Where did the daughters go?

A research on the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin, seen from the perspective of elite competition during the Late Roman Republic and the Early Roman Empire.
**Preface**

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Introduction

“In spite of the changes in political life, in spite of the opulence and magnificence of the palmy days of Rome, the cult of Vesta stood unchanging for a thousand years”¹

This quote originates from Sir Thomas Cato Worsfold, the first scholar who ventured to write an extensive work on the Vestal Virgins. In this quote, the distinctive admiration for the priesthood of Vesta and its priestesses, with which Worsfold wrote his work, is clearly reflected. This admiration is not surprising, considering that the cult of Vesta was an extraordinary priesthood, filled with female priestesses who devoted almost their entire life to their goddess and to serve the Roman State. Even nowadays, the traces that have been left by the priesthood can be clearly seen.

The restoration of the house of the Vestal virgins on the Roman Forum took 20 years and it has only been accessible for tourists since 2011. Although you can see no more than a part of its remains, it is apparent how impressive the place must have been in the Roman days. This building was once the house of the Vestal virgins, the six priestesses of the sacred temple of Vesta. These women, of aristocratic descent, were selected in their childhood between the age of 6 and 10 to become Vestal Virgins and performed the religious tasks and duties of the temple for at least thirty years. During the first ten years, the young Vestals were educated and learned their duties. In the second ten years, the priestesses carried out their duties. Finally, in the last ten years the elder Vestals were the ones to teach their duties to the younger Vestals.² Throughout the years that the priestesses served the priesthood, they were bound by their oath of chastity as they had to remain virgin. Once this oath was broken, severe punishment followed and the priestesses were buried alive.

The cult of Vesta was the most important religious safe keeper of Rome. The goddess Vesta was believed to be the centre of the earth as well as the personification of fire.³ Together, the earth and the hearth where seen as the symbols of the home⁴. Therefore the Romans turned to Vesta, who was clearly linked to these symbols as the protector of the hearths and their homes. Because of the importance of the hearth as a central symbol for home, it also became an important religious symbol that was ‘necessary for man’. Therefore,

it was thought that the public hearth was founded simultaneously with the founding of the city of Rome. Ever since, the public hearth and the city of Rome were under the protection of Vesta.

It was probably under the rule of King Numa that a temple was built where the offerings for Vesta took place and where the public hearth could be protected. Inside this temple, the Aedes Vestae, the perpetual fire burned. The most important task of the priestesses was the care and preservation of this sacred fire. The fire symbolized the prosperity of the city of Rome and as long as the fire was burning, the continued existence and the safety of the city were secured. This last point demonstrates the importance of the cult of Vesta and its priestesses. The cult was directly connected with the welfare of Rome itself: “Without the Vestals and their cult, there would in the Romans’ eyes have been no Rome”. Given that the Vestals were responsible for the perpetual fire, the safety and the welfare of the city depended on them. This task must have been a great honour and responsibility, but it must also have been a heavy burden.

Because of their important role for the religion and welfare of the Roman State, the priestesses had a high social status. Moreover, the function of Vestal Virgin came with several privileges, which gave the priesthood and its priestesses a unique position in the Roman society. For this reason, the Vestal Virgins have been an interesting and mysterious subject for research for scholars all over the world. That the subject is still relevant today and that the interest in these women has not been lost, is demonstrated by the fact that in the last decade two important works on the subject have been published: “Die vestalischen Jungfrauen in der Römischen Kaiserzeit” by Nina Mekacher and “Rome’s Vestal Virgins: A Study of Rome’s Vestal Priestesses in the Late Republic and Early Empire” by Robin Lorsch Wildfang. The works have both been published in 2006, are very informative and discuss a

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5 Dionysius Halicarnassus, Antiquitates Romanae 2.64
6 Cicero, De Legibus 2.29.
7 Dionysius Halicarnassus, Antiquitates Romanae 2.64-2.65.
9 They had one of the most important religious functions in the Roman city and “they were between categories, neither matrons nor priests, they dressed as married women, and for the entirety of their priestly tenure they were to remain a virginal state.” See S. Takács, Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons: Women in Roman Religion, (Austin,2008) p. 80.
10 In 1968 Francesco Guizzi published a well known Italian study on the Vestal Virgins: “Aspetti giuridici del sacerdozio Romano: Il sacerdozio di Vesta.” In the following decades mainly individual articles or small contributions in aggregate works were published on the Vestal Virgins, which lasted until the turn of the century.
11 The work of Wildfang is a very informative but descriptive work which focuses on the Vestal Virgins and their cult in the period after the Second Punic War and the end of the first century AD. The work of Mekacher is more comprehensive and also includes archeological findings.
broad range of topics. However, both works neglect to investigate two very interesting ancient sources on the lack of interest for the function of Vestal Virgin.

The quote of Worsfold states that the cult of Vesta stood unchanged for a thousand years. It suggests that the cult of Vesta fully prospered for a thousand years. This however, is not entirely true. Two ancient writers mention that there was a lack of interest for the function of Vestal Virgin in the Late Republic and the Early Empire. The first ancient writer who mentions this lack of candidates is Suetonius in his writings on the Emperor Augustus:

"He 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."13

It seems that, during the rule of Augustus, families tried their best to avoid that their daughter was chosen as the new Vestal Virgin. Clearly, there was a lack of interest for the function of Vestal Virgin.14 It is obvious that Augustus was indignant with this and addressed these families with anger. As a consequence of the lack of interest for the function of Vestal Virgin, Augustus increased the importance of the priests by increasing their allowances and privileges. This remarkable event is dated by John Scheid as approximately 11 BC.15

The second source that mentioned a similar occurrence is Dio Cassius. In his work on Roman history he wrote:

"And since the noblest families did not show themselves inclined to give their daughters to be priestesses of Vesta, a law was passed that the daughters of freedmen might likewise become priestesses. Many vied for the honour, and so they drew lots in the senate in the presence of their fathers, so far as these were knights however, no priestess was appointed from this class."

Scheid dates the event mentioned in the source of Dio Cassius as having occurred somewhere between 5 BC and AD 5. It seems that the problem of the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin was still not solved by the measures taken by Augustus in 11 BC. This lack of interest of the elite families in the function of Vestal Virgin seems

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12 See Suetonius, Augustus, 31.3 and Dio Cassius, Historia Romana, 55.22.
13 Suetonius, Augustus, 31.3.
14 Unfortunately, we do not know for how long this lack of interest in the function of Vestal Virgin was already going on. However, when we look more closely at the two sources of Suetonius and Dio Cassius and when we subsequently compare the dating of these two sources, the suggestion is given that this lack of interest or the function of Vestal Virgin has been going on for a while. See Suetonius, Augustus, 31.3, Dio Cassius, Historia Romana, 55.22 and J. Scheid, ‘Augustus and Roman Religion: Continuity, Conservatism, and Innovation’, in K. Galinsky, The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus, (Cambridge, 2005) p. 190.
16 Dio Cassius, Historia Romana, 55.22.
incomprehensible. It was one of the most important priesthoods of Rome and it was the most important female priesthood. The second citation, coming from the work of Suetonius, clarifies that the elite families used all their influence to avoid that their daughter was chosen as the new Vestal Virgin. Why did the families not want to give their daughter away to the cult of Vesta, even though this cult was evidently so important? What is known, is that there was an enormous competition within the Roman aristocracy and it seems likely that this competition was connected to the lack of interest for the function of a Vestal Virgin. To gain more knowledge about the motivation of these elite families and the effects on the lack of interest for the priesthood of Vesta, this Master Thesis will study the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin at the end of the Republic and the Early Empire.

Although a lot has been written about the Vestal Virgins, the shortage of candidates is a subject that is largely neglected. The discussions on the Vestal Virgins are largely focused on their unique position in Roman society, their dress, their sexuality or rather their lack of sexuality and the accusations of incestum. There are only a few works that mention the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin. Wildfang shortly mentions that there was a lack of candidates, but he does not investigate why.17 The same applies to the work of Mekacher. She cites both of the ancient sources about the lack of candidates, but only to show that there was one. Instead of investigating why this shortage existed, she wanders off to the debate of the dating of the birthdates of the granddaughters of Augustus.18

It seems strange that Mekacher doesn’t mention why the lack of candidates existed. In a joined article with Françoise van Haeperen about the selection of new Vestal Virgins which was published three years earlier, the authors both discuss the phenomenon and give explanations for its occurrence. Firstly, Mekacher and Van Haeperen discuss how the election proceeded in the Roman Republic, and subsequently how it proceeded in the Roman Empire. It becomes clear that the election and privileges of the Vestal virgins changed19 because the range of candidates also changed.20 As an explanation for the lack of candidates, Mekacher and Van Haeperen suggest that a marriage arrangement was much more promising for the daughters of the Late Republican elite than becoming a Vestal virgin. Secondly the two authors explain that the Roman priesthood was in an overall crisis due to the bloody civil

19 First, a group of 20 girls was selected under the direction of the Pontifex Maximus and then one girl was chosen by lot to be the new Vestal Virgin following the Papian law. (See Aulus Gellius, Noctes Atticae, 1.12) Later, under the rule of Augustus new privileges were given to the Vestal Virgins (See Suetonius, Augustus, 31.3) and the procedure of the election changed. (See Dio Cassius, Roman History, 55.22)
wars. These two reasons are stated by the two authors as some sort of logical fact, but they do not give a well substantiated argument for it. Subsequently in Mekacher’s more comprehensive work that she published three years later, she completely omits these two reasons and gives no explanation for the lack of candidates at all.

Scheid’s article about the political rule of Augustus provides us with an understanding of the measures Augustus took to reform the Roman religion and its religious activities. It shows that Augustus reform was “a reaction against the neglect of public ritual duties and of temples, due to the disorders of the civil wars”. Eventually, between the years of 5 BC and 5 AD Augustus dealt with the recruitment of the Vestal virgins. Sheid suggests that one of the reasons for the lack of candidates could have been a religious crisis, caused by the disorders of the civil wars. This religious crisis was also suggested by Mekacher and Van Haeperen, as we saw earlier.

The impressive work about the Vestal Virgins, written by the Italian Francesco Guizzi provides us with an additional view. According to him, the power of the Roman elite was decreased during the Late Republic because of the difficult political situation. As a result, it became more and more problematic for the Roman elite to fill the vacancies of magistrates and priests. Guizzi also suggest that the criteria the girls had to comply with, in order to become a potential candidate at the end of the Republic, were too hard to fulfil. As a result, Guizzi points out that these two explanations perhaps caused the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin.

It seems apparent that there is no consensus on the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin. In my opinion, it is remarkable that only a few scholars mention the phenomenon and that the majority fails to study it. The very few scholars who did investigate it, had different outcomes. In smaller works on the Vestal Virgins, the lack of candidates is mostly not mentioned at all. The shortage of candidates for the priesthood of Vesta is a very interesting subject which could be explored much further. Therefore I would like to attempt to fill this void with this Master Thesis. To make this study as comprehensive as possible, all

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21 Mekacher and Van Haeperen, Le choix des Vestales, p. 77.
22 Mekacher, Die vestalischen Jungfrauen, p. 24-25.
23 Scheid, Augustus and Roman Religion, p. 176-177.
24 Scheid, Augustus and Roman Religion, p. 190.
25 This suggestion, however, must be accompanied with some doubts. The intentions of Augustus’ reforms are not proven to be a reaction against a religious crisis. His real motives for reforms could also have had different reasons. This subject will be discussed in chapter 3 and 4.
27 As well one of the most recent and comprehensive works on Roman religion from M. Beard, J. North and S. Price; Religions of Rome: Volume 1 & 2 (Cambridge, 1998) only mentions the lack of candidates, without giving an explanation for it. See Beard, North and Price, Religions of Rome: Volume 1, p. 193-194.
potential explanations for the lack of candidates have to be considered and researched. For this study various primary sources from ancient writers will be used, just as some inscriptions associated with the Vestal Virgins. Moreover, relevant secondary literature will also be examined and discussed.

To obtain a good understanding of all aspects of the Roman society that influenced the appointment of the Vestal Virgins, various indicators will be discussed. In chapter one, the social, economic and legal position of the Vestal Virgins will be explored. The unique position of the priestesses in Roman society as well as their privileges will be discussed. We will discover if anything has changed throughout the centuries, thereby taking into account what the elite families gained with the social, economic and legal privileges of their daughter once she had been selected as a Vestal. Additionally, the negative aspects of the priesthood will also be discussed.

In chapter two, demographical factors will be discussed. The amount of potential candidates for the Vestal Virgins will be the chapter’s focus. The criteria with which the girls had to comply will be discussed, as well as the consequences of these criteria. Moreover, the demographical factors that could have influenced the number of available candidates and several demographical patterns that occurred at the end of the Republic will be discussed. Also, reasons given by other scholars for the lack of candidates will be explored. Finally, it is discussed whether marriage agreements were indeed more promising than becoming a Vestal Virgin.

Chapter three examines religious factors. Can we indeed speak of a religious decline at the end of the Republic? We will discuss what changes occurred in Rome’s political life and what the consequences of these changes were for the religious performance of the Roman elite. This chapter will also investigate the reforms of Augustus more closely, especially the reforms concerning the cult of Vesta.

