

Women in Antiquity
SPRING 2025

MEETING 13

Women and the Roman Religion

- Roman religion
- Roman goddesses
- Vestals and priestesses
- Cato's speech
- Matronly virtue



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Upcoming dates

- Monday, May 12 Position Paper due via BlackBoard
- Tuesday, May 20 Final Exam, 6:15–8:15 p.m.
- Tuesday, May 27 **Ultimate Deadline**
 - No late papers or resubmissions for reversible deductions after this date
 - No exceptions
 - Any incompletes owing to personal emergencies must be mutually agreed before this date
- Sunday, May 11 Post your Week 13 Responses

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Five things today

- 1 Roman religion
- 2 Roman goddesses
- 3 Vestals and priestesses
- 4 Cato's speech
- 5 Matronly virtue

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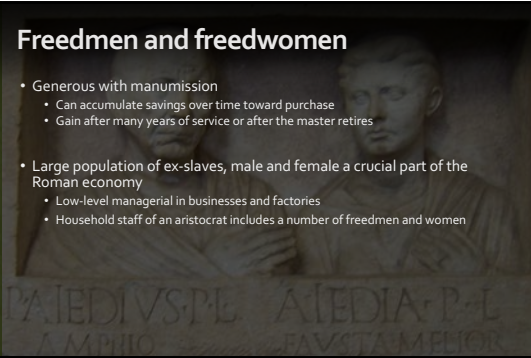
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Freedmen and freedwomen

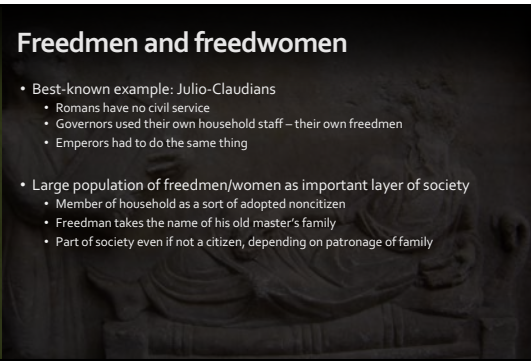
- Generous with manumission
 - Can accumulate savings over time toward purchase
 - Gain after many years of service or after the master retires
- Large population of ex-slaves, male and female a crucial part of the Roman economy
 - Low-level managerial in businesses and factories
 - Household staff of an aristocrat includes a number of freedmen and women



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Freedmen and freedwomen

- Best-known example: Julio-Claudians
 - Romans have no civil service
 - Governors used their own household staff – their own freedmen
 - Emperors had to do the same thing
- Large population of freedmen/women as important layer of society
 - Member of household as a sort of adopted noncitizen
 - Freedman takes the name of his old master's family
 - Part of society even if not a citizen, depending on patronage of family



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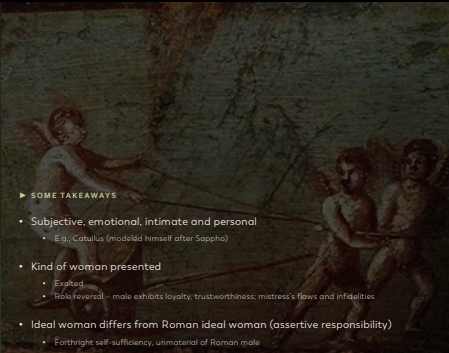
Secondary Source Reading

Judith P. Hallett

"The Role of Women in Roman Elegy: Counter-Cultural Feminism"

SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Subjective, emotional, intimate and personal
 - E.g., Catullus (modeled himself after Sappho)
- Kind of woman presented
 - Enslaved
 - Role reversal – male exhibits loyalty, trustworthiness; mistress's flaws and infidelities
- Ideal woman differs from Roman ideal woman (assertive responsibility)
 - Fortright self-sufficiency, unmaterial of Roman male



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Marriage

- Slaves: Not "official" but done with permission
- Freedmen/women: recognized and binding
- Child can be citizen
 - Only possible if born to two free parents within precincts of Rome
- Mostly domestics within city household or rural estate (not mines or harvesting gangs)

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D(is) M(anibus) Regina liberta(m) et coniuge(m)
Barates Palmyrenus natione
Catuallauna(anorum) XXX

'To the spirits of the dead, and to Regina, his freedwoman and wife,
of the Catuwallauni, aged 30 years, Barates of Palmyra erected this.'

