

Working Paper CEsA CSG 167/2018

ANCIENT ROMAN POLITICS THE VESTALS – WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

Vestals had political and religious power in ancient Rome. Their peaceful presence at the forum was one of the first attempts (if not the first) in favor of gender equality or women’s empowerment in the public sphere. Vestals were virgin priestesses of a goddess that protected the walls of Rome with her perpetual fire, which was pure and had no statue. Their rituals were based on legends such as Amata or Rhea Silvia that, regardless of being true or not, were religious and cultural references for people’s lives and should not be neglected, because they contain information that explains why the State respected the vestals and punished them so severely.

Keywords Vestals, Roman Antiquity, Politics, Religion.

Sumário

Na antiguidade romana, as vestais tinham poder político-religioso. A sua presença pacificadora, no fórum, foi uma das primeiras tentativas (se não a primeira) das mulheres alcançarem algum tipo de igualdade de género ou autoridade na cena pública. As vestais eram sacerdotisas virgens de uma deusa que protegia os muros de Roma com o seu fogo perpétuo, que era pura e não tinha estátua. Os seus rituais eram baseados em lendas, tais como de Amata ou de Reia Sílvia, que independentemente de terem existido ou não, eram referências religiosas e culturais. As suas histórias influenciavam a vida das pessoas e não devem ser negligenciadas, pois contêm informações que explicam as razões pelas quais o Estado respeitava tanto as vestais e as punia tão severamente.

Palavras-chave Vestais, Antiguidade Romana, Política, Religião.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is about vestal virgins of ancient Rome. First chapter concerns goddess Vesta, her legends and what she represented. Second chapter is about who Vesta and why her priestesses were important to roman religion. Third chapter explains where they lived. Fourth chapter lists names of known vestals until Emperor Tiberius (a larger list is included in Appendix 2) and discusses situations involving their deaths or role model.

Research was based in classical sources (but with an English translation) and more modern ones. Further translations were made by the author.

1. WHAT WAS VESTA?

Vesta was one of the oldest¹ and most important goddesses of Rome². She had *vi stando* (standing) force, for “earth stands by its own power” (Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.295).³ As a feminine entity, she was related to the land of the ancestors, but while her sisters were fertile (Ceres related to agriculture and Juno to motherhood), she was a virgin (Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.283) that offered fire⁴ to warm and protect people from danger with her vigilant light.

She was pure in order to cleanse and relive. Her fire had a positive influence and was considered necessary, like traditional slash and burn agriculture in the fields. Flames

¹ «The religion of Vesta was directly linked to the sacred flame, which kept the light of Rome lit. For this reason the origin of the goddess Vesta, and especially of the Vestal Virgins, is linked to the creation of the city of Rome as a sacred space.» (Alonso, 2010: 5)

² «The cult of Vesta was the most important religious safe keeper of Rome. The goddess Vesta was believed to be the center of the earth as well as the personification of fire. Together, the earth and the hearth were seen as the symbols of the home.» (Oldenkotte, 2014: 4)

³ Frazer, 1931.

⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, 4.721-731: «I am called upon to sing of the Parilia, and not in vain shall be the call, if kindly Pales favours me. (...) The people, go fetch materials for fumigation from the Virgin’s altar. Vesta will give them; by Vesta’s gift ye shall be pure. The materials for fumigation will be the blood of a horse and the ashes of a calf; the third thing will be the empty stalks of hard beans. Shepherd, do thou purify thy well-fed sheep at fall of twilight; first sprinkle the ground with water and sweep it with a broom. Deck the sheepfold with leaves and branches fastened to it; adorn the door and cover it with a long festoon. Make blue smoke with pure sulphur, and let the sheep, touched with the smoking sulphur, bleat. Burn wood of male olives and pine and savines, and let the singed laurel crackle in the midst of the hearth.» (Frazer, 1931)

purged people and animals⁵, as well as bad deeds and putrefaction.⁶ Dead bodies were cremated after death⁷.

Vesta had no statue. Nor her, nor her flame.⁸ Her perpetual fire protected the city from invasion. Depicting her would be considered an act of profanation of her sacred essence⁹.

Romans prayed to her first. The oldest houses had a shire of Vesta at the entrance, or Ovid thought so, because he wrote that the word “vestibule” took its name¹⁰.

Vesta had three symbols: fire, her round temple (chapter four) and a donkey. In her early days, she had been saved by a hee-haw, more like a strong bray, that frightened Priapus (that was trying to harass Vesta) and pulled him away from her.¹¹ Ovid introduces

⁵ Ovid, *Fasti*, 4.783: «Devouring fire purges all things and melts the dross from out the metals; therefore it purges the shepherd and the sheep.» (Frazer, 1931)

⁶ «All those who had taken part in the funeral had to purify themselves at home on the same day by means of the *suffitio* process, which involved being sprinkled with water from a laurel branch and passing under fire.» (Relief, 2005: 141)

⁷ Remus death by fire according to Ovid, *Fasti*, 4.807: «The work was urged on by Celer, whom Romulus himself had named and said, “Celer, be this they are; let no man cross the walls nor the trench which the share hath made: who dares to do so, put him to death.” Ignorant of this, Remus began to mock the lowly walls and say, “Shall these protect the people?” And straightway he leaped across them. Instantly Celer struck the rash man with a shovel. Covered with blood, Remus sank on the stony ground. When the king heard of this, he smothered the springing tears and kept his grief locked up within his breast. (...) When they set down the bier, he gave it a last kiss, and said, “Snatched from they brother, loath to part, brother, farewell!” With that he anointed the body before committing it to the flames. Faustulus and Acca, her mournful hair unbound, did the same. Then the Quirites, though not yet known by that name, wept for the youth, and last of all a light was put the pyre, wet with their tears.» (Frazer, 1931)

⁸ Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.295: «Long did I foolishly think that there were images of Vesta: afterwards I learned that there are none under her curved dome. An undying fire is hidden in that temple; but there is no effigy of Vesta nor of the fire.» (Frazer, 1931)

⁹ «In her worship, her virginity was expressed by the fact that she was the only goddess who was not portrayed but illustrated by a flame that burnt in her unadorned and empty house. (...) Any type of depiction, whether physical or mental, would have been an act of profanation. The perpetual virgin was a manifestation of holiness and the essence of the sacred. From the point of view of cultural anthropology, virginity is associated with a state of physical intactness, moral integrity, purity, unity, and not least, great power. In the case of Vesta, the Roman state participated in her solitary and sovereign position as the guardian of the flame, the (state) hearth, and the *res publica*, which she personified.» (Kroppenberg, 2010: 419)

¹⁰ Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.295: «I am of opinion that the vestibule took its name; it is from there that in praying we begin by addressing Vesta, who occupies the first place: it used to be the custom of old to sit on long benches in front of the hearth and to suppose that the gods were present at the table (...) » (Frazer, 1931)

¹¹ Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.319: «Shall I pass over or relate thy disgrace, rubicund Priapus? (...) Cybele, whose brow is crowned with a coronet of towers, invited the eternal gods to her feast. (...) Some roamed at haphazard in the vales of shady Ida; some lay and stretched their limbs at ease on the soft grass (...) Vesta lay and careless took her peaceful rest, just as she was, her head low laid and propped upon a sod. But the ruddy guardian of gardens courted nymphs and goddesses, and to and fro he turned his roving steps. He spied Vesta too; it is doubtful whether he took her for a nymph or knew her to be Vesta; he himself said that he knew her not. He conceived a wanton hope, and tried to approach her furtively; he walked on tiptoe with throbbing heart. It chanced that old Silenus had left the ass, on which he rode, on the banks of a babbling brook. The god of the long Hellespont was going to begin, when the ass uttered an ill-timed bray. Frightened

Priapus as “ruddy guardian of gardens”, the donkey as the “god of the long Helespont” and the goddess of fire as “Ilian Vesta” (Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.319 and 6.349). What does this mean?

2. WHO WAS VESTA?

Romans didn’t know much about Vesta. In the first century BC, Varro thought she had Sabine origins, as Minerva and Saturn.¹² Cicero believed she was a version of the Greek goddess Hestia.¹³ But was she?

According to tradition, Vesta was Saturn’s daughter (Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.283). Both their temples were at the forum, the political heart of the city, where the Senate usually got together. Vesta was fire (purification) and had the *Palladium* (virtue). Saturn housed the *aerarium* (treasure-house) and was near the *Umbilicus Urbis* (town’s symbolic center and a gate to the underground). Jupiter *Optimus Maximus* had a temple at the Capitoline Hill and was power from the Shy, sending thunders over the city when angry with roman power struggles and civil wars, looking down at his authoritative father (pit dug open to Hell) and vigilant sister (fire coming from Earth).

Juno and Ceres’ temples were close by – on the Arx (citadel on the Capitoline Hill) and the Aventine, respectively. If Saturn, Vesta, Juno and Ceres are the oldest references, they are important to point out. But what about Minerva?

Palladium was under the protection of Vesta, at her temple, since brought to Rome.¹⁴ It was the wooden image of Pallas Minerva. If she was equivalent to Athena, the

by the deep voice, the goddess started up; the whole troop flocked together; Priapus made his escape between hands that would have stopped him. Lampsacus is wont to sacrifice this animal to Priapus, saying: “We fitly give to the flames the innards of the tell-tale.” That animal, goddess, thou dost adorn with necklaces of loaves in memory of the event: work comes to a stop: the mills are empty and silent.» (Frazer, 1931).

¹² Varro, *De lingua Latina*, 2.74: «Feronia, Minerva, The Novensides are from the Sabines. With slight changes, we say the following, also from the same people: Pales, Vesta, Salus, Fortune, Fons, Fides Faith. There is scent of the speech of the Sabines about the altars also, which by the vow of King Tatius were dedicated at Rome: for, as the Annals tell, he vowed altars to Ops, For a, Vediovis, and Saturn, Sun, Moon, Vulcan and Summanus, and likewise to Larunda, Terminus, Quirinus, Vertumnus, the Lares, Diana and Lucina (...)» (Kent, 1938: 71)

¹³ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 2.27.67: «Again, the name Vesta comes from the Greeks, for she is the goddess whom they call Hestia. Her power extends over altars and hearths, and therefore all prayers and all sacrifices end with this goddess, because she is the guardian of the innermost things.»

¹⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.417: «Ilus, descendant of Dardanus, had lately founded a new city (Ilus was still rich and possessed the wealth of Asia); a celestial image of armed Minerva is believed to have leaped won on the

virgin goddess of Troy, she was the most important religious figure of the ancient city of the Hellespont.

Cassandra was a priestess of Apollo and a virgin daughter of king Priam in the legend of Troy. The *Palladium* was under her protection, or she hold on to it before being dragged and raped by Ajax or, at the very least, she tried to protect herself inside the temple of Minerva¹⁵. Aeneas sister-in-law spoke true prophecies that no one believed, since god Apollo punished her for not accepting his love. She warned about the Greeks, that they might be hiding inside the Trojan Horse. She even tried “to smite its beams, or burn with ravening fire”. But the Trojans pulled her away and “plucked and flung afar the fire and steel.”¹⁶

Therefore, Cassandra was a vigilant virgin priestess who tried to protect the city with her fire. Was her example inspirational for future vestals of Alba Longa, a city founded by the son of Aeneas? Aeneas, according to tradition, brought secret objects to Italy and they were kept in the temple of Vesta (or temple of Quirine)¹⁷ ever since.

hills of the Ilian city. (...) [Apollo] Smintheus was consulted, and in the dim light of his shady grove he gave this answer with no lying lips: “Preserve the heavenly goddess, so shall ye preserve the city. She will transfer with herself the seat of empire.” Ilus preserved the image of the goddess and kept it shut up on the top of the citadel; the charge of it descended to his heir Laomedon. In Priam’s reign the image was not well preserved. Such was the goddess’s own will, ever since judgement was given against her in the contest of beauty. Whether it was the descendant of Adrastus, or the guileful Ulysses, or Aeneas, they say someone carried it off; the culprit is uncertain; the thing is now at Rome: Vesta guards it, because she sees all things by her light that never fails.» (Frazer, 1931).

¹⁵ Virgil, Aeneid, 2.402: «Priam’s daughter, the maiden Cassandra, was being dragged with streaming hair from the temple and shrine of Minerva, vainly uplifting to heaven her blazing eyes – her eyes, for bonds confined her tender hands. (...) Then the Danaans, with a shout of rage at the maiden’s rescue, mustering from all sides, fall upon us, Ajax most fiercely (...)» (Fairclough, 1916)

¹⁶ Quintus Smyrnaeus, The Fall of Troy, 12.565-606: «One heart was steadfast, and one soul clear-eyed, Cassandra. Never her words were unfulfilled; yet was their utter truth, by Fate’s decree, ever as idle wind in the hearers’ ears, that no bar to Troy’s ruin might be set. (...) others in like sort cried shame on her, and said she spoke but lies, saying that ruin and Fate’s heavy stroke were hard at hand. They knew not their own doom, and mocked, and thrust her back from that huge Horse for fain she was to smite its beams apart, or burn with ravening fire. She snatched a brand of blazing pine-wood from the hearth and ran in fury: in the other hand she bare a two-edged halberd: on that Horse of Doom she rushed, to cause the Trojans to behold with their own eyes the ambush hidden there. But straightway from her hands they plucked and flung afar the fire and steel, and careless turned to the feast; for darkened o’er them their last night. Within the horse the Argives joyed to hear the uproar of Troy’s feasters setting at naught Cassandra, but they marveled that she knew so well the Achaeans’ purpose and device.» (Way, 1913)

¹⁷ Plutarch, The Parallel Lives, The Life of Camillus, 20.5-6: «And a very prevalent story had it that the famous Palladium of Troy was hidden away there, having been brought to Italy by Aeneas. There are some who say that it is the Samothracian images which are hidden there, and they tell the tale of Dardanus bringing these to Troy, after he had founded that city, and consecrating them there with celebration of their rites; and of Aeneas, at the capture of Troy, stealing them away and preserving them until he settled in Italy. Others still, pretending to have larger knowledge in these matters, say that two small jars are stored away there, of which one is open and empty, and the other full and sealed up, and that both are visible only to the

3. WHAT WAS A VESTAL?

Vestals were virgin priestesses¹⁸. They represented roman morality (Lindemaier, 1996: 143). Their impurity meant disruption of the sacred order (*pax deorum*), it was a capital offense (Kroppenberg, 2010: 428), an act of treason against the city and violation of a social taboo (Dowling, 2001: 44).