In the fourth and final chapter, political factors will be examined. First of all, the changes in Rome’s political life and the consequences of these changes for the Roman aristocracy will be discussed. Secondly, the effects of elite competition and reasons for elite families to prevent their daughter from being chosen for the priesthood will be more closely examined. Subsequently we will find out what the exact impact was of the civil wars. Thirdly, the connection between Rome’s political life and Rome’s religious life and the consequences of this connection for the priesthood of Vesta will be explained. Finally, we will take another look at the reforms of Augustus and we will discuss the political impacts of these reforms.
By investigating all the possible explanations for the lack of candidates for the Vestal Virgins, a more comprehensive vision can be formed about the lack of interest of the elite families for the function of Vestal Virgin in the Late Republic and the Early Empire. The results of this study will be summarized in the conclusion. With this approach, I hope to fill the existing gap on this subject; a subject which has often been mentioned by scholars but was never fully investigated.
Chapter 1: Social, Economic and Legal Position of the Vestal Virgins

Ancient authors have written a lot about the unique position of the Vestal Virgins in Roman society. From these sources, we learn that when a family decided to put their daughter forward for the function of Vestal Virgin, they were assured that she would gain a high status and receive a lot of privileges. Taking this into account, the problem of the lack of candidates during Augustus’ reign becomes even more incomprehensible. To understand the decline in candidate numbers even better, this chapter will discuss the status and privileges of the Vestal Virgins and the consequences of the priesthood for their families, by examining the social, juridical and economical position of the priestesses. It is important to bear in mind what the families of the girls exactly gained through the privileges and the social status of their daughter’s priesthood and what the other alternatives for their daughters might have been. By doing so, we might get a better understanding of the social and economic aspects that were taken into consideration by the elite families, before committing their daughter to the priesthood of Vesta.

Directly after the selection of the daughter as the new Vestal Virgin by the Pontifex Maximus, she was escorted to the Atrium Vestae and delivered to the pontiffs. By becoming a Vestal Virgin, the daughter immediately lost all legal connections with her biological family. She was no longer under the control of her father, without any ceremony of emancipation or loss of civil rights.\(^{28}\) Instead of being under the control of her father, the young Vestal Virgin was free of any legal male guardian and became _sui iuris_, legally independent and autonomous.\(^{29}\) This was unique in Roman society and before Augustus’ reign no other woman of the elite could obtain this right. It can be assumed that even the youngest and under aged Vestals were free of any legal male guardian, which makes their legal situation even more unique. Still, as mentioned earlier on, the oldest Vestals were responsible for the education and training of the youngest Vestals and the Pontifex Maximus surveyed the entire priesthood. It therefore seems logical that either the oldest Vestals or perhaps the Pontifex Maximus took the responsibility to assist the young Vestals with legal or financial matters when they were too young to make their own decisions.\(^{30}\)

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\(^{28}\) Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 1.12.


\(^{30}\) Ancient sources tell us nothing more than the fact that the Vestal immediately passed on from her fathers control and became legally free. None of our sources indicate that she became the legal responsibility of anybody else but herself. This however does not mean that there was nobody who would supervise the young Vestals in practice. See also W.K. Lacey, ‘Patria Potestas’, in: B. Rawson, *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, (New York, 1986) p. 127 and Mekacher, *Die vestalischen Jungfrauen*, p. 32-33.
A Vestal Virgin also received the right to make a will and choose her own heir. When she died without making a will, her property went to the public treasury. Here we see two consequences for the family of the girl. First of all, by losing all legal connections with her biological family, she also lost the right to automatically inherit their property. Secondly, since the Vestal Virgin could choose her own heir, she could easily choose a fellow Vestal instead of her birth family, who consequently did not receive any financial profit anymore.

Ancient sources clarify that the Vestals were probably very prosperous and that their property could include quite the amount. First of all they received some sort of stipend from the public treasury. Unfortunately there is not a lot of information about the amount of this stipend during the Republic. However, from Tacitus we know that during the rule of Tiberius in 23 AD, the emperor gave Vestal Virgin Cornelia two million sesterces. Two million sesterces was a considerable amount of money in that period. To give an idea of its value, we can compare it to the amount of money Plinius paid for a small farm. In one of his letters, he wrote that the little farm he had given as a present to his nurse was worth 100,000 sesterces.

Tacitus seems to imply that such a high amount of sesterces was given to “enhance the dignity of the priests and increase their readiness to perform the ritual of the various cults.” According to Mekacher, the amount of the stipend changed from time to time and was also clearly increased during the rule of Augustus. This information indicates that during the Republic the stipend must have been lower than the amount of money that was given to Vestal Virgin Cornelia. Nonetheless, it seems likely that the stipend given to the Vestals during the Republic must have been a considerable amount of money. As a priesthood with such high status, it would be logical that the priestesses could easily manage their own affairs with the amount of stipend they received. Moreover, we know that the Vestals were able to buy and sell their own property of land and villa’s, and they were even rich enough to dedicate an altar and other religious objects from their own earnings. Furthermore, the Vestals were able to possess their own slaves and archaeological evidence even suggests that the Vestal were also able to possess their own horses: metal discs made of bronze were

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32 Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita Libri* 1.20.
37 Hyginus, *De Conditionibis Agrorum* C. 82 and Plutarchus, *Crassus* 1.2.
found in Rome, which were carried round the necks of the horses.\textsuperscript{40} One of these bronze discs carried, in German translation, the inscription: “Besitz der Calpurnia Praetextata, Virgo Vestalis maxima, steuerfrei.”\textsuperscript{41} The last word on the inscription “steuerfrei”, gives important information about the Vestals which could be used to establish the welfare of the priestesses. As priestesses of the State, the Vestals not only benefitted from the common good of the priesthood, but they also personally benefitted from a total exemption of taxes. This allowed them to increase their wealth even more.\textsuperscript{42}

The Vestals lived together in the Atrium Vestae, where they worked for at least thirty years and were also educated. The house stood directly next to the Aedes Vestae and the location was remarkably central on the Forum Romanum. Even though the remains of the building, which you can still see nowadays, are the result of several periods of enlargement, excavations of the Area Sacra show that Atrium Vestae must have been a huge and delightful accommodation to live in in the Republican period.\textsuperscript{43}

According to Wildfang, archaeological evidence suggests that the Vestals probably owned rental property within the city as well. The Republican Atrium shows the remains of two rows of shops, just above the atrium in the direction of the Palatine hill, facing onto the Via Nova and the Via Sacra. Because of the location of these shops during the priestesses’ tenancy of the atrium, Wildfang suggests that it is logical to assume that at least some of the rent was used to support the Vestals.\textsuperscript{44} Wildfang however, draws his conclusion a bit too fast, because it is not clear if the Vestals could receive this kind of rent directly, or that they received it at all. The Atrium was in fact originally built by the State and not by the cult. Therefore it remains questionable whether or not the Vestals received any rent from these shops, or that the Roman State received it. It remains an option that the Vestals received the rent directly from the shops: because the State gave the Vestals the responsibility of the Atrium and the Vestals did take care of its household. Therefore it is reasonable to assume

\textsuperscript{40} CIL VI 2146, CIL VI 2147 and CIL VI 2148. See Worsfold, The History of the Vestal Virgins of Rome, p. 52 and Mekacher, Die vestalischen Jungfrauen, p. 208-209. The archaeological evidence mentioned above, dates from the second century AD and unfortunately no evidence from the Republic survived. This however does not exclude the fact that the Vestals also owned horses in the Republic. It is logical that the Vestals from the Republic were also able to own their own horses, as it is shown that the priesthood was already prosperous and important during the Republic.


\textsuperscript{42} See Mekacher, Die vestalischen Jungfrauen, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{43} For the most modern work on the excavations of the Atrium Vestae, see R.T. Scott, Excavations in the Area Sacra of Vesta (1987-1996), (Ann Arbor, 2009) p. 18-77.

\textsuperscript{44} Wildfang, Rome’s Vestal Virgins, p.72.
that if the shops were part of the Atrium, the Vestals were the ones who took the responsibility of the shops and its rent.

Because the Vestals did not have a male guardian, they were able to make their own financial decisions. They could buy and sell their property, buy or free their own slaves and accept an inheritance without having to consult a male guardian or secure his consent.45 As Plutarchus states; they could “transact and manage their own affairs”.46 Although this is already quite unique in the Roman society, the legal status of the Vestals becomes even more unique when we look at their liberties in court. The Vestals were the only women in Rome who could testify in court.47 For other women in Rome and especially for the women from the elite families it was rare to even appear in court.48 Evidence for the unique legal position of the Vestals in Roman society can be traced back to the 5th century BC49, which shows a long tradition of exceptional treatment of the Vestals.

It seems that the biological families of the girls gained no clear advantages from all these legal privileges and the financial status of the Vestal Virgins. There is no ancient source that mentions a Vestal Virgin helping her birth family in a financial or a legal matter. One text from Plutarchus discusses how Marcus Crassus, an important Roman politician and a relative from Vestal Virgin Licinia50, persuades her into selling her villa in the suburbs for a low price. But the text seems to suggest that this low selling price was rather because of Crassus’ his avarice and the fact that he was persistent to buy the property than because the two of them were related.51 However, when we look at the social status the Vestals gained in the Roman society for their function, it shows a slight difference concerning the advantages the families gained.

Because of the sacredness of the Vesta cult and the fact that the cult was directly connected with the welfare and safety of Rome itself, the function of Vestal Virgin carried a high social status. Because of their sacredness, they were treated with great awe and sanctity.52 Their virginity was seen as something extremely pure, and for this reason the care and protection of their fire may be more easily maintained. Their virginity and overall

45 Wildfang, Rome’s Vestal Virgins, p. 64-65.
46 Plutarchus, Numa 9-11.
47 Aulus Gellius, Noctes Atticae 7.7.1.
48 Wildfang, Rome’s Vestal Virgins, p. 69.
49 In the fragments of the law of the Twelve Tables, which dates somewhere around the middle of the 5th century BC, the Vestal Virgins and their freedom of guardians are mentioned, see Aulus Gellius mentioning of Labeo’s commentaries on the Twelve Tables in the Noctes Atticae 1.12.
51 Plutarchus, Crassus, 1.2.
52 Livius, Ab Urbe Condita Libri 1.20.
appearance were thought to be an example for other Roman women.\textsuperscript{53} In this society where chastity was so important, it was only convenient to give the Vestals a great public role, which resulted among other things in the participation in a lot of religious festivals and activities.\textsuperscript{54}

In the early history of the cult, the function of Vestal Virgin was only accessible for girls from patrician families. Later on, the daughters from elite plebeian families also became acceptable.\textsuperscript{55} Logically, these girls already had a higher social position than, for example, the daughters of freedmen. In addition, the moment they joined the priesthood, they received a number of social and political privileges, of which no other woman in Rome could count on. When the Vestals left their home and made their way through the city, they were accompanied by a lictor. This was told by Dio Cassius, who mentioned an incident during the time of Caesar, when a Vestal returned home from dinner in the evening and had not been recognized as a Vestal and was insulted. From then on, the State allowed the Vestal Virgins to employ one lictor each.\textsuperscript{56}

The story of Dio Cassius could have been invented to explain why the Vestals were allowed to be accompanied by a lictor. The fact however that they were allowed to be accompanied by a lictor shows an important privilege. This privilege was normally only given to men of certain distinctions, male priests and magistrates.\textsuperscript{57} The designation of a lictor basically equated the Vestals symbolically to these men, priests and magistrates. The lictor also carried the fasces for the Vestal, an axe attached to a bundle of rods, which was a symbol for power of the State and generally associated with emperors, consuls and other high-ranking officials.\textsuperscript{58} As a means of transport, the Vestals were the only women who were permitted to drive through the city in a two-wheeled wagon, the carpentum.\textsuperscript{59} When a Vestal on her route suddenly encountered a criminal who was going to be brought to death, the criminal was released with the idea that the meeting must have been a sign and the will of the gods.\textsuperscript{60}

Not only was the perpetual fire taken care of by the Vestal Virgins, the Vestals were also entrusted with the care of other sacred things. However, because of the secret state of

\begin{footnotes}
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\item Cicero, \textit{De Legibus} 2.29.
\item Dio Cassius, \textit{Historia Romana} 47.19.
\item Plutarchus, \textit{Numa} 9-11.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotes}
these things even the ancient sources cannot tell us exactly what sort of sacred things the Vestals were entrusted with. Nevertheless, we do receive some idea of the scope from Plutarchus, as he reveals some of the options. One of the most common thoughts is that after the fall of Troy, Aeneas took the Palladium of Troy with him to Italy, a wooden statue of Pallas Athena that fell from heaven. Another thought is that the Vestals took care of the Samothracian images, which according to the legends, Dardanus brought with him to Troy. Although it does not become entirely clear what the Vestals kept safe in the Aedes Vestae, it is clear that contemporaries found it logical that the Vestals were the safe-keepers of the most important historical objects of their city and their ancestors.

This fact also becomes apparent from other contemporary sources. According to several ancient sources, the Vestals were also guardians of official documents. Especially from the last century BC we have several accounts where the Vestals are only mentioned by historical writers when some important document is either placed or released from the safe keeping of the Vestals. Different treaties and sealed agreements were kept secured by the Vestals and the wills of Caesar and Antonius were both trusted to the care of the Vestal Virgins. However, the will of Antonius was taken from the Vestals by Octavianus while Antonius was still alive. Subsequently, the will was read out loud in the Senate, just after Antonius’ last departure to the East. As a result, Octavianus could use the contents of the will against Antonius. According to Wildfang this event implies that the possession of the document in the care of the Vestals was adequate evidence of the documents’ legitimacy. To the ordinary Roman, possession of the documents in the hands of the priestesses guaranteed the document’s authenticity, even though the will of Antonius was used in public by his opponent. This shows the level of trust the Romans had in the cult of Vesta and her priestesses. Especially the fact that important political figures trusted their wills to the care of the Vestals shows the confidence political figures, as well as the State, had in the institution.

