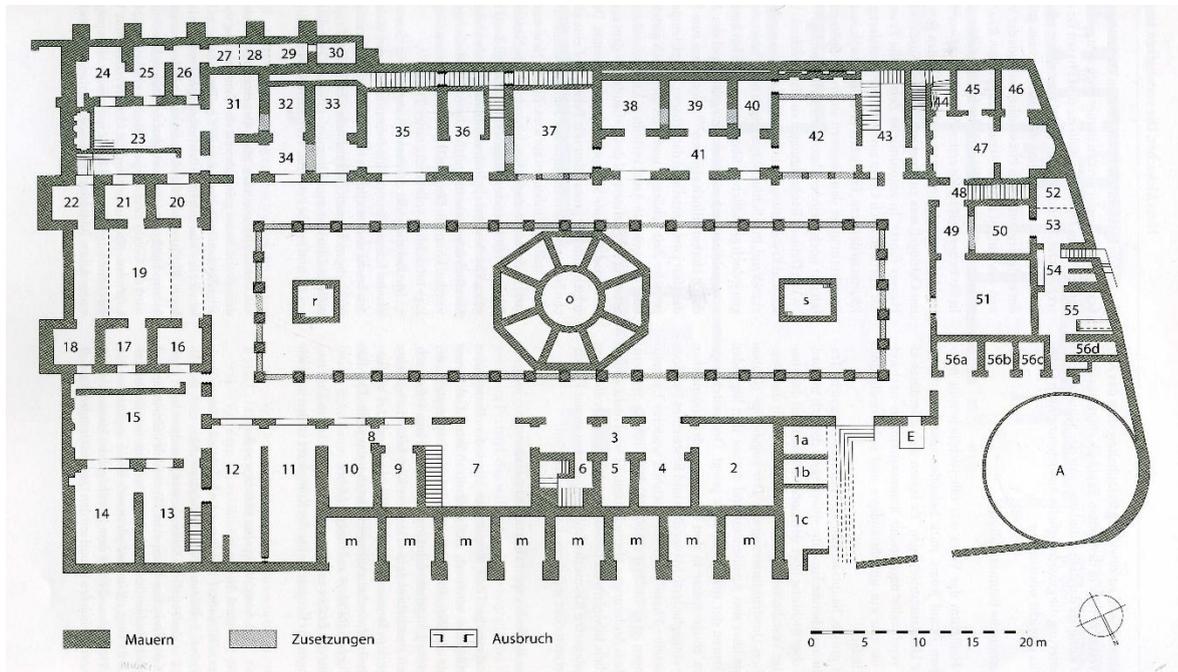


Fig. 1. *Atrium Vestae*. Plan of the imperial phases, from Trajan to Constantine.

Fig. 2. The central *atrium* is surrounded by the statues and inscriptions as it is assumed that they situated in antiquity (By Antti T. Oikarinen).





Fig. 3. Portrait statue of a Vestal, period of Hadrian, Palazzo Altemps, Rome.

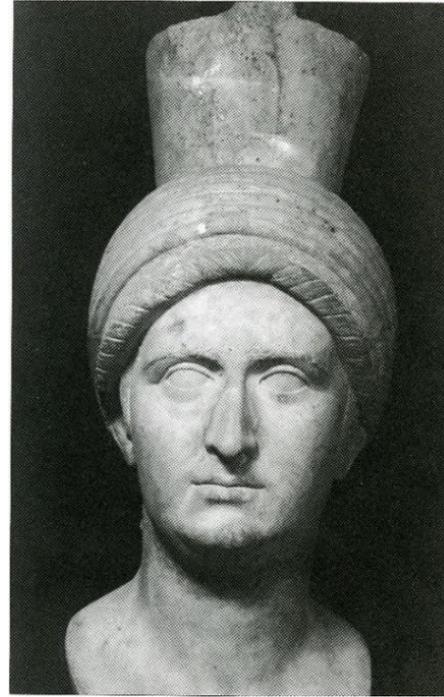


Fig. 5. A Vestal with *corona muralis*. Late Hadrian period. Present location unfamiliar.

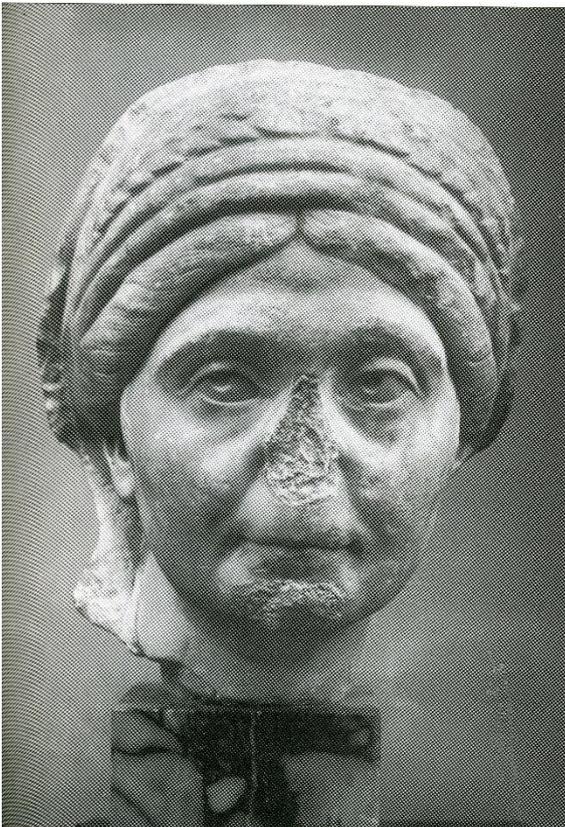


Fig. 4. Portrait of an elderly Vestal, late Antonine period, Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome.



Fig. 6. Banqueting Vestals, Claudian period. Ara Pacis Museum, Rome. (Author's own)



Fig. 7. Silver medallion of Julia Domna. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.



Fig. 10. Aureus of Postumus. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.



Fig. 8. Aureus of Julia Domna. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, Collection du Chastel 714.



Fig. 11. Aes-Medallion of Herennia Etruscilla. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles FG 469.



Fig 9. Aureus of Caracalla. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, Collection du Chastel 716.

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