A relationship with a priestess was considered incest (*incestum*). Why? If she was daughter of the State, having sex with her was like assaulting the city. In the legend of Rhea Silvia she got pregnant after the invasion of Alba Longa, by her uncle Amulius (or god Mars) who had made war to her father, king Numitor. Her babies survived. Romulus became the first sovereign of Rome and captured the Sabine women. These stories of violence probably explained why vestals had an initiation ritual of “capture” (*captio*)¹⁹ that separated them from their original families, to make them faithful to the state.

There were vestals in Alba Longa²⁰. When were they introduced in Rome? According to Plutarch, there was no consensus, perhaps by Romulus or Numa

holy virgins. But others think that these knowing ones have been led astray by the fact that the virgins, at the time of which I am now speaking, cast the most of their sacred treasures into two jars, and hid them underground in the temple of Quirinus, whence that place, down to the present time, has the name of *Doliola* or *Jars*.» (Perrin, 1914c.)

¹⁸ Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.283: «You ask why the goddess is tended by virgin ministers. Of that also I will discover the true causes. They say that Juno and Ceres were born of Ops by Saturn's seed; the third daughter was Vesta. The other two married; both are reported to have had offspring; of the three one remained, who refused to submit to a husband. What wonder if a virgin delights in a virgin minister and allows only chaste hands to touch her sacred things? Conceive of Vesta as naught but the living flame, and you see that no bodies are born of flame. Rightly, therefore, is she a virgin who neither gives nor takes seeds, and she loves companions in her virginity.» (Frazer, 1931).

¹⁹ «This meant that the Vestal was taken out of the legal connection with her family. The violent aspect of this process is expressed by the term *captio*. The girl was wrested from her father's control, a ritual representation of the conflict between the state and the authority of the *pater familias* over the girl. With the termination of a father's authority over his daughter, she became a legal entity *sui iuris*, and it must be added, she did not come under the so-called guardianship of women (*tutela mulierum*). Whereas other Roman women, from the point of view of civil law, only existed in connection with a man, either as a wife subject to her husband's control, as a daughter of a household, or as a legal entity *sui iuris* with a guardian, this did not apply to a Vestal.» (Kroppenberg, 2010: 423)

²⁰ Titus Livius, *History of Rome*, 1.20.3: «In like manner he designated virgins for Vesta's service – a priesthood, this, that derived from Alba and so was not unsuited to the founder's stock.» (Foster, 1919)

Pompilius.²¹ The second king considered fire as the cause of all things, the ever-living force ordering the universe and, for that, should be revered by vestals.²²

In Rome there were several priestesses, maybe to reward political parties or tribes and maintain peace. King Numa Pompilius chose four vestals, two *Titienses* (Sabine) and two *Ramnes* (Latins).

King Tarquinius Priscus created three new tribes²³ that were Etruscans, like him. Consequently, he added two more vestals (*Luceres*) to the temple.²⁴ Vestals became six after that.

Monarchs choose the vestals directly. In the time of the Republic, the chief priest selected the vestals. After that, emperors became the leaders of religion and picked the priestesses.

Who could be a suitable candidate? There was an age requirement, from six and ten years old. Why? In ancient Rome, the infant mortality rate was really high. First years were crucial, to see if the child was strong enough to survive. After becoming a priestess, she would be well fed. Some of them became fat.

Roman women got married after the age of twelve, though they could get pregnant before, as soon as they had their period and had sex. A girl became a vestal before her first period; if she could guarantee that nobody had touched her improperly, because body

²¹ Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, *Romulus*, 22.1: «It is said also that Romulus first introduced the consecration of fire, and appointed holy virgins to guard it, called Vestals. Others attribute this institution to Numa, although admitting that Romulus was in other ways eminently religious (...)» (Perrin, 1914a)

²² Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives*, *The Life of Camillus*, 20.3-6: «However, some writers state that these virgins have watch and ward over nothing more than the ever-living fire, which Numa the King appointed to be worshipped as the first cause of all things. (...) This principle of fire, then, Numa, who was an extraordinary man, and whose wisdom gave him the repute of holding converse with the Muses, is said to have hallowed and ordered to be kept sleepless, that it might image forth. Others say that this fire is kept burning before the sacred things by way of purification, as among the Greeks, and that other objects within the temple are kept hidden from the gaze of all except these virgins, whom they call Vestals.» (Perrin, 1914c.)

²³ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 3.71.1: «This Nevius, when Tarquinius once desired to create three new tribes out of the knights he had previously enrolled, and to give his own name and the names of his personal friends to these additional tribes, alone violently opposed it and would not allow any of the institutions of Romulus to be altered.» (Cary, 1939).

²⁴ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 2.67.1: «The virgins who serve the goddess were originally four and were chosen by the kings according to the principles established by Numa, but afterwards, from the multiplicity of the sacred rites they perform, their number was increased of six, and has so remained down to our time.» (Cary, 1937)

corruption was considered inappropriate for the job²⁵. So the criteria was not so much age, but purity.

Other prerequisites may have changed with time. Exactly how much, it's difficult to know, but roman vestals were initially Patricians, probably educated for that, and usually had other priests in the family. The Republic allowed a power shift and Plebeians priestesses came along. At some point in History, Rome seemed worried about not having enough candidates to the temple or only unsuited ones (like descends from slaves or with deficiencies)²⁶. What happened?

In the third century BC, there was a law (*Lex Papia*) determining that girls should be chosen by lot, from a group of twenty, in an informal people's assembly (*contio*). Probably there was a lot of contenders back then. But applicants diminished, for political reasons, since daughters needed to get married with their parents' allies (especially in times of civil war) and because their parents feared that girls could be condemned to death. Later on, each time around, there was probably only one candidate (Kroppenberg, 2010: 427).

²⁵ «It seems that consensus has generally been reached over the view that the holiness of the priestesses is to be directly related to their virginity and purity, a view that assumes that the chastity of the Vestals is simply a more extreme example of a phenomenon found commonly in the Greek world. For it is well known that the popular belief that sexual activity was polluting and thus disqualified a person from close contact with the deity found expression in many sets of cult regulation » (Beard, 1980: 12)

²⁶ Aulus Gellius, *Attick Nights*, 1.12.1-8: «(...) it is unlawful for a girl to be chosen who is less than six, or more than ten, years old; she must also have both father and mother living; she must be free too from any impediment in her speech, must not have impaired hearing, or be marked by any other bodily defect; she must not herself have been freed from paternal control, nor her father before her, even if her father is still living and she is under the control of her grandfather; neither one nor both of her parents may have been slaves or engaged in mean occupations. But they say that one whose sister has been chosen to that priesthood acquires exemption, as well as one whose father is a flamen or an augur, one of the Fifteen in charge of the Sibylline Books, one of the Seven who oversee the banquets of the gods, or a dancing priest of Mars. Exemption from that priesthood is regularly allowed also to the betrothed of a pontiff and to the daughter of a priest of the tubilustrium. Furthermore the writings of Ateius Capito inform us that the daughter of a man without residence in Italy must not be chosen, and that the daughter of one who has three children must be excused.» (Rolfe, 1927)

4. WHAT DID VESTALS DO?

Vestals were state symbols. They enjoyed great political power²⁷ as guardians of the sacred flame, which functioned a lot like a heart keeping people alive; and it protected the city from rape (invasion perpetrated by an army).

Priestesses started working as kids and received money for it²⁸. They learned their craft in the first ten years, as juniors or apprentices, so they probably couldn't be left alone, performing rituals by themselves, to avoid mistakes. If they were unsupervised when something went wrong, an older vestal (perhaps *maxima*) would be considered responsible for what happened.²⁹ Middle level was mostly operational and also lasted ten years. Then women became experts and teachers. As senior staff they were highly prestigious. After thirty years of work they could end their religious commitment and get married (or live alone, since they could not return to their original family); or chose to stay in the temple until death.³⁰

The *pontifex maximus* could punish vestals for misbehavior, but only for incompetence, disobedience or small things³¹. When they had lovers and perpetual fire went out, because they were impure, penalty was death. Vestals were buried alive. They were left alone, starving to death, in an underground cell.³² Descriptions of what this was

²⁷ Vestals: «They embodied the health and well-being of the Roman state. In their role as guardians of the city's sacred flame, the vestals enjoyed greater political influence (and endured harsher scrutiny) than any other group of women in the ancient world» (Dowling, 2001: 42)

²⁸ Livy, History of Rome, 1.20: «(...) [King Numa Pompilius gave these women] a stipend from the public treasury, and by the rule of virginity and other observances invested them with awe and sanctity.» (Foster, 1919).

²⁹ Story about vestal Aemilia. Cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, The Roman Antiquities, 2.68.3-5 (Cary, 1937).

³⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Roman Antiquities, 2.67.2-3: «They were required to remain undefiled by marriage for the space of thirty years, devoting themselves to offering sacrifices and performing the other rites ordained by law. During the first ten years their duty was to learn their functions, in the second ten to perform them, and during the remaining ten to teach others. After the expiration of the term of thirty years nothing hindered those who so desired from marrying, upon laying aside their fillets and the other insignia of their priesthood. And some, though very few, have done this; but they came to ends that were not at all happy or enviable. In consequence, the rest, looking upon their misfortunes as ominous, remain virgins in the temple of the goddess till their death, and then once more another is chosen by the pontiffs to supply the vacancy. Many high honors have been granted them by the commonwealth, as a result of which they feel no desire either for marriage or for children (...)» (Cary, 1937).

³¹ Plutarch, The Parallel Lives, The life of Numa, 10.4: «For their minor offences the virgins are punished with stripes, the Pontifex Maximus sometimes scourging the culprit on her bare flesh, in a dark place, with a curtain interposed.» (Perrin, 1914b)

³² That's probably how Rhea Silvia died (the mother of Romulus and Remus). If so, it was a symbolic ritual.

like are in Table 1. For the contrary, a chaste vestal was buried within the boundaries of Rome (Kroppenberg, 2010: 430).

Table 1: Buried Alive – Vestal’s Punishments Descriptions

Plutarch Account ³³	Dionysius Account ³⁴
<p>«(...) she that has broken her vow of chastity is buried alive near the Colline gate. Here a little ridge of earth extends for some distance along the inside of the city-wall; the Latin word for it is "agger." Under it a small chamber is constructed, with steps leading down from above. In this are placed a couch with its coverings, a lighted lamp, and very small portions of the necessaries of life, such as bread, a bowl of water, milk, and oil, as though they would thereby absolve themselves from the charge of destroying by hunger a life which had been consecrated to the highest services of religion. Then the culprit herself is placed on a litter, over which coverings are thrown and fastened down with cords so that not even a cry can be heard from within, and carried through the forum. All the people there silently make way for the litter, and follow it without uttering a sound, in a terrible depression of soul. No other spectacle is more appalling, nor does any other day bring more gloom to the city than this. When the litter reaches its destination, the attendants unfasten the cords of the coverings. Then the high-priest, after stretching his hands toward heaven and uttering certain mysterious prayers before the fatal act, brings forth the culprit, who is closely veiled, and places her on the steps leading down into the chamber. After this he turns away his face, as do the rest of the priests, and when she has gone down, the steps are taken up, and great quantities of earth are thrown into the entrance to the chamber, hiding it away, and make the place level with the rest of the mound. Such is the punishment of those who break their vow of virginity.»</p>	<p>«(...) severe penalties have been established for their [vestals] misdeeds. It is the pontiffs who by law both inquire into and punish these offences; to Vestals who are guilty of lesser misdemeanors they scourge with rods, but those who have suffered defilement they deliver up to the most shameful and the most miserable death. While they are yet alive they are carried upon a bier with all the formality of a funeral, their friends and relations attending them with lamentations, and after being brought as far as the Colline Gate, they are placed in an underground cell prepared within the walls, clad in their funeral attire; but they are not given a monument or funeral rites or any other customary solemnities. There are many indications, it seems, when a priestess is not performing her holy functions with purity, but the principal one is the extinction of the fire, which the Romans dread above all misfortunes, looking upon it, from whatever cause it proceeds, as an omen that portends the destruction of the city; and they bring fire again into the temple with many supplicatory rites, concerning which I shall speak on the proper occasion.»</p>

Sources: Perrin, 1914b; Cary, 1937.

³³ Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives*, *The life of Numa*, 10.4-7 (Perrin, 1914b)

³⁴ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 2.67.3-5 (Cary, 1937).

Vestals could save someone from death³⁵, testify in a court of law and make their own will³⁶ (otherwise their property would revert to the state)³⁷. They were not politicians but made petitions, conveyed messages and could be deployed in diplomatic missions. Their influence was considered useful in times of crisis and trust worthy to keep wills, treaties and other important documents in their very special archive (*Penus*).³⁸

Vestals also baked *mola salsa*, used in animal sacrifices (*immolatio*), made of spelt and salt, for purification purposes. They had expiation rites and other rituals, like walking to porta Capena to fetch water from a well.

These public duties could not be done so regularly by women that had families to take care (Lindemaier, 1996: 140). Therefore, priestesses were exclusively dedicated to the state and should not occupy themselves in private matters. They were constantly in the public eye³⁹ to prove their good reputation at the sight of many witnesses (Lindemaier, 1996: 143-144).

³⁵ Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives*, *The life of Numa*, 10.3: «When they appear in public, the fasces are carried before them, and if they accidentally meet a criminal on his way to execution, his life is spared; but the virgin must make oath that the meeting was involuntary and fortuitous, and not of design. He who passes under the litter on which they are borne, is put to death.» (Perrin, 1914b)

³⁶ Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives*, *The life of Numa*, 10.3: «But Numa bestowed great privileges upon them, such as the right to make a will during the life time of their fathers, and to transact and manage their other affairs without a guardian, like the mothers of three children.» (Perrin, 1914b)

³⁷ Aulus Gellius, *Attick Nights*, 1.12.12-13: «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."» (Rolfe, 1927)

³⁸ «(...) they acted as state notaries and maintained an archive of important documents of public law and state policy, including contracts signed by the civil war parties of the Roman Republic as well as the last wills and testaments of Caesar, Antonius, and Augustus.» (Kroppenberg, 2010: 421).

³⁹ «Outside of the shrine of Vesta, a *virgo* was a public person. As a symbol of the Roman state she was expected to appear in public and was meant to be seen. On no account did she lead an exclusively contemplative life in monasterial seclusion. During her appearances outside the shrine, which occurred rather often, a Vestal was actually constantly in the public eye. These appearances were virtually orchestrated, for instance by the fact that lictors would accompany her outside the sacred precinct, that consuls and praetors made way for her and lowered their *fasces* before her, that she was the only person in the city allowed to use a two-wheeled vehicle (*carpentum*), and that she had her own seat of honor in the theater. Together with the magistrates and the senate, Vestals actively participated in many rural and municipal festivals and in a large number of nonrecurring ceremonies, and they regularly attended religious events for the imperial family during the Principate» (Kroppenberg, 2010: 420)

Vestals were involved in many religious formalities like *Bona Dea*, the Ides of May,⁴⁰ Lupercalia and Parilia.⁴¹ But for the priestesses' perspective, the most important festival was *Vestalia*, consecrated to their goddess. In June, the temple of Vesta was open for women all over the city. They visited the holy fire, for some time, barefoot and with hair down. This was done like this because, in the past, the roman forum had been a swamp.⁴²

Roman girls used vestal's hairstyle (six braids) at their nuptial ceremony. When a father chose a day for his daughter to get married, he would respected tradition, the favors of Vesta or even the advices of the *Flamen Dialis* (Jupiter's priest) wife⁴³.

Young girls prayed to Vesta. Woman pleaded for her protection. Society felt the need for security and priestesses delivered as they could, with full time commitment. Their regular rituals were made in the name of all citizens. Therefore, if Vesta despised

⁴⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 1.38.3: «(...) in the month of May, on what they call the Ides (the day they mean to be the middle of the month); on this day, after offering the preliminary sacrifices according to the laws, the pontifices, as the most important of the priests are called, and with them the virgins who guard the perpetual fire, the praetors, and such of the other citizens as may lawfully be present at the rites, throw from the sacred bridge into the stream of the Tiber thirty effigies made in the likeness of men, which they call Argei.» (Cary, 1937)

⁴¹ «Under the direction of the city's chief priest, the Pontifex Maximus, they were expected to officiate at various ceremonies throughout the roman calendar year, including the *Lupercalia* (an annual fertility festival) and the *Parilia* (the annual celebration of the founding of Rome.)» (Dowling, 2001: 44).

⁴² Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.395: «It chanced that at the festival of Vesta I was returning by that way which now joins the New Way to the Roman Forum. Hither I saw a matron coming down barefoot: amazed I held my peace and halted. An old woman of the neighborhood perceived me, and bidding me sit down she addressed me in quavering tones, shaking her head. "This ground, where now the forums are, was once occupied by wet swamps: a ditch was drenched with the water that overflowed from the river. That Lake of Curtius, which supports dry altars, is now solid ground, but formerly it was a lake. Where now the processions are wont to defile through the Velabrum to the Circus, there was naught but willows and hollow canes; often the roisterer, returning home over the waters of the suburb, used to tip a stave and rap out tipsy words at passing sailors. Yonder god (Vertumnus), whose name is appropriate to various shapes, had not yet derived it from damming back the river (*averso amne*). Here, too, there was a grove overgrown with bulrushes and reeds, and a marsh not to be trodden with booted feet. The pools have receded, and the river confines its water within its banks, and the ground is now dry; but the old custom survives." The old woman thus explained the custom. "Farewell, good old dame," said I; "may what remains of life to thee be easy all!"» (Frazer, 1931).

⁴³ Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.219: «I have a daughter, and I pray she may outlive me; I shall always be happy while she survives. When I would give her to a son-in-law, I inquired what items were suitable for weddings and what should be avoided. Then it was shown to me that June after the sacred Ides is good for brides and good for bridegrooms, but the first part of this month was found to be unsuitable for marriages; for the holy wife of the Flamen Dialis spoke thus to me: "Until the calm Tiber shall have carried down to the sea on its yellow current the filth from the temple of Ilian Vesta, it is not lawful for me to comb down my hair with a toothed comb, or cut my nails with iron, or touch my husband, though he is the priest of Jupiter, and though he is given to me for life. Thou, too, be in no hurry; thy daughter will better wed when Vesta's fire shall shine on a clean floor."» (Frazer, 1931).

their priestesses (when they were impure), the city was considered to be in imminent danger.⁴⁴

5. WHERE DID VESTALS LIVE?

The *atrium vestae* was located in the political center of the city (in the *Forum Romanum* or *Forum Magnum* or simply *Forum*), at the confluence of the Capitoline and the Palatine hills (Horvat, 2007: 280). This was probably Rome's first public space and the Senate used to gather here. But the city had several meeting points, among them the *Forum Boarium*, the cattle market, located between the Capitoline and the Aventine hills. Next to Carmenta's door was the *Forum Holitorium*, the market for vegetables. After the end of the Republic, other forums appeared, with names of emperors (see Figure 1).

When Rome had kings, *atrium vestae* was the sacred space of Vesta. Included the *aedes*, the *Regia* (the king's house)⁴⁵ and the *Locus* (grove). But in the Republic and the Empire, the *atrium vestae* was only a house. This question is not insignificant, as there is confusion in the terms that were used (*regia*, ou *atrium regium* ou *regia vestae*)⁴⁶ (see Figure 1).

An *aedes* was a building with an altar. It could be inside a *templum*, meaning a larger holy place where augurs could watch birds or other signs of the gods (Aldrete, 2004: 150). But this text uses the (more modern) expression of temple as a synonym, to avoid confusions.

The temple of Vesta was built by King Numa. It protected an altar of perpetual fire. The roof probably had a vent at the apex, so that smoke could escape. A dome protected it from the showers of rain. The building had a circular plant⁴⁷ because “Earth

⁴⁴ Cicero, Pro Fonteio, 46.48: «A vestal virgin is stretching out towards you her suppliant hands, those same hands which she is accustomed to stretch out, on your behalf, to the immortal gods. Consider how dangerous, how arrogant a deed it would be for you to reject her entreaties, when, if the immortal gods were to despise her prayers, all these things which we see around us could not be preserved. »

⁴⁵ Platner, 1929, pp. 440-443.

⁴⁶ Platner, 1929, pp. 58-60.

⁴⁷ «In the Forum there is the temple of Vesta, whose cult, according to the traditional records, was instituted by Numa Pompilio, that chose the first Vestals and it is supposed that he has built the temple, which represents, with his circular plant, the typical cult and hierophany place The roman architecture admits an idea of classicism with functional accent, its practical spirit decided structural and formal problems with the circle. The circular plant, under the roman architects originates the cupola, is the sacred architectural element par excellence and is the significant of the abstract concept of center.» (Horvat, 2007: 280)

is like a ball”⁴⁸. Outside it had a peristyle of columns and some steps to the floor, for «(...) none who wish are hindered from entering in the daytime, whereas it is not lawful for any man to remain there at night.» (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Roman Antiquities, 2.67.1)⁴⁹

Fig. 1: Map of the Forum (Republic period)



Source: Shepherd, 1911, Table 24.

After King Numa, the temple of Vesta was rebuilt several times. It's difficult to imagine how it was like, in the beginning, but was always curved. Some specific characteristics, like columns, may have changed a bit.

⁴⁸ Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.249: «They say that Rome had forty times celebrated the Parilia when the goddess, Guardian of Fire, was received in her temple; it was the work of that peaceful king, than whom no man of more god-fearing temper was ever born in Sabine land. The buildings which now you see roofed with bronze you might then have seen roofed with thatch, and the walls were woven of tough osiers. This little spot, which now supports the Hall of Vesta, was then the great palace of unshorn Numa. Yet the shape of the temple, as it now exists, is said to have been its shape of old, and it is based on a sound reason. Vesta is the same as the Earth; under both of them is a perpetual fire; the earth and the hearth are symbols of the home. The earth is like a ball, resting on no prop; so great a weight hangs on the air beneath it. Its own power of rotation keeps its orb balanced; it has no angle which could press on any part; and since it is placed in the middle of the world and touches no side more or less, if it were not convex, it would be nearer to some part than to another, and the universe would not have the earth as its central weight. There stands a globe hung by Syracusan art in closed air, a small image of the vast vault of heaven, and the earth is equally distant from the top and bottom. That is brought about by its round shape. The form of the temple is similar: there is no projecting angle in it; a dome protects it from the showers of rain.» (Frazer, 1931).

⁴⁹ Cary, 1937.

The temple was probably burned when the Gauls invaded Rome, on 18 July 390 BC (traditional date) but «(...) the fire of Vesta, however, was snatched up and carried off by the vestal virgins in their flight, along with the other sacred things entrusted to their care.» (Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives, The Life of Camillus*, 20.3)⁵⁰

Vestals found themselves hopeless in 241 BC. They weren't able to rescue the "sacred things", of which Rome's safety depended on. But a man stepped in. The *pontifex maximus* Lucius Caecilius Metellus saved «(...) the *Palladium*, the conical image (*acus*) of the Mother of the Gods, the earthen chariot which had been brought from Veii, the ashes of Orestes, the scepter of Priam, the veil of Iliona, and the sacred shields (*ancilia*).» (Frazer, 1931 – Ovid, *Fasti* 6.437 and footnote 48). Supposedly, the temple of Vesta also had a *fascinus* (phallos) that was worshiped in fertility rituals (Beard, 1980: 19).

The *Regia*, originally, was the house of King Numa. The vestals' idea was imported from *Alba Longa*, where there was only one vestal of royal blood (Livy, *Roman History*, 1.20). So, it's not impossible that, back then, vestals lived in the same building as the king, for the goddess's temple was nearby (see Figure 1). In the Republic, it probably became a meeting place for the college of pontiffs, whose gatherings vestals also attended.

Nearby, the *Domus Publica* was a building divided in two: one for the *pontifex maximus* and other for the *rex sacrorum* (lord of the sacred things). Since these priests inherited religious responsibilities from kings, the *Domus Publica* could have been inhabited by kings, perhaps after *Regia* became too small for them. After August, emperors were the new religious leaders and they lived at the Palatine (palace comes from this word) and not at the *Domus Publica* (see Figure 1).

The *Lucus* still existed, for rituals, albeit in small size, entrenched between houses and public buildings; but would disappear later on, during the Empire; was the last dwelling place for the vestals, for they had their tombs in it.

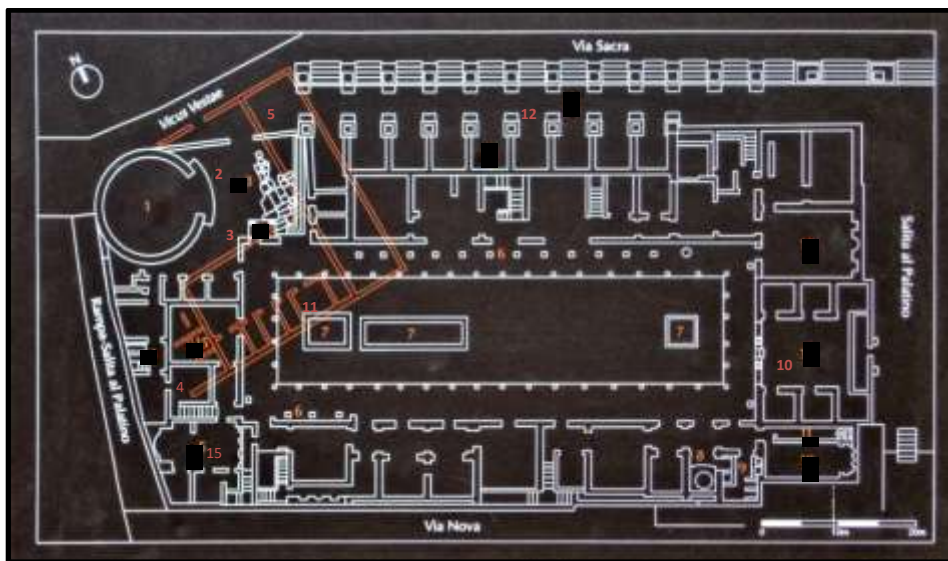
The *lucus* was a place of meditation for the vestals, where they listened to messages from the goddess. There is even an account, dating back to the fourth century

⁵⁰ Perrin, 1914c.

BC. According to records, recalled by Cicero, a voice warned the Romans about imminent danger, before the Gaul's invasion, but sadly was neglected at first⁵¹ (see Figure 1).

The *Atrium Vestae*, as a house, was initially a small (see Figure 2). Had an altar at the entrance of the house. Older houses were probably like this, or had a shire at the *vestibule*; or a *lararium* at the *atrium*, that included *Lares*, *Manes*, *Penates* and *Vesta*.

Fig. 2: Atrium Vestae



Source: Author (based on Lyubinova, 2011)

Legend: Temple before 64 BC: 1) Temple of Vesta; 2) patio of slabs with exit to the street; 3) altar at the entrance of the house; 4) old kitchen; 5) *Penus* (Archive); 11) cubicle (six rooms in total, next to each other). **Temple after 64 BC:** 6) Vestal statues along a peristyle with garden; 7) fountains; 8) mills; 9) kitchen / pantry with amphorae; 10) wing with six cubicles, three in front of three others; 12) shops (leased?) Facing the street and portico along *via sacra*.

The *Atrium Vestae* had six small rooms; a *Penus* (archive) for testaments, agreements, and other documents; a kitchen for baking *mola salsa*; a patio of slabs opened to the street and perhaps not much more. It was rebuilt and enlarged after the fire of Rome (64 AD). Only then became a magnificent complex of two floors (see Figure 2).

⁵¹ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 1.45.101: «Not long before the capture of the city by the Gauls, a voice, issuing from Vesta's sacred grove, which slopes from the foot of the Palatine Hill to New Road, was heard to say, 'the walls and gates must be repaired; unless this is done the city will be taken.' Neglect of this warning, while it was possible to heed it, was atoned for after the supreme disaster had occurred; for, adjoining the grove, an altar, which is now to be seen enclosed with a hedge, was dedicated to Aius the Speaker.» (Falconer, 1923).

6. WHO WERE THE VESTALS?

Rome had many vestals. Authors wrote mostly about the ones who had done something wrong, or were escape goats and not truly guilty of misconduct.

According to tradition, Amata was the first vestal. Who was she? Nobody knows. Authors disagree on this subject. The word itself means “the beloved one” (translation from Latin⁵²) so it could be a qualifier, rather than a person. But Aeneas’ mother-in-law was called Amata⁵³ (see Table 2).

Table 2: List of vestals – Monarchy – Hypothesis 1

City	King	Kingdom (x)	Vestal	Source
Alba Longa	Latinus		Amata ⁵⁴	Gellius, AN, 1.12.14 ⁵⁵
	Amulius		Rhea Silvia	Livy, HR, 1.3.11 ⁵⁶
Rome	Romulus	753/717 BC		
	Numa Pompilius	717/673 BC	Gegania Verenia Canuleia Tarpeia	Plutarch, Numa, 10.1 ⁵⁷
	Tulio Hostilius	673/642 BC		
	Ancus Marcius	640/616 BC		
	Tarquinius Priscus	673/642 BC	Pinaria	Dionysius, RA, 3.67.3 ⁵⁸
	Servius Tullius	578/535 BC		
	Tarquinius Superbus	534/509 BC		

(x) Indicative (according to tradition).

Source: Author

⁵² Beard, 1980: 14.

⁵³ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 1.64.2-3: «For the Rutulians had again revolted from Latinus, choosing for their leader one of the deserters, named Tyrrhenus, who was a nephew of Amata, the wife of Latinus. This man, blaming Latinus in the matter of Lavinia's marriage, because he had ignored his kinsmen and allied his family with outsiders, and being goaded on by Amata and encouraged by others, had gone over to the Rutulians with the forces he commanded. War arose out of these complaints and in a sharp battle that ensued Latinus, Tyrrhenus and many others were slain; nevertheless, Aeneas and his people gained the victory.» (Cary, 1937)

⁵⁴ Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, 1.12.19: «The Vestal is called “Amata” when taken by the chief pontiff, because there is a tradition that the first one who was chosen bore that name.» (Rolfe, 1927)

⁵⁵ Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, 1.12.14: «I take thee, Amata, as one who has fulfilled all the legal requirements, to be priestess of Vesta, to perform the rites which it is lawful for a Vestal to perform for the Roman people, the Quirites.» (Rolfe, 1927)

⁵⁶ Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, 1.3.11: «Adding crime to crime, he [Amulius] destroyed Numitor's male issue; and Rhea Silvia, his brother's daughter, he appointed a Vestal under presence of honoring, her, and by consigning her to perpetual virginity, deprived her of the hope of children.» (Foster, 1919)

⁵⁷ Plutarch, *Parallel Lives – The life of Numa*, 10.1: «In the beginning, then, they say that Gegania and Verenia were consecrated to this office by Numa, who subsequently added to them Canuleia and Tarpeia.» (Perrin, 1914b)

⁵⁸ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 3.67.3: «For in his reign [Tarquinius Priscus] a priestess named Pinaria, the daughter of Publius, was discovered to be approaching sacrifices in a state of unchastity.» (Cary, 1939)

At this point there are three options. First, the wife of King Latino⁵⁹ and mother of Lavinia was not a virgin, therefore, she was not a vestal. Second, she was a priestess when she was younger, before marriage. Third, the first vestal was not a virgin but a king's wife.

The association between a vestal and a queen (as a possibility in the early days) got some attention from scholars. A priestess would have to be chaste, as well as a wife, but while the first was abstinent from sex (virgin), the second was faithful to her only husband (*pudicitia*). Ritual tasks had much in common with shores of an ancient housewife, like taking care of the fireplace (to keep the house warm, especially important at winter time), cleaning (vestals in the temple and wives at their husbands' house) and baking (*mola salsa* versus bread). A vestal would be involved in rituals concerning harvest or fertility, like *Fordicidia* or *Consualia*; as well as rituals directly associated with married women, like the festival of *Bona Dea*. A priestess would dress with bands around the head (*vittae*) and a long dress (*stola*), much like a matron (Beard, 1980: 13-17). There are specific differences between vestals and matrons, but the original model may have changed over the centuries.

Amata was a contemporary of Aeneas, a hero of the Trojan War. If they were true people, and not just mythological characters, when did they live? Sometime between the fourteenth and the twelfth century BC⁶⁰.

Rhea Silvia is a hero from the eighth century BC. She was not a queen, a wife or a matron, but a king's daughter and a virgin vestal. This is important. Girls used vestals' hairstyle (*sex crines*) when they got married and the whole ceremony looked a lot like a *captio* of the girl from her father. Punishments allowed to a *pontifex maximus* over vestals were not much different from what a paterfamilias would be expected to do if his daughter would misbehave (Beard, 1980: 16).

⁵⁹ «Amata, the wife of king Latinus and mother of Lavinia, who, when Aeneas sued for the hand of the latter, opposed him, because she had already promised Lavinia to Turnus. At the same time she was instigated by Alecto, who acted according to the request of Juno, to stir up the war with Turnus. This story fills the greater part of the seventh book of Virgil's Aeneid. When Amata was informed that Turnus had fallen in battle, she hung herself.» (Smith, 1867: 137)

⁶⁰ «As for the date of the war itself, most calculations varied between around 1250 BC in Herodotus and 1135 BC in Ephorus; the earliest was 1334 BC in Doulis of Samos, the most influential the date arrived at by the librarian of Alexandria, Ertosthenes (1184-1183 BC).» (Wood, 1998: 28). Today's archeology has tried to resolve the mystery, but scholars still haven't agreed on the fall of Troy VI or Troy VII (a, b1, b2, b3). Others tried to find clues in natural events like solar eclipses, for example, in 1312 (Henriksson, 2012: 63). Nobody really knows. Troy was a city of several layers, who lived many wars throughout the centuries.

Rhea Silvia got pregnant after the invasion of Alba Longa by her uncle's army⁶¹. Allergy, the father of her babies was god Mars, but that's another way of saying that they were sons of war. Her twins were illegitimate babies, because she never got married and they were not adopted later on. Bastards could become slaves for they were not considered citizen. New king *Amulius* decided to send them to death. If he was the real father of Romulus and Remus that would be the reason why vestals, later on, were accused of *incestum* when they lost their virginity. If had killed his father, maybe that explained the myth about Jupiter dethroning his father Saturn from the Capitoline Hill.

The first king of Rome was Romulus. Did he have vestals? Some legends speak about Hersilia, his wife and queen; and Tarpeia, Spurius Tarpeius' daughter, who was a maiden and a traitor, who put the romans in danger by opening the city gates to the enemy (Livy, History of Rome, 1.11). But not all authors agree with Livy about who these two women were and what they did exactly.

Romulus' feminine references were perhaps: his mother (Rhea Silvia, the vestal) and Larentia (adopted mother and wife of Faustulus, cf. Livy, History of Rome, 1.4.7.).

Perhaps roman vestals followed the example of Rhea Silvia, more than Amata's. But they could also be followers of Cassandra, the legendary daughter of King Priam of Troy that Aeneas admired (see explanation in chapter 2).

⁶¹ Cicero wrote about one of Rhea Silvia's alleged dreams (based on Ennius), that he admits being "the fiction of a poet's brain, yet it is nor contrary to our experience with real dreams" (Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 1.20.42). The dream was the following. Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 1.20.40-41:

«The vestal from her sleep in fright awoke
And to the startled maid, whose trembling hands
A lamp did bear, thus spoke in tearful tones:
'O daughter of Eurydice, though whom
Our father loved, from my whole frame departs
The vital force. For in my dreams I saw
A man of beauteous form, who bore me off
Through willows sweet, along the fountain's brink,
To places strange. And then, my sister dear,
Alone, with halting step and longing heart,
I seemed to wander, seeking thee in vain;
There was no path to make my footing sure.
And then I thought my father spoke these words:
"Great sorrows, daughter, thou must first endure
Until thy fortune from the Tiber rise."
When this was said he suddenly withdrew;
Nor did his cherished vision come again,
Though oft I raised my hand to heaven's dome
And called aloud in tearful, pleading voice.
Then sleep departing left me sick at heart.'» (Falconer, 1923).

The second king of Rome was Numa Pompilius. He had four vestals, two *Titienses* (Sabine), two *Ramnes* (Latins) and their names were: Gegania, Verenia, Canuleia and Tarpeia. Was this Tarpeia Spurius Tarpeius' daughter? We don't know.

Tarquinius Priscus «(...) seems also to have first devised the punishments which are inflicted by the pontiffs on those Vestals who do not preserve their chastity, being moved to do so either by his own judgment or, as some believe, in obedience to a dream; and these punishments, according to the interpreters of religious rites, were found after his death among the Sibylline oracles.» (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 3.67.3)⁶². Vestal Pinaria was punished by him. She was accused of lack of chastity (see Table 2). Why?

She was daughter of Publius Pinarius, a patrician (native). The Pinarii were considered responsible for Hercules' cult (had Greek ancestors?)⁶³ and were long associated to religion. They must have been powerful people.

Tarquinius Priscus was an Etruscan ruler (an outsider). He made political reforms, like creating three more tribes and adding two more priestesses to the temple of Vesta. As an old man, he gave up warlike activities and faced strong opposition, especially from augur Attus Navius (religious figure). Many tried to “drive him out as an impure person”.⁶⁴ Consequently, her death could've something to do with all this.

According to tradition, Rome was a Republic between 509-27 BC.⁶⁵ It had a college of pontiffs that supervised religion and applied justice; if necessary, over the vestals that were

⁶² Cary, 1939.

⁶³ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 1.40.4: « Those who were then instructed in the Greek ceremony, they say, were the Potitii and the Pinarii, whose descendants continued for a long time to have the superintendence of these sacrifices, in the manner he had appointed, the Potitii presiding at the sacrifice and taking the first part of the burnt-offerings, while the Pinarii were excluded from tasting the inwards and held second rank in those ceremonies which had to be performed by both of them together. It is said that this disgrace was fixed upon them for having been late in arriving; for though they had been ordered to be present early in the morning, they did not come till the entrails had been eaten.» (Cary, 1937)

⁶⁴ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 3.72.6-7: «By delivering such harangues in the Forum these men, who were bold and not lacking in eloquence, inflamed the minds of many of the plebeians, and these, when Tarquinius came into the Forum to offer his defense, endeavored to drive him out as an impure person. However, they were not strong enough to prevail over the truth or to persuade the people to depose him from power. And after both Tarquinius himself had Middle Ages powerful defense and refuted the calumny against him, and his son-in-law Tullius, to whom he had given one of his two daughters in marriage and who had the greatest influence with the people, had stirred the Romans to compassion, the accusers were looked upon as slanderers and wicked men, and they left the Forum in great disgrace.» (Cary, 1939)

⁶⁵ «The Roman Republic, which is conventionally dated from 509 to 27 B.C. had an unwritten constitution that controlled its political system. The constitution established a series of institutions (such as the senate) and offices (such as the two consulships), and defined their powers; it determined the rights of citizens and

considered impure⁶⁶. Who were those vestals? Some names are listed as possibilities in Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Table 3: List of vestals – Republic (V-III BC) – Hypothesis 2

Century	Vestal	Source
V BC	Oppia	Livy, HR, 2.42.11 ⁶⁷
	Urbina	Dionysius, RA, 9.40.3 ⁶⁸
	Popilia	Orosius, 2.8.13 ⁶⁹
	Gaia Taracia (or Fufetia)	Gellius, AN, 7.7.2 ⁷⁰
	Postumia	Livy, HR, 4.44.11 ⁷¹
IV BC	Minucia	Livy, HR, 8.15.7 ⁷²

Source: Author - based in Raia, 2015

eligibility for citizenship; it addressed the role of religion in public life; it specified proceedings for lawmaking and adjudication.» (Posner, 2010: 2)

⁶⁶ «From the expulsion of the Etruscan kings until the establishment of the principate in the first century BCE, the republic found a way to ensure that the connection between the Vestals and Roman society was preserved in the judicial process. A religious board, the college of pontiffs, was created to oversee religious affairs and consisted of all the lesser pontiffs, which numbered between three and sixteen throughout Rome's history, all twelve *flamines*, the chief priests of Rome's most important priesthoods, the *rex sacrorum*, the heir to the Etruscan kings' religious authority and perhaps even the Vestals themselves were incorporated into this panel by the first century BCE.310 A panel of such distinction would have had a tremendous power to mark a Vestal in the eyes of the Roman public (...» (Roberts, 2012: 120)

⁶⁷ Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, 2.42.11: «These alarms at length resulted in the condemnation of Oppia, a Vestal virgin, for unchastity, and her punishment.» (Foster, 1919)

⁶⁸ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 9.40.2-3: «While the commonwealth was suffering from such a calamity [pestilence], information was given to the pontiffs by a slave that one of the Vestal virgins who have the care of the perpetual fire, Urbina by name, had lost her virginity and, though unchaste, was performing the public sacrifices. The pontiffs removed her from her sacred offices, brought her to trial, and after her guilt had been clearly established, they ordered her to be scourged with rods, to be carried through the city in solemn procession and then to be buried alive.» (Cary, 1940)

⁶⁹ The 74th Olympiad (484 BC). Orosius, *A History against the Pagans*, 2.8.13: «This was in the seventy-fourth Olympiad, that is, in the two hundred and seventy-fifth year after the founding of the City, at the time when Popilia, a Vestal Virgin, was buried alive at Rome because she had violated her chastity.»

⁷⁰ *Laws Valeria-Horatia* (449 a.C.). Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, 7.7.1-3: «The names of Acca Larentia and Gaia Taracia, or Fufetia as she is sometimes called, are frequent in the early annals. To the former of these after her death, but to Taracia while she still lived, the Roman people paid distinguished honors. And that Taracia, at any rate, was a Vestal virgin is proved by the Horatian law which was laid before the people with regard to her. By this law very many honors are bestowed upon her and among them the right of giving testimony is granted her, and that privilege is given to no other woman in the State. The word *testabilis* is used in the Horatian law itself, and its opposite occurs in the *Twelve Tables*: "Let him be infamous and *intestabilis*, or 'forbidden to testify.' " » (Rolfe, 1927)

⁷¹ Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, 4.44.11-13: «The same year a Vestal virgin named Postumia was put on trial for unchastity. She was innocent of the charge, though open to suspicion because of her pretty clothes and the unmaidenly freedom of her wit. After she had been remanded and then acquitted, the pontifex maximus, in the name of the college, commanded her to abstain from jests, and to dress rather with regard to sanctity than coquetry.» (Foster, 1922)

⁷² Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, 8.15.7: «In that year the Vestal Minucia, suspected in the first instance because of her dress, which was more ornate than became her station, was subsequently accused before the pontiffs on the testimony of a slave, and having been by their decree commanded to keep aloof from the sacred rites and to retain her slaves in her own power, was convicted and buried alive near the Colline Gate, to the right of the paved road in the Polluted Field —so called, I believe, on account of her unchastity...» (Foster, 1926)

Taracia was a prestigious vestal, highly recognized even by legislators. Oppia, Urbinia, Popilia, Postumia and Minutia were all accused of *crimen incesti*. Postumia was saved from charges, after being reprimanded for being vain. The others were buried alive (see Table 3).

Some say Oppia and Minutia were plebeians, but not all authors agree on that.⁷³ Oppia died because of social tension between plebeians and patricians, in a time of prodigies (daily portents implying gods' rage) and foreign war against the Veii and the Volsci.⁷⁴ Minutia was also considered vain but, after accusation from a slave, she was sentenced to death for being unchaste (see Table 3).

Urbinia was probably a scapegoat of desperation, since many people were dying of plague in Rome, at the time, especially pregnant women or having miscarriages⁷⁵ (see Table 3).

⁷³ « Near the beginning of this struggle, in 483 BCE, the Vestal Oppia was accused of *crimen incesti* during an intense debate between plebeians and patricians on land reform that resulted in the execution of an ex-consul. This social conflict did not abate and in 337 BCE the Vestal Minucia was likewise accused during the same year that the plebeians finally obtained a substantial political office, that of consul and censor in 337 BCE. Scholars have argued that both Oppia and Minucia were in fact plebeian Vestals, although there is not sufficient evidence to support this claim, and that these examples of immolation reflect the social struggle.» (Roberts, 2012: 113)

⁷⁴ Titus Livius, The History of Rome, 2.42.6-11: «The desires of the plebs were this year again excited by the charms of the land-law. The tribunes of the plebs endeavored to recommend their democratic office by a democratic law, while the senators, who thought there was frenzy enough and to spare in the populace, without rewarding it, shuddered at the thought of land-grants and encouragements to rashness. The most strenuous of leaders were at hand for the senatorial opposition, in the persons of the consuls. Their party was therefore victorious and not only won an immediate success but, besides, elected as consuls for the approaching year Marcus Fabius, Caeso's brother, and one whom, on account of the prosecution of Spurius Cassius, the people hated even more, namely, Lucius Valerius. This year also there was a conflict with the tribunes. Nothing came of the legislation, and its supporters fell into contempt, from boasting of a measure which they could not carry through. The Fabii were thence-forward held in great repute, after their three successive consulships, which had all without interruption been subjected to the proof of struggles with the tribunes; accordingly the office, as if well invested, was permitted to remain some time in that family. War then broke out with Veii, and the Volsci revolted. But for foreign wars there was almost a superabundance of resources, and men misused them in quarrelling amongst themselves. To increase the general anxiety which was now felt, portents implying the anger of the gods were of almost daily occurrence in the City and the country. For this expression of divine wrath no other reason was alleged by the soothsayers, when they had enquired into it both officially and privately, sometimes by inspecting entrails and sometimes by observing the flight of birds, than the failure duly to observe the rites of religion. These alarms at length resulted in the condemnation of Oppia, a Vestal virgin, for unchastity, and her punishment.» (Foster, 1919)

⁷⁵ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, The Roman Antiquities, 9.40.1-2 «The election of magistrates being at hand, Lucius Pinarius and Publius Furius were chosen consuls. At the very beginning of this year the city was filled with a kind of religious awe and fear of the gods owing to the occurrence of many prodigies and omens. All the augurs and the pontiffs declared that these occurrences were indications of divine anger, aroused because of some rites were not being performed in a pure and holy manner. And not long afterwards the disease known as the pestilence attacked the women, particularly such as were with child, and more of them died than ever before; for as they miscarried and brought forth dead children, they died together with their infants. And neither supplications made at the statues and altars of the gods nor expiatory sacrifices

Sextilia, Tuccia and Caparrocia were convicted of *incestum* and died. According to sources the last one “was hanged”. But Paulus Orosius wrote it in the V century BC and perhaps didn’t fully know the rules applied to an unchaste vestal in the early days. Therefore, Caparrocia most likely hanged herself before being buried alive (see Table 4)

Table 4: List of vestals – Republic (III BC) – Hypothesis 3

Century	Vestal	Source
III BC	Sextilia	Livy, HR, 14 ⁷⁶
	Caparronia	Orosius, HAP, 4.5.9 ⁷⁷
	Tuccia	Livy, HR, 20 ⁷⁸
	Opimia	Livy, HR, 22.57.1-3 ⁷⁹
	Floronia	Livy, HR, 22.57.1-3
	Aemilia	Dionysius, RA, 2.68.3-5 ⁸⁰
	Claudia V (?)	Livy, HR, 29.14 ⁸¹

Source: Author - based in Raia, 2015

performed on behalf of the state and of private households gave the women any respite from their ills.» (Cary, 1940)

⁷⁶ Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, 14: «Sextilia, a vestal, found guilty of incest [lack of chastity], and buried alive.» (Spillan e Edmonds, 1849)

⁷⁷ Orosius, *A History against the Pagans*, 4.5.9: « In the four hundred and eighty-first year after the founding of the City, a great plague raged at Rome. (...) At that time Caparronia, a Vestal Virgin, upon being convicted of unchastity, was hanged. Her seducer and the slaves, who were her accomplices, were also put to death.»

⁷⁸ Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, 20: «Tuccia, a vestal, found guilty of incest [lack of chastity].» (Spillan e Edmonds, 1849)

⁷⁹ Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, 22.57.1: « They were terrified not only by the great disasters they had suffered, but also by a number of prodigies, and in particular because two Vestals, Opimia and Floronia, had in that year been convicted of unchastity. Of these one had been buried alive, as the custom is, near the Colline Gate, and the other had killed herself.» (Foster, 1929)

⁸⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 2.68.3-5: «It is said, then, that once, when the fire had been extinguished through some negligence on the part of Aemilia, who had the care of it at the time and had entrusted it to another virgin, one of those who had been newly chosen and were then learning their duties, the whole city was in great commotion and an inquiry was made by the pontiffs whether there might not have been some defilement of the priestess to account for the extinction of the fire. Thereupon, they say, Aemilia, who was innocent, but distracted at what had happened, stretched out her hands toward the altar and in the presence of the priests and the rest of the virgins cried: "O Vesta, guardian of the Romans' city, if, during the space of nearly thirty years, I have performed the sacred offices to thee in a holy and proper manner, keeping a pure mind and a chaste body, do thou manifest thyself in my defense and assist me and do not suffer thy priestess to die the most miserable of all deaths; but if I have been guilty of any impious deed, let my punishment expiate the guilt of the city." Having said this, she tore off the band of the linen garment she had on and threw it upon the altar, they say, following her prayer; and from the ashes, which had been long cold and retained no spark, a great flame flared up through the linen, so that the city no longer required either expiations or a new fire.» (Cary, 1937)

⁸¹ Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, 29.14.12-14: «The foremost matrons in the state, among whom the name of one in particular, that of Claudia Quinta, is conspicuous, received her. Claudia's repute, previously not unquestioned, as tradition reports it, has made her purity the more celebrated among posterity by a service so devout. The matrons passed the goddess from hand to hand in an unbroken succession to each other, while the entire city poured out to meet her. Censers had been placed before the doors along the route of the bearers, and kindling their incense, people prayed that gracious and benignant she might enter the city of Rome. It was to the Temple of Victory, which is on the Palatine, that they carried the goddess on the day before the Ides of April, and that was a holy day. The people thronged to the Palatine bearing gifts for the goddess, and there was a banquet of the gods, and games also, called the Megalesia.» (Moore, 1949)

Floronia also killed herself after conviction. Opimia was buried alive. The two vestals died and so did their lovers and a human sacrifice (of two Gauls and two Greeks) was offered to the gods at the *Forum Boarium*⁸² (see Table 4).

Aemilia was probably *Vestal Maxima* at the time of the prodigy. First, she was a priestess for almost thirty years, and therefore a veteran. Second, she was blamed for the extinction of the sacred fire, despite having given the vigil to a younger colleague. This procedure was considered an oversight, because the youngster was still learning the craft, not mastering the art of keeping the fire lit when the weather was rough. Then, the leader of the temple asked the goddess to save her; prayed and threw a piece of cloth from her garments to the altar, the fire returned and she was acquitted (see Table 4).

Gens Claudia was proud of their woman, especially of Claudia V⁸³ from the third century BC. She demonstrated her value in performing a prodigy. Apparently, she was able to unbend a boat after she had prayed to *Magna Mater* (Cybele). Her name is usually on the list of vests, and is shown in Table 3. But since she participated in a group dynamics, surrounded by other women, each one trying to prove herself more dignified to carry the statue of the goddess (Vesta had no earthly representation other than the sacred fire), it is more likely that she was a matron of the city of good repute and not so much a virginal vestal. Even Cicero, in *Pro Caelio*, does not refer to Claudia V as a priestess but as a reference to his daughter who was married (see Table 4).

There was another Claudia in the second century BC. She was definitely a vestal and her name is known because she saved her father. He hadn't been granted authorization for a *triumphus* (both civil and religious ceremony celebrating success of a military commander) but he did it anyway, probably because he was a patrician and thought he

⁸² Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, 22.57.2-6: «Lucius Cantilius, a secretary to the pontiffs —one of those who are now called the lesser pontiffs —had been guilty with Floronia, and the Pontifex Maximus had him scourged in the Comitium so severely that he died under the blows. Since in the midst of so many misfortunes this pollution was, as happens at such times, converted into a portent, the decemvirs were commanded to consult the Books, and Quintus Fabius Pictor was dispatched to Delphi, to enquire of the oracle with what prayers and supplications they might propitiate the gods, and what would be the end of all their calamities. In the meantime, by the direction of the Books of Fate, some unusual sacrifices were offered; amongst others a Gaulish man and woman and a Greek man and woman were buried alive in the Cattle Market, in a place walled in with stone, which even before this time had been defiled with human victims, a sacrifice wholly alien to the Roman spirit.» (Foster, 1929)

⁸³ Cícero, *Pro Caelio*, 34: «Even if the images of us, the men of your family, had no influence over you, did not even my own daughter, that celebrated Quinta Claudia, admonish you to emulate the praise belonging to our house from the glory of its women?»

deserve it. But was attacked along the way by a plebeian tribune. She stepped in, protected her dad with her holiness and he was not dragged from his chariot (Table 5).

Table 5: List of vestals – Republic (II BC) – Hypothesis 4

Century	Vestal	Fonte
II BC	Claudia	Cícero, <i>Pro Caelio</i> , 34 ⁸⁴
	Licinia	Cícero, <i>Pro Domo Sua</i> , 53.136 ⁸⁵ ;
	Aemilia	Livy, <i>Periochae</i> , 63 ⁸⁶
	Marcia	Plutarch, <i>RQ</i> , 83 ⁸⁷

Source: Author - based in Raia, 2015

Vestal Licinia was a woman with initiative of her own. She was daughter of Gaius Licinius and probably vestal *Maxima*, since she was a “woman of the highest rank” (Cícero, *Pro Domo Sua*, 53.136). When Quintus Cecillius Metellus Balearicus and Titus Quinctius Flaminius were consuls of Rome (123 BC) she decided to build an altar. Why? Nobody knows. On her own initiative? Seems difficult to believe (Table 5).

Licinia was accused by a praetor of acting without asking authorization to the Roman people. The college of pontiffs agreed with that, and didn’t accept the holiness of

⁸⁴ Cícero, *Pro Caelio*, 34: «Did not that vestal virgin Claudia recur to your mind, who embraced her father while celebrating his triumph, and prevented his being dragged from his chariot by a hostile tribune of the people?»

⁸⁵ Cícero, *Pro Domo Sua*, 53.136: «When Licinia,—a vestal virgin, a woman of the highest rank, and invested with the most holy of all priesthoods,—in the consulship of Titus Flaminius and Quintus Metellus, had dedicated an altar, and a little chapel, and a cushion at the foot of the sacred rock; did not Sextus Iulius the praetor refer that matter to this college, in obedience to the authority of the senate? When Publius Scaevola, the Pontifex Maximus, answered on behalf of the college, “that what Licinia, the daughter of Caius, had dedicated in a public place without the authority of the people, did not appear to be holy.” And with what impartiality and with what diligence the senate annulled that act, you will easily see from the words of the resolution of the senate.» (Yonge, 1891)

⁸⁶ Titus Livius, *Periochae*, 63: «The Vestal virgins Aemilia, Licinia, and Marcia were condemned for unchastity. There is a description of how this unchastity was committed, discovered, and punished.»

⁸⁷ Plutarch, *Roman Questions*, 83: «For the tale is told that a certain maiden, Helvia, was struck by lightning while she was riding on horseback, and her horse was found lying stripped of its trappings; and she herself was naked, for her tunic had been pulled far up as if purposely; and her shoes, her rings, and her head-dress were scattered apart here and there, and her open mouth allowed the tongue to protrude. The soothsayers declared that it was a terrible disgrace for the Vestal Virgins, that it would be bruited far and wide, and that some wanton outrage would be found touching the knights also. Thereupon a barbarian slave of a certain knight gave information against three Vestal Virgins, Aemilia, Licinia, and Marcia, that they had all been corrupted at about the same time, and that they had long entertained lovers, one of whom was Vetutius Barrus, the informer’s master. The Vestals, accordingly, were convicted and punished; but, since the deed was plainly atrocious, it was resolved that the priests should consult the Sibylline books. They say that oracles were found foretelling that these events would come to pass for the bane of the Romans, and enjoining on them that, to avert the impending disaster, they should offer as a sacrifice to certain strange and alien spirits two Greeks and two Gauls, buried alive on the spot.» (Babbitt, 1936)

the altar. The sanctuary was destroyed and she was publicly humiliated by the whole thing.

Republic was about sovereignty of the people and a noble woman had dared to act without permission. She knew she had to ask? Did she ask the Pontifex maximus, but later on and under pressure, he undermined her authority? It's hard to know. But since the complainant was a patrician (praetor Sextus Iulius) and the accused was a plebeian (Licinia), this looks like social tension between patricians and plebeians.

There was a prodigy in the consulship of Manius Acilius and Gaius Porcius (114 AC). Records refer to “rain of blood and milk”.⁸⁸ After that, a slave named Manius, uncovered a long time secret involving three vestals and their lovers. The women were supposed to be chaste and pure. It was a huge scandal. People must've been scared and acted accordingly.⁸⁹ Aemilia was sentenced to death on Saturnalia's eve of 114 BC (17th December). Licinia appeared before the pontiffs and was acquitted the day after the feasts in honor of Saturn;, but she and Marcia were sentenced to death at the beginning of the following year (113 BC). Thus, all three vestals died (see Table 5).

What happened? The story had three layers. First, the story of the three unchaste vestals. Marcia had one lover. Licinia and Aemilia were hanging out with each other's brothers, but at some point they were discovered and started sleeping with all the men that could denounce them. Why did Aemilia and Licinia panicked? They were pressured and manipulated⁹⁰ but they could also be scared with that rain of blood and milk? Probably. There was some hysteria at the time.

⁸⁸ Pliny the elder, *Natural History*, 2.57: «Besides these, we learn from certain monuments, that from the lower part of the atmosphere it rained milk and blood, in the consulship of M'Acilius and C. Porcius, and frequently at other times.» (Bostock, 1855)

⁸⁹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 26.87: «The priestesses bore the chief punishment and shame themselves, but they proved the source of great evils to various others as well, while the entire city was agitated on their account. For the people, considering that what was immaculate by law and sacred by religion and decent through fear of punishment had been polluted, were ready to believe that anything most shameful and unholy might be done. For this reason they visited punishment, not only on the convicted, but also on all the rest who had been accused, to show their hatred of what had occurred.» (Cary, 1914)

⁹⁰ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 26.87: «Hence the whole affair in which the women were concerned seemed now to have been due not so much to feminine incontinence as to the wrath of some god. Three had known men at the same time. Of these Marcia had acted by herself, granting her favors to one single knight, and would never have been discovered, had not the investigation into the cases of the others extended and involved her also; Aemilia and Licinia, on the other hand, had a multitude of lovers and carried on their wanton behavior with each other's help. At first they surrendered themselves to some few privately and secretly, telling each man that he was the only one favored. Later they themselves bound everyone who could suspect and inform against them to certain silence in advance by the price of intercourse with them, and those who had previously enjoyed their favors, though they saw this, yet had to put up with it in order

Second, these vestals were discovered because there was a storm and a maiden, named Helvia, was found naked after being “struck by lightning”⁹¹. It was probably rape, instead of natural cause. People thought it was a strange death and soothsayers accused vestals of being impure while performing sacrifices. Third, after the death of the three priestesses, the city killed two Gauls and two Greeks to peace the spirits. There are at least three records of human sacrifice like these⁹².

Fabia and Licinia are probably the most famous vestals of Table 6. They were accused (in public?) of being unchaste. Who were they? Publius Clodius Pulcher (Cecilia’s nephew) spread rumors about Fabia and Lucius Sergius Catilina. It’s not certain if the two (supposed) lovers went to court, because Cato *the young* frightened the demagogue that eventually fled of the city. Clodius participated in the Mitridates War (73/63 BC).

Marcus Licinius Crassus (1st triumvirate) had to explain that he hadn’t seduced his cousin (vestal Licinia, see Table 6). Apparently, he only wanted a piece of land that she didn’t want to sell.

When did this drama (Catilina/Fabia and Crassus/Licinia) happened? Maybe simultaneously, around 73 BC. Crassus and Catilina had been an ally of Sula, had gain lots of money with proscriptions (82/81 BC). The families of his victims tried to recover

not to be detected through a display of their vexation. So besides holding commerce with various others, now singly, now in groups, sometimes privately, sometimes all together, Licinia enjoyed the society of the brother of Aemilia, and Aemilia that of Licinia's brother. These doings were hidden for a very long time, and though many men and many women, both freemen and slaves, were in the secret, it was kept concealed for a very long period, until one Manius, who seems to have been the first to assist and cooperate in the whole evil, gave information of the matter, because he had not obtained freedom nor any of the other objects of his hope. And since he was very skillful, not only at leading women into prostitution, but also in sowing slander and discord among them (...)» (Cary, 1914)

⁹¹ Plutarch, *Roman Questions*, 83: «For the tale is told that a certain maiden, Helvia, was struck by lightning while she was riding on horseback, and her horse was found lying stripped of its trappings; and she herself was naked, for her tunic had been pulled far up as if purposely; and her shoes, her rings, and her head-dress were scattered apart here and there, and her open mouth allowed the tongue to protrude. The soothsayers declared that it was a terrible disgrace for the Vestal Virgins, that it would be bruited far and wide, and that some wanton outrage would be found touching the knights also. Thereupon a barbarian slave of a certain knight gave information against three Vestal Virgins, Aemilia, Licinia, and Marcia, that they had all been corrupted at about the same time, and that they had long entertained lovers, one of whom was Vetutius Barrus, the informer's master. The Vestals, accordingly, were convicted and punished; but, since the deed was plainly atrocious, it was resolved that the priests should consult the Sibylline books. They say that oracles were found foretelling that these events would come to pass for the bane of the Romans, and enjoining on them that, to avert the impending disaster, they should offer as a sacrifice to certain strange and alien spirits two Greeks and two Gauls, buried alive on the spot.» (Babbitt, 1936)

⁹² «On three occasions in the later Republic (in 228, 216 and 113 BC) two Gauls and two Greeks were buried alive in the Forum Boarium (Cattle Market) of the city of Rome – on the instructions of the Sibylline Books.» (Beard, North and Price, 1998: 158)

his possessions or even revenge of his enemies. Accusations about him and Licinia can come from here.

Table 6: Vestals of the Republic (I BC) – Hypothesis 5

Century	Vestal	Source
I BC	Aemilia (?)	Coin ⁹³
	Cecilia (?)	Cicero, <i>Pro Roscio</i> , 27 ⁹⁴
	Fonteia	Cicero, <i>Pro Fonteio</i> , 46-48 ⁹⁵
	Popilia	Macrobius, <i>Saturnalia</i> , 3.13.11 ⁹⁶
	Perpennia	Macrobius, <i>Saturnalia</i> , 3.13.11
	Arruntia	Macrobius, <i>Saturnalia</i> , 3.13.11
	Licinia	Macrobius, <i>Saturnalia</i> , 3.13.11
	Fabia	Salustius, <i>GC</i> , 15.1 ⁹⁷ ; Plutarch, <i>Cato the young</i> , 19.3 ⁹⁸

Source: Author

Some years later, Terencia (Cicero's wife) was attacked by a band (of Clodius?) during her husband's exile (May 58 and August 57 BCE) and sought refuge at the temple of the vestals, where her sister Fabia was a priestess. Tulia, Cicero's daughter, married Publius Cornelius Dolabela, the ex-husband of aunt Fabia, around 50 BC.

⁹³ Cf. Bibliography (D. Digital Sources).

⁹⁴ Cicero, *Pro Roscio*, 27: «As soon as he perceived this, by the advice of his friends and relations he fled to Rome, and betook himself to Caecilia, the daughter of Nepos, (whom I name to do her honor,) with whom his father had been exceedingly intimate; a woman in whom, O judges, even now, as all men are of opinion, as if it were to serve as a model, traces of the old-fashioned virtue remain. She received into her house Sextus Roscius, helpless, turned and driven out of his home and property, flying from the weapons and threats of robbers, and she assisted her guest now that he was overwhelmed and now that his safety was despaired of by everyone. By her virtue and good faith and diligence it has been caused that he now is rather classed as a living man among the accused, than as a dead man among the proscribed.» (Yonge, 1903)

⁹⁵ Speech (69 BC). Cicero, *Pro Fonteio*, 46: «(...) especially when a vestal virgin on the other side is folding her own brother in her embraces, and imploring, O judges, your good faith, and that of the Roman people; she who has been, on behalf of you and of your children, occupied for so many years in propitiating the immortal gods, in order now to be able to propitiate you when supplicating for her own safety and that of her brother.»

⁹⁶ Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 3.13.11: «In the ninth day before the calends of September, on the day that Lentulus became flamen Martialis, the house was decorated, the triclinia received ivory beds, and the pontiffs reclined on two of the beds: Q. Catulus, M. Aemilius Lepidus, D. Silvanus, G. Caesar, *rex sacrorum*, P. Scaevola Sextus, Q. Cornelius, P. Volumnius, P. Albinovanus e L. Julius Caesar, the augur that inaugurated him [Lentulus]. In the third bed there were Popilia, Perpennia, Licinia e Arruntia, the vestal virgins; and his wife the flaminica Publicia; and his mother-in-law Sempronia.»

⁹⁷ Sallust, *The war with Catilina*, 15.1: «Even in youth Catiline had many shameful intrigues — with a maiden of noble rank, with a priestess of Vesta — and other affairs equally unlawful and impious.» (Rolfe, 1921)

⁹⁸ Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, *The life of Cato the Younger*, 19.3: «At one time he opposed Clodius the demagogue, who was raising agitation and confusion as a prelude to great changes, and was calumniating to the people priests and priestesses, among whom Fabia, a sister of Cicero's wife Terentia, was in danger of conviction. But Cato put Clodius to such shame that he was forced to steal away from the city.» (Perrin, 1919)

Fabia was a patrician from an *optimata* family. She is more likely to have been nominated by Lucius Cornelius Sula, after he invaded the city of Rome (on 1 November 82 BC) than by a popular government (86/82 BC). If she replaced Cecilia and was a priestess for thirty years, then she would have left the temple at 52 BC. This reasoning may also be applied to Licinia, who was cousin of Crassus (one of Sula's biggest allies in civil war).

Licinia allowed Lucius Licinius Murena to sit in her place (given to the vestals) at the gladiatorial games (63 BC). After this, her cousin won the consulate elections (a position he held for the year of 62 BC). Was she still a vestal when Caesar delivered his will to the chief of the vestals⁹⁹? It's difficult to know but probably left the temple before civil war (read more Appendix 3).

Fabia and Licinia were known for the wrong reasons. Vestal Fonteia tried to help her brother and was praised by Cicero (Pro Fonteio, 46-48). She was Gaius Fonteius's daughter. He died around 91 BC, at the beginning of the war against Italians.

Fonteia was still a vestal at 69 BC. But since when? Her brother Marcus Fonteius was born around 110 BC. If older than him, she could've be a vestal since 113 BC. If younger, then she would've entered in the temple sometime between 99-92 BC. She was a veteran when she defended her brother at court (early 69 BC). She is not listed at Niger's inauguration banquet (read more in Appendix 4). Why? For one of three reason: she was working at the temple, or was no longer a vestal, or had died. Arruntia may have replaced Fonteia (see Table 6).

What about the others? Popilia and Perpena are listed by Macrobius, in his book *Saturnalia*. They were invited for the inauguration of Lucius Cornelius Lentulus Niger's banquet, shortly after he became the new *flamen Martialis* – god Mars' priest (read more in Appendix 4)

Table 6 also includes some interesting hypothesis. If Caecilia was a vestal virgin, she's the woman who sheltered Sextus Roscius Amerino when he was accused of parricide. He was defended by Cicero. The case was brought to court at 80 BC. But the lists of proscribed were published between November 82 BC and June 81 BC. Cecilia

⁹⁹ Suetonius, The Live of the Twelve Caesars, The Life of Julius Caesar, 83.1: «Then at the request of his father-in-law, Lucius Piso, the will was unsealed and read in Antony's house, which Caesar had made on the preceding Ides of September at his place near Lavicum, and put in the care of the chief of the Vestals» (Rolfe, 1913a)

was no longer a priestess when all this happened (otherwise she wouldn't be living at her own house). If she replaced one of the fallen vestals (114/113 BCE) and served thirty years of service, then she could have left the temple around 83-82 BC.

Who were the vestal virgins when Julius Caesar invaded the city in 49 BC? Did any of them die in consequence of that? There are no records about the subject, so the answer could be no. But Suetonius explained that August, latter on, had problems recruiting vestals, because noble families avoided giving their girls to the temple.¹⁰⁰ It could be a question of lack of prestige, but, the political system was very instable after three consecutive civil wars and parents could also fear for their daughters' lives, as escape goats for invasions of the city walls.

Julius Caesar was Gaius Marius's nephew. While a young man, he survived Sulla's dictatorship with the help of vestals that spoke at his behalf.¹⁰¹ Who were these woman? It's difficult to know, but we can try to analyze available information.

One of Caesar's biggest allies was Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (consul in 46 and 42 BC), son of homonymous father (consul in 78 BC); from the family of Mamercus Aemilius Lepidus Levianus (consul in 77 BC) who was Sulla's son-in-law.

When Marcus Lepidus was young, he was a *monetallis* around 61-58 BC. His coins had the face of an Emilia Vestal virgin and the Basilica Aemilia. Who was this priestess?

Before the birth of Marcus Lepidus there were two vestals named Aemilia, both accused of lack of chastity. One had been acquitted after rekindling the sacred fire (see Table 4). Other had been sentenced to death following a scandal involving several lovers (see Table 5). Neither of them were references of purity to a rising politician, who had recently become a member of the college of pontiffs (after Mamercus' death, between 63-61 BC).

¹⁰⁰ Suetonius, The Live of the Twelve Caesars, The Life of August, 31.3: «He [Augustus] increased the number and importance of the priests, and also their allowances and privileges, in particular those of the Vestal virgins. Moreover, when there was occasion to choose another vestal in place of one who had died, and many used all their influence to avoid submitting their daughters to the hazard of the lot, he solemnly swore that if anyone of his grand-daughters were of eligible age, he would have proposed her name.» (Rolfe, 1913b)

¹⁰¹ Suetonius, The Live of the Twelve Caesars, The Life of Julius Caesar, 1.2: «But at last, through the good offices of the Vestal virgins and of his near kinsmen, Mamercus Aemilius and Aurelius Cotta, he obtained forgiveness. » (Rolfe, 1913a)

Could there be a vestal Aemilia in the first century BC? (See Table 6). Marco Lepidus wanted to assert himself in a religious position. He called his ancestors and coined his heroes. If he chosen a vestal of good reputation, at the eyes of the people, she was probably someone he met or lived before he became a priest (read more Appendix 3).

Table 7 includes some vestal's names of the first century BC and AD, there could be others (read more in Appendix 1 and 2).

Table 7: List of vestals – Empire of August and Tiberius – Hypothesis 6

Century	Imperator	Vestal	Office	Source
I BC	August	Occia	Maxima	Tacitus, The Annals, 2.86 ¹⁰²
		Scantia		Tacitus, The Annals, 4.16.6 ¹⁰³
I AD	August	Lepida		¹⁰⁴
		Torquata ¹⁰⁵		Tacitus, The Annals, 3.69.6 ¹⁰⁶
	Tiberius	Domitia ¹⁰⁷		Tacitus, The Annals, 2.86
		Cornelia		Tacitus, The Annals, 4.16.6

Source: Author (based on Raia, 2015)

Occia and Scantia became vestals when Rome was still a Republic and died as members of the empire. They probably dedicated all their lives to the temple of Vesta. That's why their names are in Table 7 (not Table 6).

Scantia and Occia were long time priestesses and are the most famous at the time of August. After them, Vestals didn't seem to leave the temple after thirty years, as much

¹⁰² Tacitus, The Annals, 2.86: «The emperor [Tiberius] then moved for the appointment of a Virgin to replace Occia, who for fifty-seven years had presided over the rites of Vesta with unblemished purity: Fonteius Agrippa and Domitius Pollio he thanked for the public-spirited rivalry which had led them to proffer their own daughters. Pollio's child was preferred, for no reason save that her mother was still living with the same husband, while Agrippa's divorce had impaired the credit of his house.» (Jackson, 1937)

¹⁰³ Tacitus, The Annals, 4.16.6: «(...) and to enhance the dignity of the priests and 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 (...)» (Jackson, 1937)

¹⁰⁴ Raia, 2015, p. 1; Wildfang, 2006: Appendix B

¹⁰⁵ Junia Silana Torquata.

¹⁰⁶ Tacitus, The Annals, 3.69.6: «This was also the desire of Silanus' sister Torquata, a Vestal of old-world saintliness.» (Jackson, 1937)

¹⁰⁷ Domitia Pollia.

as their predecessors¹⁰⁸. Things had changed with August because he made the priesthood prestigious again.¹⁰⁹ They, in all probability, died of natural causes.

August set standards straight and used vestals as symbols of peace after the end of civil war, which was already the third in a row (Marius/Sulla, Caesar/Pompeii and Augustus/ Marcus Antonius/Lepidus). Vestals were recognized as important¹¹⁰ because people saw how privileged they were. But he manipulate the situation and associated to them as emperor and chief priest (he became *pontifex maximus* after the death of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, consul 46 and 42 BC) and, apparently, they all won.¹¹¹

Augustus' propaganda focused on domestic tranquility, based on a sense of History combined with religion and culture. In his big plans, the priestesses represented the past and gave a sense of stability to the present, with an eye on the bright future of Rome¹¹².

¹⁰⁸ «Roman traditions of Vesta evolved parallel to the course of Roman political history, and with Augustus Vestals themselves reshaped their public role, although their responsibility remained to cultivate the favor of the gods for Rome through ritual offerings of drink, *aqua sancta*, and food, *mola salsa*, a salted spelt meal.» (McElroy, 2016: 5)

¹⁰⁹ «Various sources and archeological evidence demonstrate that the priesthood and its priestesses possessed a great amount of wealth. Various statues erected in honor of the Vestals show the appreciation of the Vestals in Rome's public and religious life. These facts indicate that the elite daughters who joined the priesthood were assured of a strong legal, financial and social position.» (Oldenkotte, 2014: 53)

¹¹⁰ Suetonius, *The Live of the Twelve Caesars*, *The Life of August*, 31.3: «Only the Vestal virgins were assigned a place to themselves, opposite the praetor's tribunal.» (Rolfe, 1913b)

¹¹¹ «As important as the Vestals were to Roman political leaders during the Principate, it was Augustus who recognized that by associating himself with a quintessentially Roman religious order he would increase his reputation among the people and augment the legitimacy with which they regarded the constitutional reforms he wrought, although it is fair to say these reforms had precedence in the political careers of Romans like C. Marius, L. Cornelius Sulla, L. Cornelius Cinna, and C. Julius Caesar. Nonetheless, the nuanced approach Octavian employed to become Augustus, the manipulation of soft power factors like the Vestal Virgins, permitted him to become the first to secure legitimacy for his heirs where those predecessors had failed. The Roman Empire grew from the ashes of the Republic which Augustus had razed for its instability.» (McElroy, 2016: 3)

¹¹² «Augustus reimagined Vesta and the Vestal Order as part of a cultural program to legitimize his regime. He adapted the domestic and peaceful symbolism of the Vestal Virgins to suit political purposes and to stop the cycle of violence that precipitated civil disorder from land riots in the time of Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus down the arduous century until decisive victory off the coast of Actium. The Vestals, who guarded the eternal flame, participated in the public and political aspects of religion, and they became the focus of the Augustan cultural movement to recall the memory of Rome's earliest days, to recast her Italic and Trojan prehistory as an Augustan monument to domestic tranquility. Augustus promoted a renaissance of visual art, history, and song that inspired artists to trumpet domestic tranquility and moral purity, both of which had been conspicuously absent from public transactions of religion and of politics in the previous generations. Distinct from the influence of Augustan politics and morality on the content and the tone of art produced during the regime of Augustus, the cultural works themselves shared a sentiment for renewal and purity, within which Romulus and his Vestal mother Rhea Silvia, also called Ilia, were manifestations of ancient cultural memory, a shared feeling through which the Romans reconstructed culture and order from revolution, civil strife, and generations of proscriptions.» (McElroy, 2016: 1)

Torcata was the daughter of Gaius Junius Silanus and had a brother of the same name.¹¹³ According to sources, she was a “Vestal of old-world saintliness”. Tacitus, *The Annals*, 3.69.6: Priestesses Domitia and Cornelia also had god reputation. Times seemed smother for them, than for their forerunners. Lepida also tried to help her brother with her testimony in court.

Therefore, vestals had political and religious status. Even when they were not directly involved in power struggles, these women were listened and had the right to have an opinion and to express it, at least in favor of family members or taking a stand, defending the emperor. Their role was one of the first attempts in favor of gender equality and empowerment of women in the public sphere.

¹¹³ Cf. Lindner, 2015, 65.

CONCLUSION

Vesta was a virgin goddess with no statue that protected the city from invasion. She was probably more based on Pallas Athena of Troy than Hestia from Greece. That's why the priestesses worshipped the *Palladium* in their temple. Six priestesses supervised her sacred fire. If they were pure, they received big honors. If they were unchaste, the flame would go out, the women were convicted of *incestum* and buried alive.

Vestals worked for thirty years or for life (their choice), but they couldn't leave before the end of the term, that began between the age of six and ten. They lived in the *atrium vestae*, which was a house in the republican and imperial Rome, but before was a *templum* (sacred area) that included an *aedes* (building with an altar), the *Regia* (king's house) and the *Locus* (grove).

There were many vestals, from Amata (Aeneas' mother in law) and Rhea Silvia (Romulus and Remus mother) onwards. Some were prestigious, like Gaia Taracia. Others were scandalous like Aemilia, Marcia and Licinia that died in the second century BC after "rain of blood and milk" (a phenomenon that they couldn't handle) and before a human sacrifice (to purge the city). Their stories help understand social tensions (for instance, between patricians and plebeians) or hysteria from misfortune that people didn't comprehend or could not fully control.

Vesta represented Roman morality. Her priestesses had major political and religious power, but could also be harshly judged in periods of crisis (pestilence, foreign war, natural cataclysm). These women could easily become scapegoats or manipulated by political parties or desperate people; and were killed when the Romans couldn't find another way to make peace or please the gods.

Vestals were only six at the time, but they represented some kind of gender equality and empowerment for women. We know the names of some of them, especially the ones who took a stand and were praised or punished for being brave or free spirits, for having a voice or something to say about what they believed in.

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APPENDIX 1

Table A: List of vestals (case study)

Século	Vestal	Fonte
	Amata	Gellius, AN, 1.12.14
VIII BC	Rhea Silvia	Livy, HR, 1.3.11
VII BC	Gegania	Plutarch, Numa, 10.1
	Verenia	Plutarch, Numa, 10.1
	Canuleia	Plutarch, Numa, 10.1
	Tarpeia	Plutarch, Numa, 10.1
	Pinaria	Dionísio, RA, 3.67.3
V BC	Oppia	Livy, HR, 2.42.11
	Urbínia	Dionísio, RA, 9.40.3
	Popília	Orosius, 2.8.13
	Tarácia Gaia (or Fufetia)	Gellius, AN, 7.7.2
	Postúmia	Livy, HR, 4.44.11
IV BC	Minúcia	Livy, HR, 8.15.7
III BC	Sextília	Livy, HR, 14
	Caparrónia	Orosius, 4.5.9
	Túcia	Livy, HR, 20
	Opímia	Livy, HR, 22.57.1-3
	Florónia	Livy HR, 22.57.1-3
	Aemília	Dionísio, RA, 2.68.3-5
	Claudia V (vestal?)	Livy, HR, 29.14
II BC	Claudia	Cícero, <i>Pro Caelio</i> , 34
	Lícínia	Cícero, <i>Pro Domo Sua</i> , 53.136; Dio 26.87
	Aemília	Livy, <i>Periochae</i> , 63
	Marcia	Plutarch, RQ, 83
I BC	Aemília (?)	Coin
	Cecília	
	Fonteia	Cícero, <i>Pro Fonteio</i> , 46-48
	Popília	Macrobius, <i>Saturnalia</i> , 3.13.11
	Perpennia	Macrobius, <i>Saturnalia</i> , 3.13.11
	Arruntia	Macrobius, <i>Saturnalia</i> , 3.13.11
	Lícínia	Macrobius, <i>Saturnalia</i> , 3.13.11
	Fabia	Plutarch, <i>Cato the young</i> , 19.3
I BC	Occia	Tacitus, <i>The Annals</i> , 2.86
	Scantia	Tacitus, <i>The Annals</i> , 4.16.6
I AD	Lepida	
	Torquata ¹¹⁵	Tacitus, <i>The Annals</i> , 3.69.6
	Domítia ¹¹⁶	Tacitus, <i>The Annals</i> , 2.86
	Cornelia	Tacitus, <i>The Annals</i> , 4.16.6

Source: Author (based in Raia, 2015)

¹¹⁵ Junia Silana Torquata.

¹¹⁶ Domícia Polia.

APPENDIX 2

Table B: List of vestals (not studied)

Century	Vestal
I AD	Valeria
	Aurelia
	Vibidia
	Cossinia
	Rubria
	Laelia
	Cornelia
	Varronilla
	Oculata
	Licina
II AD	Sossia
	Junia
	Calpurnia Praetexta
III AD	Bellicia Modesta
	Rufina
	Vetzenia Sabinilla
	Numisia Maximilla
	Clodia Laeta
	Pomponia Rufina
	Aurelia Severa
	Cannutia Crescentia
	Terentia Flavola
	Junia Aquilia Severa
	Cloelia Torquata
	Campia Severina
	Flavia Mamília
	Flavia Publicia
	Cloelia Claudiana
Octavia Honorata	
Terentia Ruffilla	
IV AD	Claudia (?)
	Cloelia Concordia

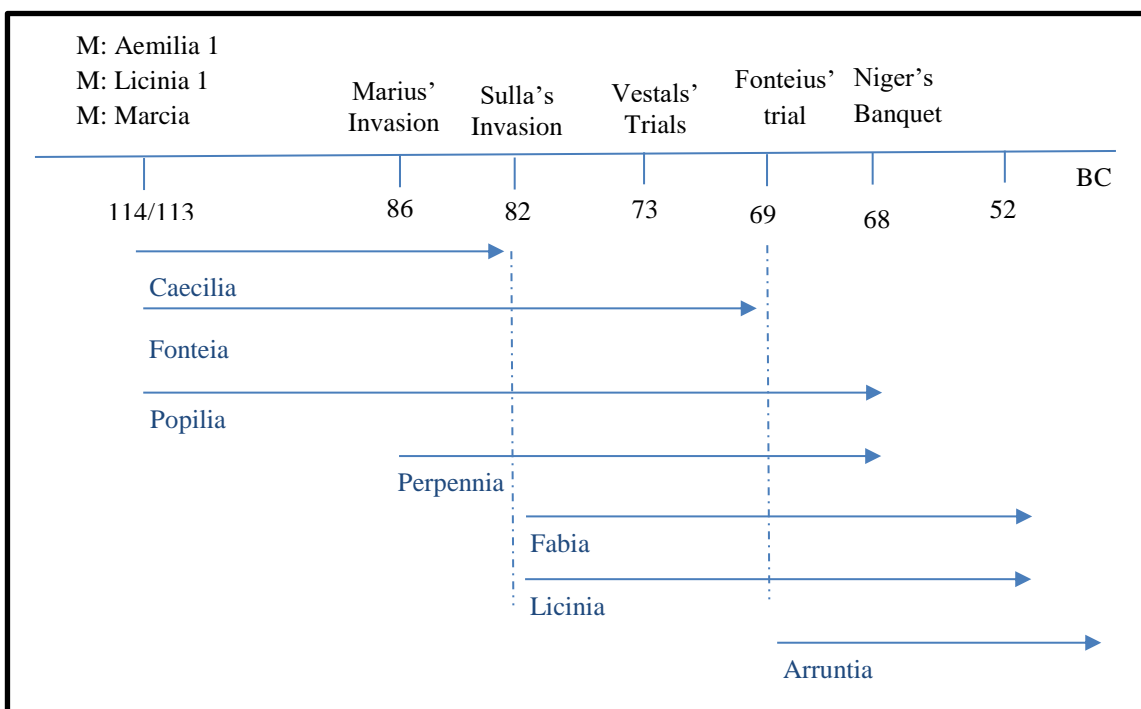
Source: Author (based in Raia, 2015)

APPENDIX 3

There was a prodigy in 113 BC (rain of blood and milk, according to Pliny, Natural History, 2.57). There were 17 prodigies between 113/100 BC; problems with bees in the period of 118/111 BC; 9 miscarriages between 98/90 BC; and in 13 prodigies were purified 93 BC by a ritual of purification (lustrations, according to Rüpke, 2011, 294).

Hypothesis X1 takes in consideration known information, without considering the possibility of a vestal Aemilia, sister or daughter of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, consul of 78 BC).

Timetable 1: Hypothesis X1 – Without vestal Aemilia



Source: Author

But what if there was a vestal Aemilia at the first century BC? This Gens has at least two pontifex maximus (one in II BC¹¹⁷ and one in I BC¹¹⁸). It had a priestess in the III century BC, other in the II century BC and other in I century AD (Lepida). Therefore, a vestal Aemilia at I century BC is a hypothesis to consider, especially if she died pure or was publically acclaimed, contrarily to her predecessors. This way she could have helped Marcus Lepidus (consul 78 BC) to survive the three invasions (88, 87 and 82 BC). After the death of Mamercus Aemilius Lepidus, Marcus Lepidus (consul 46 and 42 BC) replaced him and would've used her reputation to his advantage at the college of pontiffs.

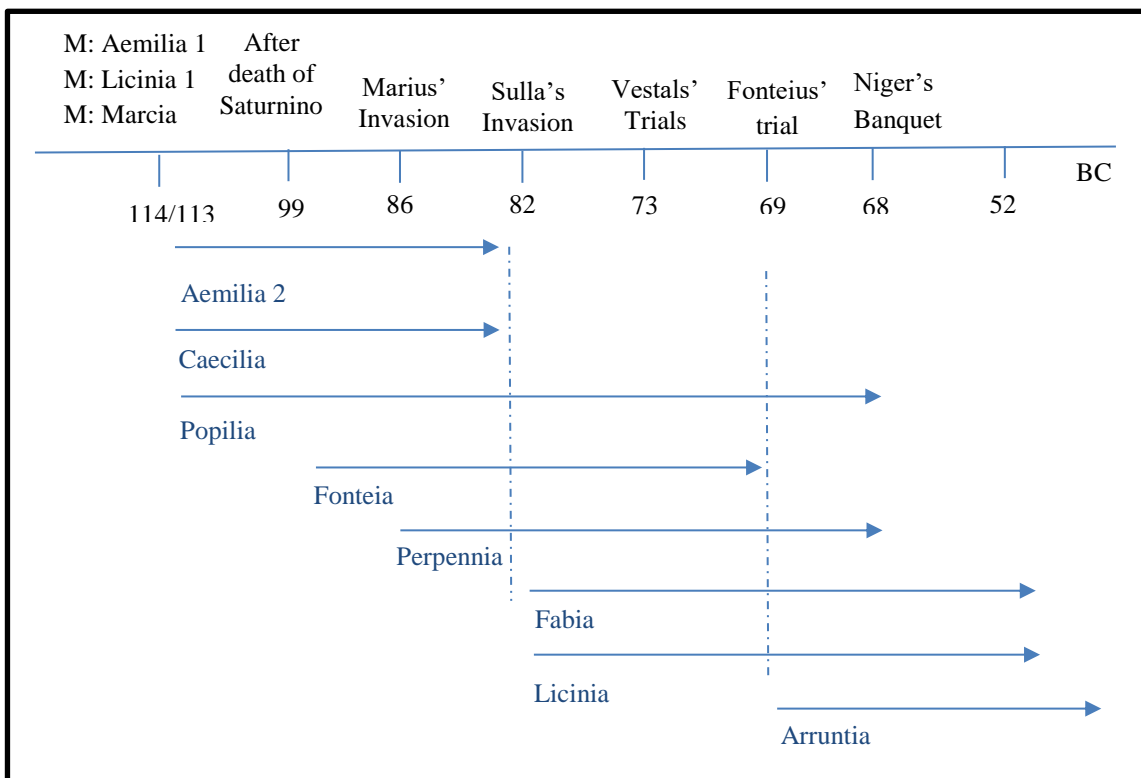
¹¹⁷ Marcus Aemilius Lepidus Pontifex Maximus (187/175 BC).

¹¹⁸ Marcus Aemilius Lepidus Pontifex Maximus (44/13-12 BC BC).

If she had existed, Aemilia might have been a high priestess. First, because Caecilia, Fonteia, Fabia, Popilia, Perpennia, Arruntia or Licinia were known as "virgins" or "vestals" but none of them as "Maxima". Third, it's more likely that Marcus Aemilius (consul 46 and 42 BC) would mention her if she had been a leader of some kind.

Hypothesis X2 considers a vestal Aemilia, sister of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (consul of 78 BC) and, therefore, aunt of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (consul 46 and 42 BC).

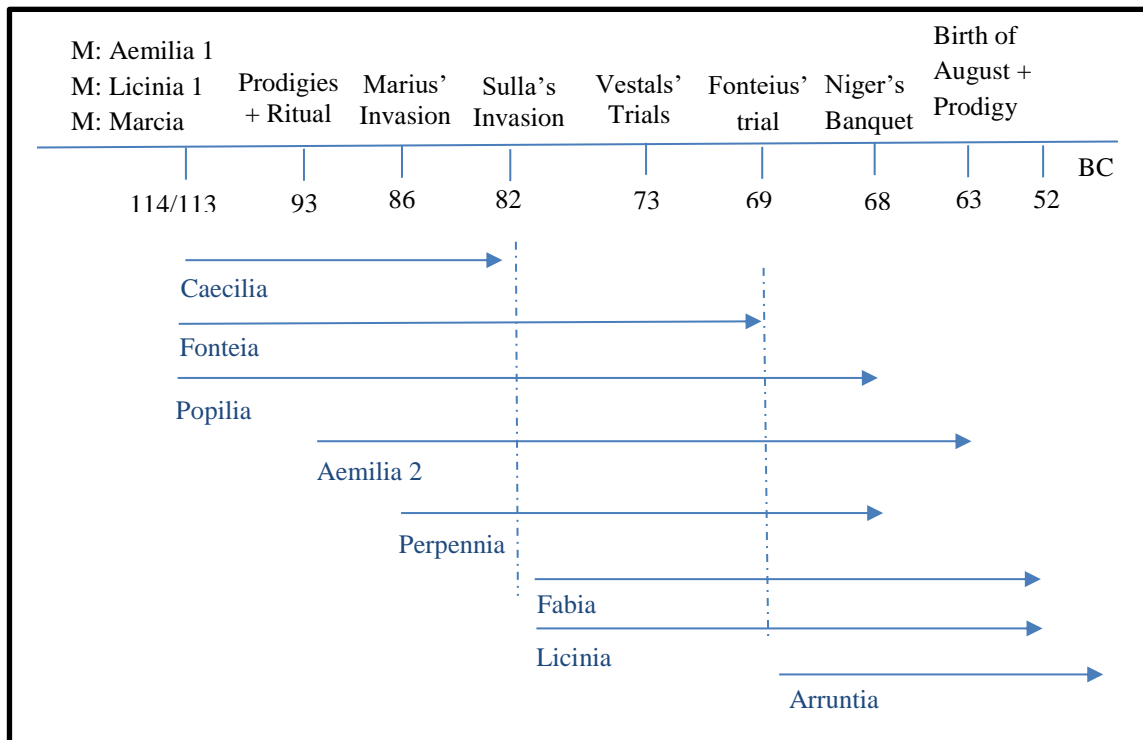
Timetable 2: Hypothesis X2 – with vestal Aemilia (sister of Marcus Lepidus, consul of 78 BC)



Source: Author

Hypothesis X3 has a possible vestal Aemilia, daughter of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (consul of 78 BC) and sister of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (consul 46 and 42 BC).

Timetable 3: Hypothesis X3 – with vestal Aemilia (sister of Marcus Lepidus, consul of 46 + 42 BC)



Source: Author

APPENDIX 4

Theory developed in Appendix 3 is based on the interpretation of Lucius Cornelius Lentulus Niger's inauguration banquet and its guest list. Names are in order of seniority (Tansey, 2000). According to historical records, the pontifices were divided in three long chairs (*triclinia lectis*), two for men and one for women (each probably took six people), therefore, 18 people (see Table C).

Table C: Guest List (Niger's inauguration as Flamen of God Mars)

1	<i>Pontifex Maximus</i>	Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius ¹¹⁹
2	After 82 BC	Quintus Catullus
3		Mamercus Aemilius Lepidus
4		Decimus Silanus
5	After 74 BC	Gaius Caesar
6	<i>Rex Sacrorum</i>	(name?)
7		Publius Scaevola Sextus (or Sextius)
8		Quintus Cornelius
9		Publius Volumnius
10		Publius Albinovanus
11		Lucius Iulius Caesar, augur
12	<i>Flamen Martialis</i>	Lucius Cornelius Lentulus Niger
13	<i>Virgo Vestalis</i>	Popilia
14	<i>Virgo Vestalis</i>	Perpennia
15	<i>Virgo Vestalis</i>	Licina
16	<i>Virgo Vestalis</i>	Arruntia
17		Publicia, Niger's wife
18		Sempronia, Niger's mother-in law

Source: Macrobius, Saturnalia, 3.13.10-11

The inauguration of Lucius Cornelius Lentulus Niger as flamen Martialis was when? Nine days before the calends of September. This is equivalent to August 22th. The year nobody knows (Tansey, 2000: 237-238). Most authors agree on a time frame, sometime between 74-73 BC (Gaius Aurelius Cotta's death) and 64-63 BC (Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius' death), since Gaius Iulius Caesar was one of the guests (replaced his uncle Cotta at the college of pontiffs), but was not yet the leader of roman religion.

Some scholars tried to narrow it down. Maybe 74 BC (Mommsen, 1864: 87-88). Around 74-69 BC (Taylor, 1942, 400-411) is another option. But 70-68 it's a better possibility (Tansey, 2000: 237-238) since Metellus Pius (*Pontifex Maximus*) was not at Rome between 79/71 BC (he was fighting Sertorius in Hispania Ulterior) and, before his return, Caesar and Niger weren't officially pontifices.

¹¹⁹ Not mentioned in the list, but it was HIS list (the Annals of the Pontifex Maximus).

Gaius Iulius Caesar had problems between 87/82 BC because he was probably elected flamen Dialis (Jupiter's priest) with the help of his uncle Gaius Marius and his father-in-law Lucius Cornelius Cinna, but was not officially accepted at the college of pontiffs by the pontifex maximus Quintus Mucius Scaevola, because the young man had a plebeian mother (according to norms, both parents had to be patricians). He replaced his uncle Gaius Aurelius Cotta (brother of Aurelia Cota, Caesar's mother) as a priest. Would he risk another humiliation? Metellus Pius was a Sulla's supporter and fought Sertorius (ally of Gaius Marius). Caesar was Marius' nephew (an enemy), but he negotiated marriage with Pompeia (Sulla's grand-daughter in) after Metellus Pius returned Rome and Caesar's experience in Hispania Ulterior (as a questor) in 69/68 BC, after the deaths of his aunt Julia (Marius' widow) and his wife Cinilla (daughter of former Lucius Cornelius Cinna). Metellus Pius became Caesar's ally after that marriage, not before.

Therefore, the most probable date is 68 BC. Not 70 BC as Tansey (2000) concludes, because his argument has flaws. He himself recognizes that some "names are conspicuous by their absence" (Tansey (2000: 246). In fact, Publius Servilius Vatia Isauricus (consul 79 BC), Marcus Terentius Varro Lucullus (consul 73 BC), Quintus Caecilius Metellus Creticus (cônsul 69 BC), Manius Acilius Glabrio (consul 67 BC) and Marcus Valerius Messalla Niger (consul 61 BC) were probably pontiffs, but are not listed by Macrobius. Yet they were (most likely) in Rome at the time, sometime between 70/69 (Tansey (2000: 246-247). Nothing says they were in 68 BC, which would justify their nonappearance at Niger's banquet.

The banquet was part of the *index quartus* of the *annals* of the pontifex maximus? If so, could that be four years after he became leader of religion (Marinone, 1970: 272-273) or after he returned from Hispania? In 78 BC Cotta was still alive. In 68 BC is a possible date.

The banquet was attended by four vestal virgins: Popilia, Perpennia, Licinia and Arruntia (order probably based on seniority). Fonteia and Fabia are not listed. Why? Fabia was working at the temple, because she had been accused (publicly or not) of lack of chastity, survived the claim, but discretion was advised. She would only leave the temple in the 50s.

Fonteia was still a vestal in 69 BC, because she testified in favor of her brother Marcus Fonteius at trial (Cicero, *Pro Fonteio*). But her name is not mentioned again. As an older priestess, she probably died or left the temple shortly after that, reason why she would be absent of Niger's list. If she was still a vestal it would be strange not to attend, for political reasons, because Marcus Fonteius was an old ally of Metellus Pius and Pompeius, and consequently was an *optimatus* like Niger.