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Secondary Source Reading

Larissa Bonfante Warren
"The Women of Etruria"

SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Roman attitude toward public participation of women is a reaction to the older culture of the Etruscans
 - Etruscan culture empowers not women but couples
 - Many engaged in love of the husband and wife take on side
 - Joint public and private responsibilities
- Foreign to Indo-Europeans
- Romans were fascinated by Etruscans, but increasingly set aside Etruscan ways
 - Latin is a distinctive feature some of the independence

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Gender in Roman Religion

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Roman ideas of the gods

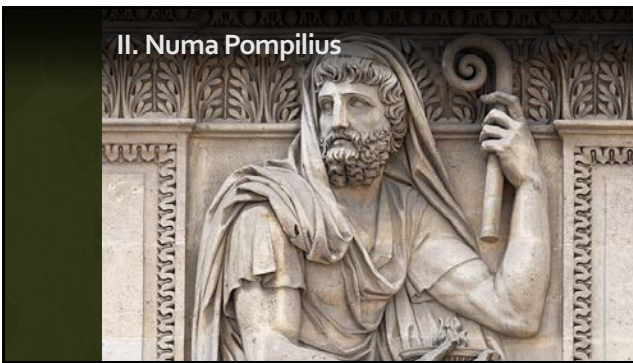
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Primary Source Reading

Livy

"Cato on the Oppian Law"

► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Sumptuary law – restriction on wearing of luxury goods – ostentation and spectacle
- Repeal long sought by Roman women
 - Would allow them to demonstrate their status
- Cato the Elder speaks vehemently against repeal
- Representative of ways men use control over public life to control way men and women have separate responsibilities
 - Laws that made them subject to men

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Roman religion

- Numen

Spirits investing key aspects of the Roman world

 - Janus doorways, past/future
 - Vesta hearth, persistence, protection of things as they should be
 - Terminus boundaries
 - Penates household guardians
 - Lares household guardians
- Gods of the Roman state

Anthropomorphized powers interested in Rome's power and legacy

 - Juppiter sky
 - Mars war
 - Quirinus Roman people

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Terminus

Terminus is what the propitiator

Terminus, or Signa of Propitiator

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Janus



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Vesta



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Vestal Virgins

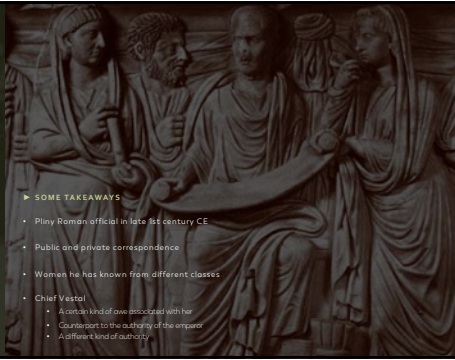


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Primary Source Reading

Pliny the Younger

Selected Letters



► SOME TAKEAWAYS

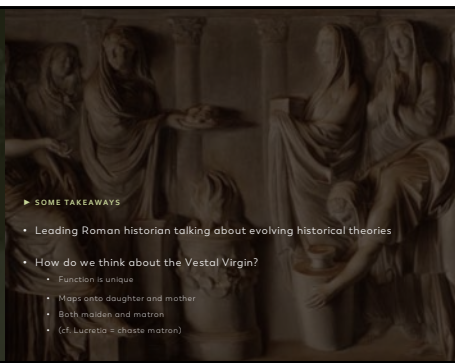
- Pliny Roman official in late 1st century CE
- Public and private correspondence
- Women he has known from different classes
- Chief Vestal
 - A certain kind of awe associated with her
 - Counterpart to the authority of the emperor
 - A different kind of authority

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Secondary Source Reading

Mary Beard

"Re-reading (Vestal) Virginity"



► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Leading Roman historian talking about evolving historical theories
- How do we think about the Vestal Virgin?
 - Function is unique
 - Maps onto daughter and mother
 - Both maiden and matron
 - (cf. Lucretia = chaste matron)

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Fortuna



- Fortuna Virginalis
- Fortuna Promigenia
- Fortuna Muliebris
- Fortuna Virilis

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Bona Dea



28

Roma



29

Isis



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Priesthoods attributed to Numa

- Curiones *Sacrifices for the curiae (assemblies)*
- Flamines *Priests dedicated to a specific god*
- Celeres *Romulus's bodyguard*
- Augurs *Divination*
- Vestals *Tenders of the sacred fire*
- Salii *Twelve youths carrying Jupiter's shields*
- Fetiales *Sacred heralds*
- Pontiffs *Religious advisors to the state; public rituals*

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Secondary Source Reading

Gillian Clark

"Roman Women"

SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Fundamental summary of key elements of what we know about women in Roman life
- Not naturally inferior
 - Married Roman women did not have a vote and could not initiate their own will
 - Despite Roman women's role in the family, they were not equal (strong role usually)
 - They have to be kept from exerting their power in the world
- Men use their control over public sphere to maintain their position in society
 - Citizenship is a male privilege
- Rather men recognized the power of women
 - Men used the influence of women to gain through politics and legislation

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Secondary Source Reading

Christine Perkell

"On Creusa, Dido, and the Quality of Victory in Virgil's *Aeneid*"

► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Peers of the Greeks by origination with Troy
- Aeneas and Dido parallel Rome's interaction with Carthage (nemesis, defeated, destroyed)
 - Dido throws herself on a pyre
 - Dido divides herself to Aeneas, but Aeneas has a greater destiny and must leave her
- If anyone had wondered whether Carthage and Rome could have joined together and made a new, combined civilization
 - Rome had greater destiny than Carthage
 - Aeneas not torn up by feelings for Dido
 - How does he deal with the fact that he has to leave?

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