Another example that shows the importance of the priestesses and their tasks can be seen in several writings on an occurrence during the attack of the Gauls on the city of Rome. Although it is questionable whether or not the occurrence really happened, the story is a good

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64 Suetonius, Iulius 83 and Plutarchus, Antonius 58.
65 This occurrence had an enormous political background. This event will be discussed more extensively in chapter 4.
66 Wildfang, Rome’s Vestal Virgins, p.100.
example that shows the importance of the cult to Rome, and it is easy to imagine how the story was probably used to remind the Romans of this fact as well. During the attack of the Gauls, the Vestal Virgins decided to escape the city and take the secret objects with them. During their escape they were spotted by the Roman Lucius Albanius, who was just bringing his wife and children to safety in a wagon. Instead of continuing his way, he decided that the Vestals and the religion of the State were more important than his family. Therefore he ordered his family to leave the wagon and then brought the Vestals and the sacred objects safely to the city of Caere.\(^{67}\) The story shows that the wellbeing of the Vestals as well as the welfare of the city of Rome were the priority of the Romans; in such an extent that Rome’s welfare was more important for a Roman than his entire family. It is clear that the story served as a roll model for the Romans; it explains that the Romans had to respect the cult of Vesta and the Vestals. Even today people can see statues of Vestals near the Aedes Vestae on the Forum Romanum, established by the Romans in honour of one of the Vestal Virgins. From Plinius Major we learn that this is an extraordinary fact and a great compliment, considering that not many statues were erected in honour of a woman.\(^{68}\)

Out of the high social prestige and the great privileges the Vestals received, we may conclude that the Romans must have been very proud of their Vestal Virgins. The social status of the Vestal Virgins was without doubt unique and they were an important and indispensable element of the public and religious life in Rome. For the young girls, and thus also their families, it must have been a true honour to become a part of the cult of Vesta. Even though the families probably did not gain any personal financial or juridical advantages, the social prestige the family gained when their daughter was chosen to become a Vestal Virgin must have been a great compensation. Their daughter must have been known by everyone, probably not just in the city of Rome: the Vestals were probably known everywhere in the Roman State and they had a great welfare and a high religious position. But this good reputation and the public role of the function could therefore also be a great risk for the families of the girls, especially when a scandal occurred.

Nowadays, especially after the increase of social media, all famous and public persons must be on their guard to make sure that they do not make an enormous scandal that could ruin their career and their personal lives. This fact not only applies to all famous actors, singers and important political persons but also to persons who are expected to behave as a role-model to society. However this is not a modern practice: also in antiquity all important

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\(^{67}\) Valerius Maximus, 1.1.10, Livius 5.40 and Plutarchus, *Camillus* 20-21.

\(^{68}\) Plinius Major, *Historia Naturalis* 34.24-25.
public persons had to be careful not to become part of rumors and scandals that could ruin them. The function of Vestal Virgin was not only a function with great prestige and privileges; it also came with a great burden. When a Vestal Virgin broke her vow of chastity, she awaited a severe punishment for the crime of incestum and was buried alive near the Colline gate.\textsuperscript{69} When such an incident happened, it put a negative mark on the social prestige of the Vestal Virgins and besides that, it must have also brought a great shame to the families of the girls. With this in mind, it seems interesting that in 114 BC\textsuperscript{70}, less than a century away of the founding of the Empire, we see such a terrible incident happening not only to one of the Vestal Virgins, but in fact to three of them.

Orosius describes how a daughter of a knight was riding on her horse and got struck by a lightning bolt and was stripped naked. According to the Romans, this was such a remarkable event that it could only have been a prodigy from the gods which led, with the cooperation of the angered Roman populace, to the accusation of incestum of three Vestals Virgins; Marcia, Aemilia and Licinia.\textsuperscript{71} Livius also described the accusation of the three Vestals in book 63 on the history of Rome. Unfortunately only his summary survived, from which we learn that all three of the Vestals were consequently sentenced to death.\textsuperscript{72} This cruel incident could have scared off potential candidates and their families in the late Republic and could have lowered the number of available candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin in the following century. The event clearly shows the negative aspect of the priesthood and the risks that belonged with the priesthood. Furthermore, once the daughters became fully integrated into the priesthood, it became questionable to which extent the families were able to keep influencing the actions of their daughters. Families had to take these risks into account when they gave their daughter away to become a Vestal Virgin.

The social, economic and legal position of the Vestal Virgins remains an extraordinary subject in Roman literature. Various ancient sources demonstrate how unique the position of a priestess of Vesta was in Roman society. It appears that during the late Republic, no major changes occurred concerning the social, economic or legal status of the Vestal Virgins. The priesthood offered great opportunities to families who aspired that their daughters got an important religious and public role with a great social prestige. The Vestals received various social and economic privileges and were legally more independent than any other woman of the Roman elite. Nevertheless this chapter also showed some factors that could have

\textsuperscript{69} Plutarchus, Numa 9-11.
\textsuperscript{70} Wildfang, Rome’s Vestal Virgins, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{71} Orosius 5.15.20-22.
\textsuperscript{72} Livius, Periochae 63a.
influenced elite families to reconsider and even reject the benefits of this priesthood. First of all, the priesthood came with one heavy burden. Every Vestal founded guilty of *incestum* would be buried alive and families would lose their daughter forever. Secondly, once the families gave away their daughters to the priesthood they lost all their legal connection with their daughters and although the daughters benefitted from the financial and legal advantages, there is no reason to assume that the families also benefitted from them.
Chapter 2: Demographic Factors

The life course of an elite family in Rome depended strongly on demographical factors. These factors in ancient Rome showed very different patterns than the demographical factors current families have to deal with. There was a high infant mortality and the life expectancy differed much from the life expectancy western society is blessed with nowadays.\(^{73}\) Knowing these demographic patterns is fundamental for getting a good understanding of the decisions Roman families took for their daughters. It is likely that some of the decisions were strongly affected by the demographical factors.

Unfortunately, for the research of Rome’s demographic patterns we have to cope with a significant lack of reliable statistics and data. Therefore we have to take advantage of reconstructions of demographical models in which probabilities play a significant role. Fortunately we have access to a large amount of information about the Vestal Virgins that we can use to make new calculations based on existing demographical models. In this chapter we will look at demographical data that can give us an insight in the demographical factors that could have positively or negatively impacted the number of available candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin. Not only will we look at demographical developments that could have influenced a family in their decision to put their daughter forward for the function of Vestal Virgin, but this chapter will also discuss the demographical factors that could have determined whether or not a girl was at all suitable as a candidate for the function of Vestal Virgin.

From ancient sources we learn that there was a large number of criteria with which a girl had to comply to be suitable, for the function of Vestal Virgin. In *Noctes Atticae*, Aulus Gellius wrote about the various criteria a girl had to meet in order to become qualified as a Vestal. First of all, the girl had to be between the ages of six and ten years old. She had to be from freeborn parents, of which both of the parents had to be alive and they might never have been engaged in a low occupation. Her father had to own a residence in Italy and both the girl and her father could not already have been emancipated from the guardianship of their head of the family.\(^{74}\)


\(^{74}\) This refers to a situation in which the girl was under guardianship of her grandfather and her father was still living. Being freed of *potestas* was considered not pure enough for the priesthood even when the father was the one who was freed. See Wildfang, *Rome’s Vestal Virgins*, p. 42-43.
Daughters of parents who had three children were excused. However, the girl could not have been disabled in any way. Furthermore, Aulus Gellius explains, girls were excused from the function of Vestal Virgin, when their direct family was already chosen for some of the other important priesthoods. A girl was also excused when she was betrothed to a pontiff. From Tacitus we learn that a daughter from divorced parents was undesirable.

With a calculation based on a demographical model, we can evaluate an average number of vacancies that became available for the priesthood of Vesta. The model life table used for the calculation, Coale Demeny Model West Level 3 Female (table 1), is one of the Coale-Demeny tables, which are the most commonly used tables today. The West Level 3 Female table represents a standard pattern of mortality among females, with an average life expectancy ($e_0$) of 25 by birth.

### Table 1: Coale Demeny Model West Level 3 Female.

<table>
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<th>$x$</th>
<th>$a_x$</th>
<th>$d_x$</th>
<th>$l_x$</th>
<th>$1000m_x$</th>
<th>$l_x$</th>
<th>$T_x$</th>
<th>$c_x$</th>
<th>$c_x$</th>
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</thead>
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<td>30956</td>
<td>10000</td>
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<td>14988</td>
<td>69444</td>
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<td>34.864</td>
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<td>3300</td>
<td>54456</td>
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<td>2181638</td>
<td>40.062</td>
<td>10.53</td>
</tr>
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<td>2424</td>
<td>51156</td>
<td>9.7</td>
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<td>1918431</td>
<td>37.302</td>
<td>10.00</td>
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<td>48732</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>236465</td>
<td>1669468</td>
<td>34.237</td>
<td>9.46</td>
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<td>0.0766</td>
<td>3503</td>
<td>45734</td>
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<td>1432003</td>
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<td>3728</td>
<td>38614</td>
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<td>1095269</td>
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<td>7.36</td>
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<td>3677</td>
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<td>130566</td>
<td>511911</td>
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<td>24389</td>
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<td>381349</td>
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<td>55</td>
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<td>3950</td>
<td>20661</td>
<td>42.1</td>
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<td>268346</td>
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<td>3.75</td>
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<td>4241</td>
<td>12173</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<td>7934</td>
<td>121.8</td>
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<td>6.448</td>
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<td>2.544</td>
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<td>1.784</td>
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</tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>810.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.234</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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75 According to Wildfang, this criterion was added later on the list and is as a consequence less important in this discussion. In 18 BC Augustus granted all citizen class women who had borne three children the *ius trium liberorum*. With this right the women were freed of male guardianship. As a consequence, the *potestas* the mothers was normally under, was now disturbed and became less pure. Wildfang states that this was the reason why these daughters were probably not eligible anymore for the function of Vestal Virgin and were excused. See *Wildfang, Rome’s Vestal Virgins*, p. 43 and Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 1.12.

76 Disabled children will be left out of the discussion in this Chapter. The number of disabled elite girls with the age of six to ten in the Roman Republic was probably minimal. In the Roman society disabled children would mostly have been disposed immediately after birth.


78 Tacitus, *Annales* 2.86.

79 See table 1: Coale-Demeny Model West Level 3 Female. A very useful explanation on the table can be found in T.G. Parkin, *Demography and Roman Society*, (Baltimore and London, 1992) p. 80-82.

80 I chose to use this table, since other scholars also prefer to use this table as a standard table to represent the patterns of Roman society. See Parkin, *Demography and Roman Society*, p. 80-82.
Table 2: Vacancies for the function of Vestal Virgin during 30 years of service.\textsuperscript{81}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>x</th>
<th>Qx</th>
<th>Dx</th>
<th>Lx</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.0606</td>
<td>0.3636</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.0474</td>
<td>0.2672</td>
<td>5.6364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>0.0606</td>
<td>0.0220</td>
<td>0.3636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths:</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2892</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.0615</td>
<td>0.3302</td>
<td>5.3692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>0.0474</td>
<td>0.0162</td>
<td>0.3416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
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<td>0.0175</td>
<td>0.2892</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>(15)</td>
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<td>0.3254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10)</td>
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<td>0.0129</td>
<td>0.2717</td>
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<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>0.0606</td>
<td>0.0221</td>
<td>0.3639</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>(20)</td>
<td>0.0766</td>
<td>0.0234</td>
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<td>0.0162</td>
<td>0.3418</td>
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<td>Deaths:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Deaths:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Deaths</td>
<td>2.4608</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Remaining Vestals of the original 6, after 30 years of service</td>
<td>3.8437</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the calculation for an average number of vacancies that became available for the priesthood of Vesta, based on the Coale Demeny table. To estimate the number of vacancies, we have to calculate how many Vestals died during their 30 years of service and furthermore how many new Vestals were needed as a supplement to fill the empty vacancies in the priesthood. The fourth column (Lx) shows the number of survivors at age x. The

\textsuperscript{81} The first column on the left shows the ages of the girls (x) in steps of five years. The second column shows the probability of dying between ages x and x + n years (Qx). The third column displays the number of persons dying between ages x and x + n years (Dx). The last column, displays the number of survivors at age x from an original cohort (Lx). These symbols are based on the same symbols in the book of Parkin, \textit{Demography and Roman Society}, p. xv-xvi.
original cohort \((L_0)\) in this table is 6. We know that there were six Vestal Virgins in the priesthood in total. These six Vestal Virgins had to serve the priesthood for 30 years. They started to serve the priesthood at \(x=5\), and left the priesthood at \(x=35\). The second column shows the probability of dying for the Vestals. We can see that the 6 Vestals who started to serve the priesthood at age 5 (\(x=5\)), had a probability of 0.0606 of dying. The third column shows us the number of Vestals dying between age \(x\) and \(x + n\). Now we can see that from the 6 original Vestals, 0.3636 died between \(x=5\) and \(x=10\). Because 0.3636 Vestals ‘died’ from the original 6 at \(x=10\), 0.3636 ‘new’ Vestals had to start from \(x=5\) in order to get a total of 6 Vestals again. After 10 years of service from the original Vestals (\(x=15\)) only 5.3692 of the original Vestals survived and 0.3416 from the supplement of 0.3636 Vestals survived. This means that 0.2892 Vestals must have died and hence 0.2892 ‘new’ Vestals were needed to get a total of 6 Vestals again.

This calculation must be continued till we reach \(x=35\). At that moment, the original Vestals served for 30 years and left the priesthood. After these 30 years we see a total sum of 2.4608 deaths. This is not only the number of deaths from the original six Vestals, but also the number of deaths of the Vestals who were needed as a supplement. We can conclude that while they served the priesthood of Vesta, on average 2.5 Vestals died every 30 years. This means that every 30 years 6+2.5= 8.5 Vestals were needed to fill the vacancies in the priesthood. By means of a simple calculation we can now conclude that every 3.5 years a new vacancy opened for the function of Vestal Virgin.

This number of vacancies is relatively high, but that is partly the result of the restrictions we had to cope with making this calculation. We have to keep in mind that it is a reconstruction based on Vestal Virgins who left the priesthood after 30 years of service. It appears however, that in reality at least some of the Vestal Virgins decided to stay in the priesthood after the mandatory 30 years of service and serve the priesthood until their death. As a result it seems likely that it took a slightly longer time than 3.5 years before a new vacancy became available. Altogether, this calculation clearly shows that because of a high mortality rate, not all Vestal Virgins were able to serve the priesthood for the mandatory 30 years.

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82 To make this calculation not unnecessary complicated, standard numbers were used. The Vestals started to serve the priesthood at age 5. In this way we include all girls from age 6 -10. For this calculation we also assume that every Vestal left the priesthood at \(x = 35\). The probability of dying by means of an accusation of incestum is ignored in this calculation, because we are not sure about the total number of accused Vestals and it would also make the calculation unnecessary complicated.

83 When we multiply the 6 Vestals with the probability of dying 0.0606, 0.3636 is the outcome.

84 When we have 30 years of service to fill, divided by 8.5 Vestals, every 3.5 years a new Vestal was needed. \(30÷8.5=3.53\)

85 See Plutarchus, Numa, 9-11.
years. As a result, throughout the years a relatively high number of vacancies became available for the priesthood of Vesta, which meant that a relatively high number of elite daughters were needed to fill all the vacancies. This would have made the situation at the end of the Republic even more difficult, because there was a lack of interest in the function.

We learn from Dio Cassius that the Vestals were chosen from the daughters of the noblest families in Rome. However, it does not become clear from the text which noble families were meant. Because of the lack of reliable statistics from ancient Rome and nearly a complete lack of data samples from which we could have constructed meaningful statistics, it is impossible to give an exact number of girls who complied with all the criteria. Luckily, thanks to the significant comprehensive research work of other scholars on the demography of Rome, it is possible to sketch the impact this large amount of criteria had on the remaining amount of suitable candidates. First we have to start with the number of available elite girls. Again we might take recourse to Model Life Tables. Since we do not exactly know which noble families were meant, two different scenarios have been completely outlined.

The first scenario is one in which we assume the broadest meaning of Dio Cassius’ ‘noblest families’. In this scenario we include the top families of the socioeconomic pyramid, the well-off Roman citizens, which represented no more than 2% of the total Roman population. Unfortunately we do not have an exact population size of Rome. However, scholars have roughly estimated that there were about 1,000,000 inhabitants in Rome during the Early Principate. This means that the Roman upper layer of 2% of elite families consisted out of 20,000 people. We may assume that 50% was female, which leaves us with 10,000 women. We now have to figure out how many percent of these 10,000 women fell within the age-category of the candidates for the function of Vestal Virgins. To answer this question and in order to get an indication of the number of girls aged from 6-10, we turn to table 1 again: the Coale Demeny Model West Level 3 Female. The last column of the table shows the percentage of persons aged between x and x + n years, based on a stationary

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86 Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana* 55.22
87 Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family*, p. 9.
88 I do not discuss this perspective to accomplish a detailed account on the amount of suitable candidates, I only want to show the possibilities and the restrictions demographical factors may have caused.
Because the table works with different age groups and is based on steps of five years, it is very difficult to calculate how many girls were exactly between the age of 6 and 10. Therefore, in order to make it less complicated we will look at the age group of 5 to 10 years, which covers the girls with the age of 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. The table shows that the percentage of girls aged between 5 and 10 was 10.53. When we multiply this percentage with the population of 10,000 women, the outcome of the number of girls aged between 5 and 10 is estimated as 1053. This calculation gives us an indication of the number of elite girls that could have been potential candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin. With this indication, it can be concluded that the broadest meaning of Dio Cassius ‘noblest families’ contained around 1053 young elite girls who could have been potential candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin.

The second scenario is based on a considerably smaller amount of Roman elite. For this scenario we assume that Dio Cassius only referred to the most aristocratic families of Roman society; the senatorial families and the richest equites. We may assume that there were about 1000 of these families, representing a notional amount of 5000 people. From these 5000 people, 2500 were female and 10.53% were girls aged between 5 and 10. By multiplying this percentage with the 2500 females, we obtain the total amount of girls aged between 5 and 10. In this scenario, only 263 girls had the proper age to be potential candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin. Keeping the results of these two scenarios in mind, we can now take a look at other criteria the elite girls had to comply with, besides ancestry or their age.

Richard Saller is one of the scholars who published a significant and comprehensive work about Roman family. He used computer simulations to give a reconstruction of the changing shape of kinship and the Roman life course. Saller used micro simulation called CAMSIM, developed by James Smith. This simulation simulates the events of birth, death and marriage in order to generate a model population. In Saller’s book: Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family, Saller presents three different types of tables based on micro simulation. The first table presents the mean number of living kin, the second table the

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90 See Parkin, *Demography and Roman Society*, p. xv.
91 As we can see, the percentage of x=5 and x=10 are almost alike. After the child’s’ survival of the first years, the mortality rate drops sharply. As a consequence the number of children with the age of 5 till 14 will not decline significantly. For this reason it is not a great issue to use x=5, since it will not make much difference on the final result.
92 If Dio Cassius only referred to the senatorial families, he probably would have chosen a different vocabulary. For this reason, the richest equites are also included in the calculation. See Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana*, 55.22.
93 For this calculation we assume that there was an average of 3 children per family. See Bodley, *The Power of Scale*, p. 94.
proportion having living kin and the last table the mean age of living kin. In his tables Saller makes a distinction between males and females, between ordinary males and females and between senatorial males and females. The tables based on senatorial males and females take into account the consequences of marrying at a younger age, which happened amongst Roman elite families.\(^94\) In order to approach Dio Cassius ‘noblest families’ in the best way, the model for the senatorial female is the most suitable table. One of the tables of Saller shows, among others, the percentage of females at different ages living with their parents and other living kin. Because of the high mortality rate in ancient Rome, a lot of children already lost one of their parents at a very young age. Table 3 shows that 89% of the senatorial girls at the age of 5, still had a father and 93% of the girls still had a mother.\(^95\) This means that with the age of 5, 11% of the girls had already lost her father, and 7% had already lost her mother. The table also shows the percentage of girls with at least one parent alive, being 99% of the girls. This means that 1% of the girls had already lost both of her parents at the age of 5.


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<th>15</th>
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<th>25</th>
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<td>0.36</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: . indicates no occurrences in simulation; 0.00 indicates less than 0.01.

\(^94\) Saller, Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family, p. 45-46.

\(^95\) See table 3: Female, “senatorial,” Level 3 West: proportion having living kin. According to Saller, Coale-Demeny Level 3 West Female (\(e_0 = 25\)) is the best all-purpose estimate of Roman mortality rates, therefore he used this number as the mortality rate for this table.
Using these statistics and a simple two-way probability table, we can now calculate the probability that a senatorial girl at the age of 5 had already lost at least one of her parents. The same can be calculated for a senatorial girl with the age of 10. Table 3 shows that at the age of 10, 78% of the senatorial girls still had a father and 85% of still had a mother. At this age, 96% of the girls at least had one living parent, which means that 4% of the girls had already lost both of her parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4a: Senatorial girls age 5.</th>
<th>Table 4b: Senatorial girls age 10.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Father</strong></td>
<td><strong>Father</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4a\(^{96}\) shows that from the percentage of senatorial girls with the age of 5\(^{97}\), probably 83% had two living parents, which means that 17% lost at least one of their parents and was therefore not qualified for the function of Vestal Virgin. When we look at Table 4b, which contains the numbers relevant to the senatorial girls that had the age of 10, we see that based on the micro-simulation and the Saller’s table, only 67% had two living parents. This means that 33% of the girls had lost at least one of her parents and was therefore not eligible to be presented as a candidate for the function of Vestal Virgin. If the percentages in the table of Saller approach the real percentages of ancient Rome, the results of these two calculations tell us a very interesting fact. The two tables show that, between 17% to 33% of the daughters of the Roman elite was not eligible for the function of Vestal Virgin, because at least one of their parents had died.\(^{98}\)

We can now place these results within the two scenarios that we discussed earlier on. The first scenario discussed the broadest meaning of the Roman elite. This scenario showed that 1053 girls of the Roman elite were available as potential candidates. However, we now know that 17 to 33% of these girls had lost at least one of their parents. As a consequence,

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\(^{96}\) Bold are the numbers we copied from the table of Saller. The numbers in italics are the numbers which were calculated and subsequently entered. The number which is blue, bold, in italic and is underlined is the number we wanted to calculate with this two-way probability table. This number shows the percentage of girls who still had both of their parents alive at the age of 5.

\(^{97}\) The table of Saller calculates with age steps of 5. Therefore I use girls with the age of 5 instead of girls with the age of 6, which was originally the minimal age for candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin.

\(^{98}\) According to the criteria of Aulus Gelius 1.12.1-8.
179 to 347 of the 1053 elite girls lost their potential as a candidate for the priesthood. This means that only 706 girls remained potential candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin in the most negative scenario.

The second scenario was based on a stricter interpretation of Rome’s aristocratic families. In this scenario, only 263 daughters of the Roman aristocracy were left available for the function of Vestal Virgin. Taking into account that both of the parents of these girls must have been alive, 17% to 33% of the 263 daughters were not qualified anymore. These percentages are equal to 45 to 87 girls. In the most negative scenario, only 176 daughters of the aristocracy remained available as a potential candidate for the function of Vestal Virgin. Both scenarios are good examples that show what kind of influence demographic factors could have had on the number of available candidates.

One other demographical development which could have also influenced the amount of eligible candidates was the high divorce rate. Several scholars have demonstrated the increase of divorce rate within marriages at the end of the Republic. Keith Bradley states that divorce was common among Roman marriages.99 The following citation from Seneca clearly illustrates the extent of this occurrence:

"Is there any woman who blushes at divorce, now that certain distinguished and aristocratic women reckon their years, not by consuls but by the number of their husbands? They leave home in order to marry, and marry in order to divorce. As long as it was rare, they feared the scandal. But now every gazette carries the news of divorce; they have learnt to do what they have often heard about. Is there any shame about adultery, when matters have come to such a pass, that no one has a husband, except to provoke her lover. Chastity is simply proof of ugliness."100

Divorce was relatively easy in some cases of marriage in the Late Republic. Marriage was based on consent; in free marriage the will of either of the consenting parties was sufficient to renounce the marriage.101 Divorce in a manus-marriage was permitted to the husband only and in the early Republic this type of divorce was only permitted on a few specific grounds. When a man divorced his wife on any other grounds; he had to give a part of his property to his ex-wife. Later, in the Republican period, we see cases of divorce where the husband did not had to pay property to his wife and as a result an innocent wife could easily be divorced without receiving any financial compensation. Another later development in the

100 Seneca, De Beneficiis 3.16. It becomes clear from Seneca’s vocabulary that the text is rhetorical and that he dramatizes the phenomenon. However, it is very likely that behind these rhetorical words the text contains some truth.
101 This was a possibility until the law of Marcus Aurelius changed it, when he included the pater as a consenting party.
Republican law allowed men to divorce without any fixed grounds for divorce, divorcing became gradually easier. Other factors that contributed to the incidences of divorce where marriages that remained childless or when a divorce was used as a political or strategic move.\textsuperscript{102} Corbier states that at the end of the Republic divorce often seems to have been a matter of familial obligation.\textsuperscript{103}

Susan Treggiari states that amongst the senators and equestrians there was a chance of about one in six that a first marriage was dissolved by divorce within the first decade of the marriage. According to Treggiari, there was “no automatic social stigma attached to the spouse who divorced or the spouse who was divorced.”\textsuperscript{104} This statement could be correct for the daily social life of the spouses, but as we saw earlier, there was some sort of stigma attached to daughters of divorced parents. As a result, these daughters became undesirable for the function of Vestal Virgin. If Treggiari’s thought on the frequency of the divorce rate comes close to that of the actual rates in the Roman Republic, almost 17\% of the marriages of the noblest families in Rome would end in a divorce within the first decade of the marriage. This means that the daughters born from these marriages were also not suitable anymore for the function of Vestal Virgin.

This percentage of girls with divorced parents affects the remaining number of available candidates. From the first scenario we still have 706 to 874 girls left who could be potential candidates. However when we deduct the percentage of girls with divorced parents, only 586 to 725 girls remain as available candidates. From the second scenario we still have 176 to 218 girls left. When we deduct this 17\% of girls with divorced parents from the remaining candidates only 146 to 181 girls remained available as a candidate for the function of Vestal Virgin. Originally, the first scenario started with a total of 1053 girls and the second scenario with 263 girls. This means that at least 31\% of the girls in both scenarios were not eligible for the function of Vestal Virgin, because they did not comply with the set criteria.\textsuperscript{105} The demographical factors of death and divorce were thus of great influence on the number of suitable candidates drawn from daughters of the elite Roman families. In addition, there were other criteria which could result in an even lower number of suitable candidates.

\textsuperscript{103} M. Corbier, ‘Divorce and Adoption as Familial Strategies’, in: B. Rawson, \textit{Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome}, (Oxford, 1991) p.60. More on these divorces which were used as political and strategic moves will be discussed in chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{104} S. Treggiari, ‘Divorce Roman Style: How Easy and how Frequent was it?’ in B. Rawson, \textit{Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome}, (Oxford, 1991) p. 46.
\textsuperscript{105} This percentage can be checked with a simple calculation: 725 out of 1053 = 69\% (100\% - 69\%=31\%) 181 out of 263 = also 69.
Also, a notable number of daughters probably already had a direct family member in one of the other priesthoods. Daughters of the flamen, the augurs, the dancing priests of Mars, the daughters of the triumviri epulones and the daughters of the guardians of the Sibyline books, acquired exemption of the priesthood of Vesta. The girls who had a sister that had already joined the priesthood of Vesta, acquired exemption as well.\textsuperscript{106}

It is likely that a combination of all the criteria mentioned by Aulus Gallius, plus the demographical problems of divorce and early deaths of parents, had great consequences for the number of suitable candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin. It is safe to say that, because of these criteria, at least one third of the elite daughters between the age 6 and 10 were not eligible for the function of Vestal Virgin anymore.

Augustus decided to ease the criteria, when he also permitted the daughters of freedmen to join the priesthood.\textsuperscript{107} The fact that many daughters of elite families could no longer fulfil the large amount of criteria to become a Vestal Virgin, could have been the main reason for Augustus’ decision. The impact of this decision was probably significant. We do not know the exact amount of freedman in Rome, but estimates made by scholars indicate ten of thousands families. However, most slaves were released at old age, and as a consequence not many children were born. But even when we take this fact into account, it still appears that the decision of Augustus resulted in a significant increase of available candidates.

Besides the above mentioned demographical factors, there were also other demographical factors which could have additionally lowered the number of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin. These other demographical factors, that will be discussed later on, did not directly affect the suitability of the candidates. These demographical factors could however have influenced the decisions of the fathers of the families to not put their daughters forward for the function. This might have been because of other consequences with great political or strategic value.\textsuperscript{108}

What is known, is that Roman girls were officially allowed to marry when they reached the age of 12. It is very likely however, that the agreement between both of the families was arranged much earlier. By the time a new candidate was needed in the priesthood of Vesta, the available girls may have already been betrothed by their parents. In one of the chapters of Saller’s book on patriarchy property and death, he discusses the dowry, its function and the strategies behind the dowries in Roman society. He points out that the

\textsuperscript{106} Aulus Gellius, \textit{Noctes Atticae} 1.12.
\textsuperscript{107} Dio Cassius, \textit{Historia Romana}, 55.22.
\textsuperscript{108} More on the political and strategic values of the Roman daughters will be discussed in chapter 4.
Roman demography could have had noticeable effects on the dowries. He argues that the high divorce rate possibly restrained the eagerness of men to demand a large dowry.\(^\text{109}\) The probability of divorce was after all very high, as we saw earlier on in the article of Treggiari.\(^\text{110}\) With the increase of the number of divorces, it became an important concern for the wife and her family to ensure that the dowry returned at the end of a marriage: either to enhance her chance for remarriage or to preserve the wealth of her family. The Roman law developed a set of legal rules to secure this.\(^\text{111}\) Consequently, at the end of the Republic, a divorce meant the return of the dowry to the wife. and moreover, with the prospect of divorce, a high dowry was not necessary and useful anymore for the husband. This meant that it is likely that the dowries were lower at the end of the Republic, than it used to be; which made a marriage arrangement for the daughters of the Roman elite much cheaper and tempting. Other demographical phenomena also suggest a decline in the price of dowries.

Judith Hallet wrote an extensive work on the relationship between fathers and daughters in Roman society. One chapter in her book deals with the value of Roman daughters. Hallet discusses the decision of families to admit their daughters to the Vestal cult. She states that it is plausible that a connection existed between social and economic factors and developments in admission and length of term for girls in the cult. During periods of war or economic crisis, when the available number of suitable husbands was diminished, well-born and powerfully situated families desired a place in the order of Vesta for their own young daughters. The fact that the number of suitable husbands diminished was not the only reason for families to desire a place in the order of Vesta for their daughters. Because of the crisis, some of the families were unable to find large dowries for their daughters, which gave them a disadvantage in marriage: families were unable to wed their daughters to husbands of their own social status and therefore the high religious position of the Vestal cult was a much better alternative for their daughters.\(^\text{112}\) This suggestion of Hallet seems very plausible, although it indicates that a reversed situation is also very likely. What if the opposite trend took place at the end of the republic?

From Dio Cassius we learn about the measures that Augustus took for the marriages in the Roman aristocracy. It seems that the city of Rome struggled with unequal male/female ratios during that period. According to Dio Cassius there were far more males than females in

\(^{109}\) Saller, Patriarchy, Property and Death, p. 222-223.

\(^{110}\) Treggiari, Divorce Roman Style, p. 46.

\(^{111}\) Gardner, Women in Roman law and society, p. 97-98.

the Roman elite. Therefore, Augustus allowed all men, except the senators, to marry freedwomen. This lack of marriageable aristocratic women corresponds with the lack of candidates for the function of priestess of Vesta. Just when there was an overall shortage of aristocratic women in Roman society, daughters of elite families who were available for marriage would have probably been very popular within the aristocratic circle. For this reason it may have become less desirable for families to lose their daughters for religious functions.

In the article of Mekacher and Françoise Van Haeperen in which the recruitment of the Vestals is discussed, the authors state that marriages at the end of the republic were much more promising for the daughters of an aristocratic family, than the function of Vestal priestess. However, in their article Mekacher and Van Heaperen do not provide us with any evidence or ancient source which could support this statement. The reason for this could be the fact that there simply no relating sources which support their statement. However, this does not mean that a shortage of marriageable women could not have had a lot of consequences for the marriage agreements between two families. Even though we have no surviving sources that agree on this subject, we do have sources of similar situations in other cultures.

Among Hindus from the high caste, it is usual that the family of the girl presents a dowry to the family of the boy at the tilak: the betrothal ceremony that is held one week before the wedding. Among Hindus from the lower and the pariah caste, it is the opposite. Among these lower castes the families of the boys are expected to give a dowry to the family of the girls. However, in nineteenth century Guyana we see a striking event. Because of an acute shortage of women, Hindu men of all castes including the high caste, were forced to adopt the lower caste tradition. In this new situation they were the ones who had to offer the dowry for a chance to win a spouse. The same situation appeared in Trinidad, Jamaica and Surinam. With this example, I do not state that I am sure that the same event occurred in republican Rome, but it does show that a shortage of women has direct consequences for marriage agreements. If the same striking event occurred at Rome, it is not unthinkable that fathers could have lowered the dowries of their daughters in time of a shortage of marriageable women; there was still plenty of demand for them.

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113 There has been a lot of discussion about this subject. A reason for this lack on marriageable aristocratic women could have been the bloody civil wars but it could also have been a consequence of gender-specific exposure, as some scholars expect that female children were exposed more often than male. See Gardner, Women in Roman Law and Society, p. 156.
114 Dio Cassius, Historia Romana 54.16.2.
115 Mekacher and van Haeperen, Le choix des Vestales, p. 77.
A lower dowry could have had many consequences for the decision making of the fathers of the families of the elite girls. Not only was a marriage agreement much cheaper and enticing than before, it was now also much easier and cheaper to arrange a second or even a third marriage for the daughters. The various factors including a high mortality level, a high divorce rate, and the low dowries, created a demographic background in which remarriage was frequent. As we will see in chapter four, frequent remarriage was very profitable for the families of the Roman elite for several reasons.

From this chapter it becomes clear that because of several demographical factors, it was difficult for the daughters of the elite families to meet all the necessary criteria for the function of Vestal priestess. We have seen that at least 31% of the daughters between the age of 6 and 10 were unsuitable for the function, because their parents had divorced or because one of their parents was already deceased. In addition, it appears that because of various demographical factors like the high divorce rate, low dowries and the shortage of marriageable women, the marriage agreements for daughters from the Roman elite became much more promising at the end of the Roman republic than becoming a Vestal virgin. Altogether it becomes clear that the demographical factors mentioned in this chapter must have had a great influence on the life course of the daughters of the Roman elite. Families definitely had to take these demographical into account when they decided whether or not they aspired a place in the priesthood of Vesta for their daughter.

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Chapter 3: Religious Factors

The *Forum Romanum* was the heart of ancient Rome. It was the place where religion, politics and life itself were fully intertwined. Although many things changed over time in the Roman city, the Roman religion remained the most important component. A Rome without religion was unthinkable. The Roman religion and the welfare of the state were inseparable; rituals were performed every day to make sure that the gods were pleased and the city was protected.\(^{118}\)

Nonetheless, every religion has its ups and downs and so did the Roman religion. It appears that at the end of the Republic, a turning point emerged concerning the religious life in Rome. As we saw earlier, several scholars linked the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin to a religious neglect, which seem to have occurred in the same period.\(^{119}\) In this chapter, we will look at this changing religious life as well as the religious factors that influenced the religious behavior of the aristocratic families and could have contributed to the lack of interest in the function of Vestal Virgin.

Both Mekacher and Van Haeperen and Scheid suggest that the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin was probably a consequence of the effects of the civil wars and the subsequent religious neglect.\(^{120}\) Their statement is not surprising when you look at the available evidence with regards to the religious condition of Rome during that period. Several ancient sources mention some sort of religious neglect in the Late Republic.\(^{121}\) The most outstanding source is perhaps Emperor Augustus himself. According to the *Res Gestae Divi Augustus*, the deeds of the Divine Augustus, he "rebuilt in the city eighty-two temples of the gods, omitting none which at that time stood in need of repair."\(^{122}\) Although Augustus is known for his reforms, it is obvious that we have to be skeptical about his information: Augustus was clearly not the most objective person when it comes to describing his own deeds. Nevertheless when you look at the writings of his contemporaries, it becomes clear that his restorations were probably justified.

\(^{120}\) See Mekacher and Van Haeperen, *Le choix des Vestales*, p. 77 and Scheid, Augustus and Roman Religion, p. 176-177.
For example, both Propertius and Horatius state that the temples and shrines are ruined or abandoned and that the gods are neglected. They do not give any numbers or an exact period of time of this ‘neglect of the gods’, but their writings give the impression that it is a severe problem, or at least for them. Furthermore, several writings of Cicero evidently showed his displeasure and incomprehension about the religious situation of Rome. In one of his writings he mentions one occasion where two consuls disrespected their religious traditions and set sail, thereby they ignoring the auspices and consequently losing their fleet. Cicero called it a “shameless disdain”.

The ‘religious neglect of the Late Republic’ as well as these sources, have been discussed by many modern historians. The conventional view on religion in the Late Republic can be summarized in three main processes. Firstly, the old state religion consisted of several old-fashioned universal rituals, which could not keep up with the emotional needs of the Romans. The ordinary Romans craved for individual contact with the divine, especially because the state rites became increasingly incorporated into the competitive politics of the Roman elite. Secondly, the introduction of Greek and other ‘oriental’ influences resulted in many foreign deities and foreign rituals in the Roman religion. It reflected the endlessness of the Roman religion, which eventually became a weakness of the Roman system. Thirdly, through the introduction of Greek philosophy, educated Romans became more critical and sceptical about their native religious tradition. Therefore, Scheid adds that because of this religious neglect, Augustus had to react with restorations of Rome’s religious institutions and cult places to legitimate his power. The enemies from the civil wars had caused this religious neglect and the subsequent forgotten Roman traditions and as the new ruler, Augustus had to restore everything his enemies had violated. These views fit well with the suggestion of Van Haeperen and Mekacher and Scheid; the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin was caused by a diminishing Roman religion.

Interestingly, recent studies have emphasized the fallacy of this conventional view. According to Eric Orlin, this view on religious neglect originated largely from the idea that religion was manipulated by a disbelieving aristocracy, in order to pursue their own political

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124 See Cicero, De Legibus 2.12.29-33, Cicero, de Natura Deorum 1.82, Cicero, De Natura Deorum 2.3.7-10, Cicero, De Divinatione 1.24-28, Cicero, De Divinatione 2.71.
125 Cicero, De Divinatione 2.71.
127 Scheid, Augustus and Roman Religion, p. 177.
ambitions. In some cases it indeed happened that the aristocracy used the Roman religion for their own political ambitions. But this view is too limited, especially when we look at other developments in the Late Republic. Also, it is no more than logical that we find religion involved in political struggles. After all, Roman religion was centered in the city of Rome. The religious authority and the religious institutes were tightly interwoven with the political authority and political institutes of the Republic. Since the political power was in the hands of the Roman elite, religious power was in their hands as well. Therefore, it is logical that changes in Roman society corresponded with changes in Roman religion. When political struggles persisted and began to transform Rome, the religious system needed to adapt to the new situations.

One example of a situation in the Late Republic provides us with an even clearer view of the connection between political struggles and religious developments. Rising welfare in the Roman society led to bigger differences in wealth amongst Romans and increased the competition for power. The Roman state became more and more unbalanced. This resulted in the clash between the optimates and the populares. Although political power had always been in the hands of the Roman elite, a shift in the division of power emerged during this period. The optimates were the ones who supported the traditional governing class. The populares were the ones who claimed to speak for the interests of the ordinary people and were also supported by them. They were encouraged by the members of the aristocracy who saw support from the people as a means to power.

When the two groups opposed each other politically, its consequences were felt religiously. The populares attempted to claim more religious and political authority for the people and threatened the supremacy of the optimates over the priestly office-holding.

In 104 BC, a law was established which handed the selection of priests for major colleges to the tribal assembly, which was formed by 17 out of 35 Roman voting tribes.

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128 A famous example of religious manipulation among the aristocracy is illustrated by struggles between Clodius and Cicero. In their struggles they both used religion for manipulation and slander. Cicero constantly characterized Clodias as enemy of the gods. For more on this subject see Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1*, p. 140.
129 The two recent works of Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1*, (p. 134 and Orlin, *Urban Religion*, p. 65 both agree to this.
135 As we know from Aulus Gellius 1.12, this law did not apply to the election for the new Vestal Virgin. Twenty girls were chosen by the chief pontiff, and subsequently the girl who was drawn by lot became the new priestess.
resulting in a special popular assembly.\textsuperscript{136} Even though the priestly colleges still drafted the list of candidates for election, this law was a definite change that heightened the authority of the people. Subsequently, Sulla tried to limit the power of the people and removed the law several years later. Nonetheless, in 63 BC the tribune Labienus restored the selection of the priest to the people. From that moment onwards, the competition among the elite changed. It demanded more attention for public opinion and the elite had to strive for public honor.\textsuperscript{137} This case shows that in the Late Republic, religion had to adapt to new circumstances. More authority went to the people instead of the aristocracy and Roman religion was not simply manipulated by a disbelieving aristocracy in a way the conventional view suggested.

Keeping these events in mind, we reconsider the remarkable incident mentioned in chapter 1, that happened in 114 BC just before the law in favor of the \textit{populares} was established. A negative sign from the gods appeared after which three Vestal Virgins, Marcia, Aemilia and Licinia, were convicted for being unchaste\textsuperscript{138}. What makes this incident so remarkable is the fact that at first instance only Vestal Marcia, was found guilty by the pontifical college and sentenced to death. Subsequently, as a response to the acquittal of the two other girls, tribune Sextus Peducaeus asked for a new trial by means of a bill carried through the popular assembly. In the subsequent trial, the other two Vestal Virgins were sentenced to death as well. This shows that the popular assembly had the means to control the behaviour of public religious officials and challenged traditional religious authority during the Late Republic.\textsuperscript{139}

From these cases it becomes clear that the religious supremacy of the elite families decreased during the Late Republic. They had to share their religious power with the popular assembly, which had enormous consequences for the elite families. In the case of Aemilia and Licinia, the pontifical college which consisted only out of aristocratic members, was not able to secure the fate of the two aristocratic priestesses. Suddenly, they had to abide by the decisions of the people. This must have been a drastic and uncomfortable change for the aristocracy, who lost some of their power and their securities.

Because of the larger role of the \textit{populus} in the Roman religion, the primary cooperation amongst the aristocrats in Rome’s religious offices disappeared. As a

\textsuperscript{138} Livius, \textit{Periochae} 63a..
\textsuperscript{139} Beard, North and Price, \textit{Religions of Rome: Volume 1}, p. 137.
consequence, an intense competition arose between the aristocrats for public honour. An example of this situation can be seen amongst the four major priestly colleges. The restoration of the law in 63 BC, access to one of the four major colleges; the pontifices, augurs, decemviri and triumviri, could only be obtained when the candidate had the support of the popular assembly. Eric Orlin states that “Religion became another site of contestation among the political elite as the restraints on the competition for status and power were less and less enforced”. It seems that at the end of the Republic, Rome’s religion became the battleground for politicians. For politicians it became easier to gain political support from the people when they had the gods on their side, which could be expressed by means of favourable omens. Therefore it became more and more important for politicians to receive the favour of the gods and to use the Roman religion for their own political aspirations. These developments suggest that elite families could expand their power by getting involved in Rome’s religion. As a result, the elite families that wanted to be a part of this political manipulation were drawn to Rome’s public religious life. On the contrary, families that tried to stay out of this political battlefield probably withdrew their family members from Rome’s public religious life.

Taking into account these new developments in the Late Republic, what remains of the religious neglect? As we can see in ancient sources some of the priesthoods or temples were in decay. Nevertheless, Orlin states that that this competition for religious authority shows that religion was still very important at the end of the Republic; there was no such thing as a religious neglect. It rather confirms the importance of religion, especially when you consider that the aristocracy continued to use the religion for political manipulation.

In addition, Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price state that we can be confident that the claims of a religious neglect are seriously exaggerated. Keeping in mind the developments mentioned before, we can only agree with their statement. As evidence for the religious decline we have the sources who mention the neglect of the temples and the lack of candidates, which not only involves the priesthood of the Vestals, but also other important priesthoods like the flamen Dialis. It is very likely that these sources were telling the truth and that the situation must have truly bothered the writers. Still these sources are not enough

\[140\] Orlin, Urban Religion, p. 66.
\[141\] Beard, North and Price, Religions of Rome: Volume 1, p. 136.
\[142\] Orlin, Urban Religion, p. 66.
\[143\] Orlin Urban Religion, 65-69.
\[144\] Beard, North and Price, Religions of Rome: Volume 1, p. 124.
\[145\] The fact that these ancient writers were bothered by the situation indicates as well that the Roman religion was at least to some people still very important.
evidence to state that the Roman religion was in an overall decline and that this decline was responsible for the lack of candidates for several priesthoods. We could rather suggest that the Roman religion was in a state of transformation. Because of the changing political and religious environment some of the priesthoods apparently lost the priority of the Roman elite, while other religious aspects became increasingly important. Access to one of the four major colleges would have given the aristocracy a lot more political power, but the aristocracy needed the support of the popular assembly to obtain this access. This made the elite probably more occupied with propaganda and strife for public honour than religion, but that did not mean that the religion was in an overall decline. There are also sources that support this claim.

The sources who mention that the Roman religion is in some sort of decline, neglect to tell that several new and old temples were actually constructed in Late Republic Rome. In the year 102 BC, Marius built a temple known as the *aedes Mariana* to Honos and Virtus, following his triumph over the Cimbri and Teutones. Pompey, one of the generals of the first century BC, was responsible for the construction of three new buildings; a temple for Hercules, a temple for Minerva and the temple for Venus Victrix. Caesar was also responsible for a religious building. He ordered the construction of a new forum, centred around the temple of Venus Genetrix. These religious buildings are only the examples of buildings constructed by powerful figures. There were also temples built by less known members of the elite and furthermore, there were also several temples reconstructed. These examples show that several religious buildings were constructed by members of the elite during the Late Republic. That fact supports the suggestion that the religious neglect mentioned by several sources is probably exaggerated.

One final interesting fact explains why the lack of candidates for several important priesthoods could perhaps have lost the priority of the Roman elite, due to the changing political and religious environment. During the Late Republic, the office of *flamen Dialis*, the high priest of Jupiter, had not been reappointed for 75 years since the death of the last appointed *flamen Dialis*, named L. Cornelius. The empty vacancy was rather a result of political problems than a result of a religious neglect. Julius Caesar was originally the man who was designated as the new *flamen Dialis*. However, after the civil war, Sulla decided to

148 Under the reign of Tiberius, again a problem occurred concerning the appointment of the *flamen Dialis*. This time however, it was due to the criteria the candidates had to comply with, instead of political issues. See Tacitus, *Annales* 4.16.
cancel all the regulations and appointments that were made by his enemies which meant that no new *flamen Dialis* was reappointed. Augustus finally managed to reappoint a new high priest in the year 11 AD. Because of the important position of the high priest and the incredible length of the unoccupied priesthood, this case of the *Flamen Dialis* is probably the most famous case of a non-fulfilled vacancy in the Roman religion. But how could such an important priesthood exist without its high priest?

First of all, Beard, North and Price state that the degree of neglect of the rituals of this priesthood is much less than often is assumed. Moreover, we learn from Tacitus that during the period of an unoccupied priesthood, *pontifices* performed the rituals instead of the high priest. Therefore ceremonies could continue without interruption and without the loss of any of the rites. Since the ceremonies could continue without interruption, there was no need to fill the vacancy. Combining this argument with the suggestion that the Roman elite had other concerns due to the disorders of the civil war and the changing Roman society, gives a logical explanation for the non-importance of the empty vacancy of the priesthood. The priesthood of Vesta could also have been less of a priority for the elite families. There were other priesthoods where the families could obtain and exert more political power. The Roman religion was in a state of transformation and somehow the old traditional priesthoods, like the *flamen Dialis* and perhaps also the priesthood of Vesta, seem to have been falling behind temporarily. All of this was a consequence of the strong connection between the Roman religion and the Roman politics. With the arrival of Augustus as the new Emperor and absolute ruler, the attention for political conflicts could be reduced and religious problems could be solved.

When Augustus became emperor, he introduced various reforms in order to ‘restore’ the Roman religion. As we saw earlier, the claims of an overall religious neglect in the city of Rome were exaggerated. Still some parts of Rome’s religion have suffered under the religious transformation of the Late Republic. Augustus religious policy focused on the restoration of tradition, institutions and buildings. For the Roman people the period of civil wars had felt as a punishment of angry gods. In a poem of Horatius we read: “Though guiltless, you will

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continue to pay for the sins of your forefathers, Roman, until you repair the crumbling temples and shrines of the gods, and the statues that are begrimed with black smoke.\textsuperscript{157} With Augustus as emperor, the time had come to appease the gods.

Some of the reforms of Augustus concerned the cult of Vesta. It seems that Augustus tried to appropriate the cult to the royal family. According to Wildfang, the Vestals supported and acknowledged Augustus immediately, since they were leading the procession that was sent out of the city to meet the new emperor.\textsuperscript{158} Wildfang states that: “The Vestals’ presence at the head of this procession was without doubt meant as a symbol of the reunited and restored Rome to which Augustus was returning and emphasizes the importance that the Romans attached to these priestesses and their cult as a symbol for Rome itself.”\textsuperscript{159} When we look at the writings of Dio Cassius, it indeed seems striking that the Vestals Virgins and the Senate were mentioned separately.\textsuperscript{160} In addition, it is probably no coincidence that the Vestals were also depicted on the \textit{Ara Pacis Augustae} along with male priests, officials and Augustus’ family.\textsuperscript{161} The six Vestal Virgins are portrayed while making a sacrifice and they are escorted by a lictor.\textsuperscript{162} The fact that the Vestals are depicted on this altar shows that the priesthood was an important part of the religious policy of Augustus. Subsequently, on this altar erected in honour of Augustus and his safe return from Gaul and Spain, the Vestals had to make a yearly sacrifice. It strengthens the idea of the Vestals as the protectors of Rome and the protectors of their new emperor Augustus.\textsuperscript{163}

In less than two months after Augustus became the \textit{pontifex maximus}, he dedicated a shrine to Vesta inside his house on the Palatine. The official shrine remained on the Forum Romanum, but this new shrine was important for Augustus policy to appropriate the cult to the imperial family. This shrine acted as a symbol of the fusion between the public hearth of the State and the private hearth of Augustus and his family.\textsuperscript{164} Even ancient writers tried to

\textsuperscript{157} Horatius 1.1.25-30.
\textsuperscript{159} Wildfang, \textit{The Vestals in Roman History}, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{160} Dio Cassius, \textit{Historia Romana} 51.19.
\textsuperscript{162} Mekacher, \textit{Die vestalischen Jungfrauen}, p.249.
\textsuperscript{164} Beard, North and Price, Religion of Rome: Volume 1, p. 190-191.
link the origin of the cult with the mythical ancestors of Augustus. Regarding the reforms of the priesthood of Vesta, Augustus increased the privileges of and the prestige of the Vestals. Earlier on we saw how he tried to solve the problem of the lack of candidates, a problem he clearly disliked. He increased their status by giving the priestesses lands in the vicinity or the city and he gave them special seats in the theatre near his royal family. In addition he gave the women of his family some of the same privileges as the priestesses. Looking at the reforms and changes that Augustus made, he clearly tried to use the Vestals as propaganda. By linking his family to the priesthood he wanted to show how inseparable the imperial family was with Rome.

In the next chapter the disorders of the civil wars will be discussed and as well as the political problems elite families had to deal with. Keeping in mind that the political and religious life were tightly interwoven, it is important to explore political problems more closely before making any conclusions about the priorities of the elite families and the consequences of the religious and political developments. This chapter revealed that the late Republic was not necessarily characterized by a religious neglect. The Roman religion transformed into a religion that was more open for the people, which was not an advantage for the elite families. The elite families had to invent new ways of obtaining political power and as a consequence the Roman religion was transformed into a political battlefield. In the Late Republic, the priesthood of Vesta noticed some religious changes due to these new political developments. The popular assembly had the power to influence the trials of accused Vestals, which can be seen in the events of 114 BC. During the Early Empire, Augustus introduced various religious reforms and increased the privileges and prestige of the Vestals. Augustus clearly tried to use the priesthood of Vesta and the Vestal Virgins as propaganda. He connected the priesthood with his own family to strengthen the position of the imperial family and his position as the Emperor of Rome.

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165 For an example, see Ovid, *Fasti* I.527-528 and Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1*, p. 189-190.


Chapter 4: Religious Factors

From the previous chapters it becomes clear that the Roman religion and politics were fully intertwined. Therefore, the lack of candidates can not be understood without looking at the political factors that could have contributed to this matter. The end of the Republic, and thus the beginning of the imperial era, was characterized as a politically unstable period, full of changes and chaos. Without a question, the political developments from this period must have had a significant impact on Rome’s religious life.

In this chapter we will look at the changes in Rome’s political life and the consequences of these changes for the families of the Roman elite. Several scholars pointed out that the civil wars taking place during that period had an enormous impact on Rome’s religious life, which resulted in the lack of candidates for the priesthood of Vesta. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at these consequences by exploring the statements and arguments of several scholars. Furthermore, with the arrival of the new Emperor, reforms were introduced that also affected the priesthood of Vesta. Finally, the consequences for the Vestals will be discussed, such as the way in which these reforms influenced the lack of candidates for the priesthood.

With the defeat of Carthage and Corinth in 146 BC, Rome was officially the only remaining major power in the Mediterranean. Although Rome once started as a small and simple agricultural society based on self-sufficiency, the Roman Republic developed into a society with great, although mostly imported, wealth and it had an economy which was heavily based on slave labour. The Roman elite benefitted strongly from these developments and became assured of Rome’s success. The growth of the empire increased the desire of the Roman elite for power and high status, which is reflected by their luxurious and ostentatious lifestyles. As a result, the competition between the members of the aristocracy rose.

Not everyone was able to benefit from this wealth. Many Romans and also Italians were suffering from the changing economic conditions. The peasant farmers who initially had a significant share in the Roman economy, faced various difficulties after the Punic wars. The independent small peasant farmers suffered from the rise of new extensive estates created

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168 This fact is mentioned before in the introduction. The scholars who directly link the civil wars as an explanation for the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal virgin are Mekacher and Van Haepenen, Sheid and partially also Guizzi. See Mekacher and Van Haepenen, Le choix des Vestales, p. 77, see Scheid, Augustus and Roman Religion, p. 176-177 and see Guizzi, Aspetti Giuridici del Sacerdozio Romano, p. 78-81.
by the wealthy upper class.\textsuperscript{172} Widespread devastation of farms and land was caused by Hannibal’s invasion of Italy and after the wars, after years of service for the Roman army, the poor farmers often returned to a ruined home. More and more goods like grain were imported by the Roman city and many farmers in the area around Rome who previously supplied the city with corn, suffered from this competition from abroad.\textsuperscript{173} 

Because of these aspects mentioned above, many of the peasant farmers lost their farm and moved to the city where they formed the proletariat. This group of landless poor increased and started to form a problem for the Roman Republic. Since they were not subject to conscription, Rome’s military strength became infected.\textsuperscript{174} The gap between the rich and the poor increased and caused great dissatisfaction. The Roman historian Sallustius writes the following about the problems in the Republic:

\textit{“for the nobles began to abuse their position and the people their liberty, and every man for himself robbed, pillaged, and plundered. Thus the community was split into two parties, and between these the State was torn to pieces.”}\textsuperscript{175}

Since the proletariat did have the right to vote, the dissatisfaction of the poor had great consequences for Rome’s political life. As a result, the state became torn apart between two factions. Some politicians realized that they needed to attempt to improve the economic situation, while others tried to ignore the changing will of the people. Normally, Rome’s political life was dominated by the nobles, an inner circle of senators originating from a small group of important families who all had a consul amongst their ancestors.\textsuperscript{176} These nobilis were supported by the Republican nobility who was obsessed with a severe and continual competition for position and power. The basic political unit was the family group and alliances were formed between families to attack their common enemies or to improve their political positions.\textsuperscript{177} There were always struggles between alliances and the nobility, but with the new developments, a clear division occurred within the nobility: between the optimates and the populares. As mentioned before in chapter 3, the optimates supported the traditional governing class and the populares claimed to speak for the ordinary Roman citizen. However, we have to keep in mind that the primary interest of each Roman politician remained his own individual career.\textsuperscript{178} This paradox between the authority of the senate and the rights of the

\textsuperscript{172} Flower, \textit{The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic}, p. 7. 
\textsuperscript{173} Scullard, \textit{From the Gracchi to Nero}, p. 18-19. 
\textsuperscript{174} Scullard, \textit{From the Gracchi to Nero}, p. 22. 
\textsuperscript{175} Sallustius, \textit{Jugurtha}, 41.5. 
\textsuperscript{176} Scullard, \textit{From the Gracchi to Nero}, p. 5-22. 
\textsuperscript{178} Flower, \textit{The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic}, p. 92.
people eventually led to several civil wars and the so-called ‘crisis of the Roman Republic’ from 133 BC to 30 BC.179

The consequences of these civil wars were tremendous. Many soldiers died in battle and thousands of Romans were killed in exile. Many farmers lost some or all of their property and became poor.180 Rome’s political life was turned upside down and entire families who once ruled amongst the nobiles disappeared because of proscriptions. As a consequence, from 49 BC onwards the senate was composed by families who had no consul among their ancestors and thus many families seized the opportunity to increase their own positions.181 Political alliances amongst the nobility shifted more rapidly and dramatically than ever before as traditional alliances came under greater pressure. Members of the same families were involved in conflicting interests and policies. Family members were not necessarily political units. At the end of the Republic we see an increasing importance in the individual and its own political ambitions.182 Still some things remained the same. The nobility still used the same methods to secure the position of their own families. They continued to form marriage arrangements and they adopted relatives and friends. Furthermore, they tried to show off their achievements and impress their enemies.

It appears that during this period of political uncertainty, rapidly shifting political alliances and the disintegration of traditional alliances, the methods to secure the political position of a family became even more important. In chapter 2 we established that because of various demographic factors, a marriage-agreement became much cheaper and enticing for the Roman elite families at the end of the Republic than before. There already existed a high mortality rate in Roman society and it became even higher because of the civil wars. There was a high divorce rate, dowries were probably low and a remarriage happened frequently. Given the political situation, elite families could benefit tremendously from these developments. Daughters could be used as puppets in this Roman aristocracy web of political alliances and competition. When married to the right ally, the daughters could provide safety and security in an uncertain political period. They could marry, divorce and remarry again in order to start new family bonds. For example once the old family bonds were destroyed in the aftermath of the civil wars. However, daughters were also very useful politically in a different manner than political alliances.

179 See P.A. Brunt, Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays, (New York, 1988) p. 34. Brunt also states that the civil wars were off course much more complex, but that will not be discussed here.
180 Liebeschuetz, Continuity and Change in Roman Religion, p. 55..
181 Brunt, The fall of the Roman Republic, p. 5.
According to Keith Hopkins, there are several examples that show that Roman women became politically and socially much more powerful at the end of the Republic. Because of a new form of marriage named *sine manu*, which became the usual form of marriage at the end of the Republic, women were not legally in their husbands’ power: they remained in power of their father and were kept close to their birth family. When the father died, the daughter became more or less legally independent, although she was under the authorization of her guardian. She could inherit substantial property and income through the will and often shared it equally with her brothers or sisters. Widows automatically received their dowry and additionally they could be provided for by trust, legacy or the will of their husbands. During their life women could inherit substantial shares from their dead relatives’ estates. Hopkins states that women probably had considerable control over the dispersion of their property in case they died. This must, however, not be mistaken with the privilege of the Vestal, who had the right to make a will. Hopkins has no evidence that women at the end of the Republic had the right to make a will as well, but he states that it is very likely that some wealthy women had enough influence to decide what would happen with their property when they would die. According to Hopkins, the most important argument for the new political and social power of women at the end of the Republic, is the fact that there was roughly a chance of one in five that when a father died, he had no sons and only a daughter or daughters surviving him.\footnote{Hopkins, *Death and Renewal*, p. 87-89.} This meant that especially after the civil wars, some families only had women that could inherit all the family property. If Hopkins is right, up to 20\% of the aristocratic families only had a daughter left to inherit the property. As a consequence, the political role for the daughter in an aristocratic family increased considerably.

The political developments which appeared during and after the civil wars that were mentioned earlier on, show that the aristocrats could use their daughters in this uncertain period as a part of their political security. The daughters could be used to secure new political alliances and because of the favourable demographic environment when it comes to divorces and remarriages, the daughters could be used over and over again in various marriages. From then on, daughters could serve as substitutes, when there was no male heir left to inherit the family property: they remained in their fathers’ guardianship until his death.

We already discussed the so-called ‘religious decline’ of which scholars claim that it occurred after the civil wars, but which seems to have been exaggerated.\footnote{See chapter 3.} Politics and religion were completely intertwined in the Roman society and Rome’s political life was very
unstable at the end of the Republic. Due to political developments, the Roman religion landed in a state of transformation whereby some of the priesthods lost the priority of the Roman aristocracy. Throughout this chapter we became aware of the new priorities of the Roman aristocracy, which allows us to understand the developments in the Roman religion even better. In the light of the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin, it seems likely that it became necessary for some of the daughters of the Roman elite to fulfil their political purposes instead of establishing a position in the religious circles.

The priesthood of Vesta has always been remarkably involved into Rome’s politics. This continued until the end of the priesthood, somewhere at the end of the 4th century AD. We saw earlier on, that the Vestals were a symbol for the welfare and safety of Rome itself. “As long as the Vestals performed their appointed religious duties, Rome, the most powerful and foremost city in the ancient world, would remain.”185 This meant that, if something went wrong within the priesthood, something would go wrong with Rome. When the eternal fire in the temple was accidentally extinguished, the Vestals were punished and the Romans probably held their breaths out of fear for the consequences of the city.186 The interesting thing is that it worked the same way vice versa: would anything happen within the Roman city, the Vestals would also be punished.

There are many examples of cases of political chaos during the Roman Republic and the Vestals were kept responsible and were brutally punished for it. This fact becomes clear when we look at several cases in which a Vestal was convicted of incestum. Wildfang states that between the founding of the Republic and the end of the second Punic war, seven out of the nine cases187 of possible Vestal incestum support this statement. Four of these cases were probably used by the Roman authorities to send a message to the Roman political factions with whom the Vestals were engaged with, or to send a message to the Roman people. The other three cases happened when Rome was under the threat of a plague.188

During the second Punic war we see an example of a case of incestum which could have been used to send a message. Shortly after the disaster at Cannae in 216 BC, where the Roman army was defeated by Hannibal, two Vestals, Opimia and Floronia were accused and convicted of incestum.189 Livius mentioned that during this period fear occupied the city, causing a great tumult among the Romans. Women were weeping in the streets of Rome and

186 Plutarchus, Numa, 9-11 and Livius, 28.22.6.
187 The other two cases can not be securely dated. Therefore it is difficult to say something about their political connexion.
188 For an example of a case of incestum when Rome was under the threat of a plague, see Orosius 4.5.6-9.
189 Wildfang, Rome’s Vestal Virgins, p. 80-82 and Livius, 22.57. 2-3.
throughout the city loud crying could be heard everywhere. This depressing situation in the streets of Rome distracted the Roman authorities.\textsuperscript{190} According to Wildfang, the accusation of \textit{incestum} was not only the consequence of the disaster at Cannae. He states that this accusation could have been an attempt to restore the balance and to regain some of the control from the weeping women of Rome. In this scenario, the conviction of the Vestals was a punishment for the inappropriate and uncontrolled behaviour of the Roman women.\textsuperscript{191}

We have already seen that in 114 BC, when the clash between the \textit{populares} and the \textit{optimates} took place, three Vestals were convicted of \textit{incestum} and were buried near the Colline gate.\textsuperscript{192} After the events of 73 BC, when Rome was in the midst of a period of political chaos because of the army of gladiator Spartacus and the revolt of the slaves, two Vestals, Fabia and Licinia, were accused of \textit{incestum}.\textsuperscript{193} Luckily for them, they were acquitted. Bearing this in mind, it is not hard to imagine that some of the fathers of the elite families did not even dare to give their daughters away. Putting your daughter forward as candidate for the function of Vestal Virgin could not have been the safest decision in the unstable and political chaotic period at the end of the Republic. After so many years of civil wars and after the murder of Caesar, the political life at Rome was extremely unreliable. It seems logical that as a consequence at least some of the elite families were more reluctant to give away their daughter to the priesthood than they used to be.

The new political situation of the Late Republic also caused changes in the priesthood of Vesta itself. It appears that at the end of the Republic, political participation of the Vestals increased. In Roman society, women normally had no clear political participation in any matter whatsoever. Nonetheless this seems to be different in the case of the Vestal virgins\textsuperscript{194}. In several ancient interpretations we see examples of Vestals who use their power and position for some political involvement. The first example of such an involvement in Roman public affairs took place in 143 BC, when Appius Claudius Pulcher asked the senate for permission to celebrate his triumph over the Salassi. The senate declined his request because a lot of lives were lost

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{190}Livius 22.55.
\item \textsuperscript{191}See Wildfang, \textit{Rome's Vestal Virgins}, p. 80-81.
\item \textsuperscript{192}Although there is no direct evidence that the conviction of the Vestals had political reasons, I believe it is way too coincidental that during this unstable political period, three out of 6 Vestals were suddenly accused of \textit{incestum} and convicted based on the so-called ‘sign of the gods’. On this specific case of the Vestals Marcia, Licinia and Aemilia see Bauman, \textit{Women and Politics in Ancient Rome}, p.52-58.
\item \textsuperscript{193}Plutarchus, \textit{Cato Minor} 19.3-9, Plutarchus, \textit{Crassus} 1.2 and see Wildfang, \textit{Rome’s Vestal Virgins}, p. 96.
\item \textsuperscript{194}According to Beard, this could have partly been a consequence of the male aspect that is associated with the cult of Vesta. It appears, that some of the privileges the Vestals received, are only associated with men. Therefore it is arguable that the Vestals were to some extent classified as masculine. For more on this subject, see: M. Beard, ‘The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins’, \textit{The Journal of Roman Studies} 70, (1980) p. 12-27.
\end{itemize}
during his campaign. However, in spite of the decision of the senate, he decided to continue his celebration. Hereby he received help from Vestal Claudia, who was his daughter according to Cicero, or his sister according to Suetonius.

Claudia used her power and status to stand up against a hostile tribune that wanted to stop his chariot. She clarified that it would be seen as an act of sacrilege for any of the tribunes that would forbid them to continue the celebration. She held Claudius in her embrace and escorted him all the way to the Capitol. According to Wildfang, she rather acted out of a wish to expand the prestige and power of her own cult and to enforce some limitation of Tribunician power, than an act solely on a family feeling. However this view is a little too limited. We can rather look at the action of Vestal Claudia as a combination of entangled motives. It seems more likely that Claudia acted initially wanted to support a good cause, namely her family, and secondly to gain personal profit for her own benefit and for the status and power of her cult.

From that moment on, the Vestals used their power more often in other public and political affairs. During the reign of Sulla we see another, even more, interesting example. Suetonius writes:

“Therefore besides being punished by the loss of his priesthood, his wife’s dowry, and his family inheritances, Caesar was held to be one of the opposite party. He was accordingly forced to go into hiding and though suffering from a severe attack of quartan ague, to change from one covert to another almost every night, and save himself from Sulla’s detectives by bribes. But at last, through the good offices of the Vestal virgins and of his near kinsmen, Marcus Aemilius and Aurelius Cotta, he obtained forgiveness. Everyone knows that when Sulla had long held out against the most devoted and eminent men of his party who interceded for Caesar, and they obstinately persisted, he at last gave way and cried, either by divine inspiration or a shrewd forecast: ‘have your way and take him; only bear in mind that the man you are so eager to save will one day deal the death blow to the cause of the aristocracy, which you have joined with me in upholding; for in this Caesar there is more than one Marius.’”

According to Suetonius, Caesar was forced to go and hide from the men of Sulla, because he was thought to be one of the opposition parties. However, he obtained forgiveness from the state with the help of good interference of the Vestal Virgins, even though Sulla was still extremely against him. The citation indicates that the Vestal Virgins somehow intervened in this political situation and chose to support Caesar. Apparently their influence was

195 Wildfang, Rome’s Vestal Virgins, p.91.
196 See Cicero, Pro Caelio 34 and Suetonius, Tiberius 2.4.
197 Wildfang, Rome’s Vestal Virgins, p.92 and see also R. Bauman, Women and Politics in Ancient Rome.
198 For more on the public involvement of the Vestals see Plutarchus, Cicero 19-20, Wildfang, Rome’s Vestal Virgins and Bauman, Women and Politics in Ancient Rome.
199 Suetonius, Iulius 1.2.6.
significant enough to help Caesar in this oppressive situation. This event is a clear example of political interference of the Vestals and how their status could help in political arguments.

These examples show that Vestals got more and more involved into Roman politics at the end of the Republic. This could have been their own decision, but perhaps the political period of that time gave them no other choice. In chapter 1, the safekeeping of the wills of Caesar and Antonius was discussed. It showed the level of trust the Romans and the State had in the priestesses. Unfortunately, the will of Antonius was seized and released by Octavianus, while Antonius was still alive and was just departed to the East. Octavianus used the Vestals and abused the trust they received from Antonius to release his will. Plutarch tells us how the Vestals first tried to stop Octavianus from releasing the will\textsuperscript{200}, but were not in the position to prevent it from happening. Octavianus read the will to the senate and who was shocked by the content of the will.\textsuperscript{201} The outcome of this civil war is something we all know. The event shows that the Vestals could be used for political purposes and that their political participation was partially forced by the political environment. The political participation of the priesthood of Vesta in Rome’s politics could have discouraged some of the elite families in offering their daughter to the priesthood. In this period, the religious function of the priesthood could have diminished because of the overwhelming numbers of political purposes, a fact which probably did not appeal to every aristocratic family. Still, other families might have grasped this opportunity to get an advantage on the political battlefield. This decision depended on the priorities of these families.

With the start of the Early Empire not only Rome’s religious life changed as we saw in chapter 3, the political situation also changed. Karl Galinsky states that Augustus’ \textit{res publica} was both republican and monarchic: there was continuity and there was change.\textsuperscript{202} The establishment of a new monarchy fundamentally altered the ground rules of political competition within the elite of Rome. The arrival of the absolute ruler lessened the power and status of the consuls. The power of the nobility, their pursuit of military glory and their profit in the provinces were all restricted.\textsuperscript{203} For the aristocracy, the area of religion also changed.

After the death of Lepidus in 12 BC, Augustus became \textit{Pontifex Maximus}. As a result, he was the most powerful person in Rome in both the political and religious area. Participation in Rome’s political life was reserved for the Roman citizens. A large amount of

\textsuperscript{200} Plutarchus, \textit{Life of Antonius}, 58.
\textsuperscript{201} J.S. Richardson, \textit{Augustan Rome 44 BC to AD 14: The Restoration of the Republic and the Establishment of the Empire}, (Edingburgh, 2012) p. 68.
\textsuperscript{202} Galinsky, \textit{Continuity and Change}, p. 71-72.
\textsuperscript{203} Hopkins, \textit{Death and Renewal}, p. xi and 120-123.
Rome’s inhabitants were freedman or slaves. Slaves who were eventually released by their owners would also become freedmen. It therefore seems logical, to involve the large amount of non-citizens of Rome in other parts of society. For this reason, Augustus reformed some of the priesthoods in favour of the non-citizens, such as the cult of Lares. In this way, he increased the participation of the non-citizens in Rome’s religion. The freedmen benefitted of these reforms and received a strikingly active role in Augustus’ religious and political policy. However, as a consequence, the aristocracy lost their exclusive control in the priesthoods. The old ruling class of the aristocracy had to adjust to these new circumstances.

Because Rome’s religious and political life were closely connected, the loss of power in the Roman religion also meant the loss of power in Rome’s politics. Rome’s elite families, who once dominated Rome’s politics and its highest priestly functions, now had to obey to the new Emperor. Once again a process of transformation occurred. A society dominated by the power of the elite was replaced by a more complex society with a broader elite in which functions became more and more specialized.

Earlier on we saw how Augustus used the cult of Vesta as propaganda for his imperial policy. He appropriated the cult to the imperial family and the priesthood became an important aspect of his rule. His imperial policy changed Rome’s religious and political life. The power and influence of the former ruling elite declined. As a consequence of these developments, the political and religious ambitions of the elite families must have changed. There must have been families who supported Augustus and who wanted to be part of his imperial policy. Yet, apparently their focus was not in the direction of the priesthood of Vesta: otherwise there would not have existed a problem in finding candidates for the function of Vestal. The aristocratic families, who were not pleased with the arrival of the new Emperor, probably did not want to be a part of the cult he used as propaganda. This must have lowered the interest of some of the elite families; they may have withdrawn themselves of Rome’s political and religious life. Regarding the cult of Vesta, Guizzi has the same opinion. He states that the power of the aristocracy became weaker at the end of the Republic and the Early Empire. Therefore it became much more difficult to fill magistracies and priesthoods.

Guizzi makes a good argument here. Still, there must have been other aspects as well. This chapter clearly showed how complicated Rome’s politics were at the end of the Republic and at the beginning of the Early Empire. The competition amongst the aristocracy was

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204 Galinsky, Continuity and Change, p. 78-80.
206 Guizzi, Aspetti Giuridici del Sacerdozio Romano, 78-81.
enormous and Rome’s political life was a tangle of alliances, which shifted rapidly after the civil wars. Even the traditional family bonds were not secured. The demographic environment made room for many remarriages, in which the elite daughters were used as puppets in the political struggle for power and position. In this unstable period, the function and role of the daughters became more important to the families. The religion of Rome also had to adapt to the new political situation, which we can be clearly seen in the increased political participation of the priesthood of Vesta. The arrival of Augustus as Emperor provided a more stable political period, even though this was at the expense of the power of the aristocracy. Once again they had to adapt to the new situation, and apparently the priesthood of Vesta was not the focus of interest for the elite families.
Conclusion
The lack of elite interest for the function of Vestal Virgin appears to have been much more complicated than some scholars might think. There were many different factors that influenced the choices of the elite families. The Roman aristocracy was engaged in a continuous struggle for status and power, which influenced their social, religious and political agenda. The following summary will give a clear view on all the different considerations that elite families had to take into account at the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Early Empire. The different factors appear to fit together strikingly well. It is clear that one factor does not exclude the other.

The priesthood of Vesta was one of the most important priesthoods of Rome. The priesthood was located in the center of the religious and political heart of Rome; the Forum Romanum. The priesthood protected the perpetual fire, important state documents and symbolized the welfare of the Roman State. The priesthood was therefore associated with a lot of privileges and great prestige. The Vestal Virgins obtained various rights which increased their social, economic and legal position. Especially the fact that they were free of male guardianship and could therefore make their own legal and financial decisions was quite extraordinary. Additionally, they obtained the right to make a will and to choose their own heir. 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. However, the moment the girl joined the priesthood, all legal connections with her birth family disappeared. Therefore the benefits of the families of the girls remained questionable. Legal and economic advantages were probably limited to a minimum. On the other hand, social benefits seem to have been significant. Having a daughter in one of the most important priesthoods must have increased the social position of the family.

The great importance of the priesthood and its public and religious function also came with a downside. Vestals convicted of incestum, were buried alive outside the city walls. Because of their central public role and appreciation, Vestals convicted of incestum must have made a deep impression on Roman society. To the family of the convicted Vestal such a conviction most likely brought great shame. However, it is no coincidence that most of the convicted Vestals were accused of incestum during unstable periods in the Roman Republic. The Vestals were seen as the symbol of the welfare of the state. Thus, when anything went
wrong with the welfare of the state the Vestals were probably the one to blame. As a result, we see several cases of *incestum* immediately after a political or social disaster.

Demographical factors are an essential element in the study on the Roman elite. The life course of the Roman aristocratic girls depended strongly on demographical aspects. There was a high mortality rate, a high divorce rate and the life expectancy was much lower than the life expectancy of our own western society. These demographical factors proved to have had a significant influence on the available amount of potential candidates. Potential candidates had to comply with various criteria in order to be suitable for the function of Vestal Virgin. Potential candidates included only the girls from aristocratic families aged between 6 and 10, whose parents were still alive and were still married. In Chapter 2, various calculations were made based on demographical models to create some insight into the number of available candidates. This led to some interesting discoveries. Firstly, assuming that every priestess served the cult for thirty years, it appeared that every 3.5 year a new vacancy opened. This would have resulted in a relatively high number of vacancies in short periods of time. This will certainly have made it more difficult to find enough candidates, especially when there was a lack of interest for the vacancies among the elite. Subsequently, we sketched two scenarios based on two different interpretations of Dio Cassius’ meaning of the ‘noblest families’, to calculate a notional number of elite girls who might have been potential candidates. The first scenario was based on the broadest interpretation of ‘noblest families’ and began with a total of 1053 elite girls. The second scenario was based on the Dio Cassius’ interpretation, that only the daughters of the senatorial elite and the wealthiest *equites* belonged to this group. This resulted in a considerable lower number with a total of 263 girls.

One of the criteria required that both of the parents of the girls had to be alive. Luckily, scholars like Sallar developed various model life tables. These tables reconstruct situations from the past while taking into consideration various demographical factors, such as the high mortality rate or the low life expectancy. With the help of Saller’s model life table, we obtained important statistics concerning the death rates of parents of elite girls. Subsequently we entered these statistics in a two-way probability table and the results were striking. 17 to 33% of the daughters aged between 6 and 10 had lost at least one of their parents at such a young age. Consequently, these girls were not eligible anymore to become a candidate for the priesthood of Vesta. We also learned that divorces were common in the Late Republic. Almost 17% of the aristocratic marriages would end in a divorce within the first decade of the marriage. Girls born in the first years of these marriages could therefore not fulfill the criteria anymore.
These numbers had significant consequences for the total amount of potential candidates for the function of Vesta. Out of the 1053 girls from our first scenario, 706 to 874 girls remained potential candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin. The second scenario started with 263 potential candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin, but at the end only 176 to 725 of these girls remained potential candidates. In other words, both scenarios show that 31% of the elite girls could not have been qualified for the function of Vestal Virgin due to these demographical factors. