



**Women and the Roman Religion**

Women in Antiquity | Meeting #13

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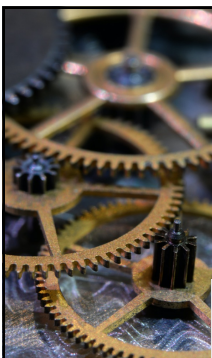
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**Upcoming Dates**

- Monday, December 8  
Position Paper Due
- Tuesday, December 16  
6:15 to 8:15 p.m.  
Final Exam
- Sunday, December 7  
Responses for Week 13 Due
- Sunday, December 28  
**Ultimate Deadline**
  - No late papers or resubmissions for reversible deductions after this date
  - No exceptions
  - Incompletes owing to personal emergencies must be mutually agreed before this date

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**Five things today**

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

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A close-up photograph of hands typing on a laptop keyboard. Several white speech bubbles with three dots inside are floating above the keyboard, suggesting communication or a digital interface.

## Responses

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A close-up photograph of a hand holding a red pen, poised to write on a white sheet of paper resting on a wooden desk. The background is blurred, showing other people in a classroom setting.

## Final Exam

- Identification and Impact
  - Define and discuss the impact of four or five terms or names
  - All terms will come from the review sheet
- Essays
  - Two essays having to do with overall themes of the course
  - Provide an argument and three solid examples
- For each section, I will give you twice as many options as you need

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A close-up photograph of a hand holding a red pen, poised to write on a white sheet of paper resting on a wooden desk. The background is blurred, showing other people in a classroom setting.

## Final Exam review

- The final exam covers all assigned materials
  - Everything in the assigned readings is fair game, even if we did not discuss it in class
  - The essays are cumulative—you can use examples from the entire course
- Review resources are linked on the Exams page
  - These include quiz notes, slides, lecture videos, weekly responses, textual topic discussions from online semesters, maps and timelines, and more

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### Approach to preparing

- Make a list of the most important milestone events in the periods we've discussed
  - Think about causes and legacies
  - Dates are less important than sequences of events
- Use the review sheet
  - Look through the questions to gauge which topics to spend more time reviewing
  - Take note of the terms and review the ones you're unfamiliar with
- Pregame the essay
  - Try to come up with possible essay questions
  - Map out in advance possible examples and interpretations
  - Example: If there were a question about religion and culture, what would I say and what three examples would I give?

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## Questions about whatever



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## Gender in Roman Religion

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### Roman ideas of the gods

- Primordial  
Roman gods are more like animistic spirits
- Not originally depicted in human form or mythologized with human behavior

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### Unlike Greek gods

- “Equating”  
Greek gods with Roman gods came much, much later

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### Roman gods as natural forces

- Connected to the land and the Romans’ relationship with the land
- Would respond with wrath and punishment if the Romans dishonored them

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### Organization of religion

- Attributed to the second king, Numa Pompilius
- Romans created colleges of priesthoods and rituals to ensure the gods were appeased

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### Consultation of the gods

- The Romans believed that the gods must be consulted before any actions of the state
- This empowers the families that control the priesthoods (patricians)

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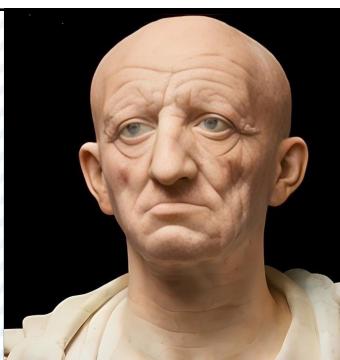
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14

Primary Source Reading

Livy  
"Cato on the Oppian Law"

- 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
  - "From the moment that they become your fellows they will become your masters"
  - Laws that made them subject to men




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### Roman matron

- Force within family
  - Expected to be strong
  - Champion of family, clan, and Rome
- Connection with gods and land
  - Household gods
  - Collective worship
  - Mystical role of matron
- Collective role on culture, society, and state

16

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Secondary Source Reading

Gillian Clark  
"Roman Women"

- Fundamental summary of key elements of what we know about women in Roman life
- Not naturally inferior
  - Hesiod: feared women not because women are weak but because men are weak
  - Cato the Elder: women are so strong, have such great power (biologically, sexually)
  - They have to be kept from exerting that power over men
- Men use their control over public sphere to maintain their position in society
  - Otherwise women will be in a superior position
- Rather men recognized the power of women
  - Realized so it be entrancing it or seeking to curb it through customs and legislation



17

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Secondary Source Reading

Elizabeth A. Fisher  
"Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana*: History and/or Fiction?"

- Much later in Roman story
- Debate about presentation of women in *Historia Arcana*
- Why Theodora and Antonina are depicted as unscrupulous and ambitious
  - Antigone, Medea, Clytemnestra – extreme fem behavior
  - Why is their story being told this way?
  - Not representative of normal female behavior – not how women normally lived
- Intent of the writer: role of the matron



18

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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*

- Jupiter sky
- Mars war
- Quirinus Roman people

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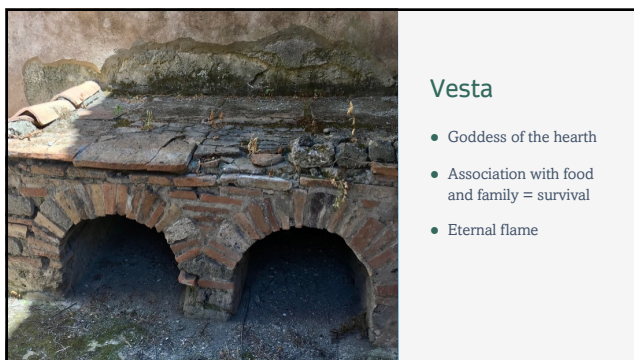
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## Vesta

- Goddess of the hearth
- Association with food and family = survival
- Eternal flame

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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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### Vestal Virgins

- Maidens of noble birth selected as priestesses of Vesta
  - Purity of virginity
  - Contrasted with men and matrons
- Charged with protection of the eternal flame

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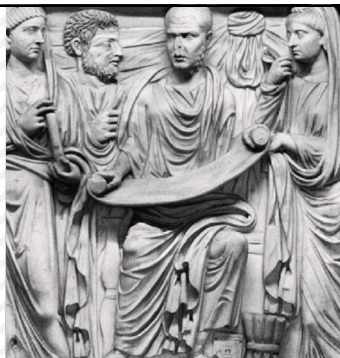
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#### Primary Source Reading

### Pliny the Younger Selected letters

- 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"**

- 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

- "Good goddess"
  - chastity and fertility among married Roman women
  - healing
  - protection of the community
- Festival of the Bona Dea
  - Annual rites of fertility
  - Forbidden to men

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### Roma

- Spiritual force of Rome
- Vulnerable to the actions of men

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### Isis

- Most powerful of Egyptian gods
  - Mother goddess
  - Protector of the Egyptians
- Cults spreads among Greeks and Romans
  - Private shrines and altars set up on the Capitoline Hill
- Adopted into the Roman pantheon
  - Banned by Augustus but only within the sacred boundary of Rome
  - Later emperors claimed Isis as a patron of their rule

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### Virgil's Aeneid

- Romans using Greek tools to reinforce Roman identity
- Positions Romans as successors to Troy
  - Founded by a heroic Trojan, Aeneas
  - Travels Mediterranean like Odysseus
- Main encounter with a powerful woman: Queen Dido of Carthage

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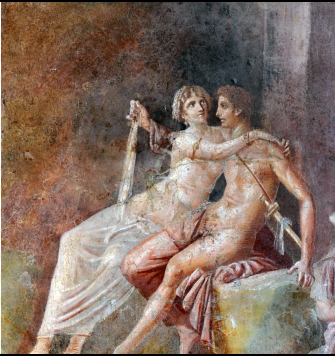
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Secondary Source Reading

Christine Perkell

**“On Creusa, Dido, and the Quality of Victory in Virgil’s *Aeneid*”**

- Peers of the Greeks by origination with Troy
- Aeneas and Dido parallel Rome’s interaction with Carthage (nerveless, defeated, destroyed)
  - Dido throws herself on a pyre
  - Dido devotes 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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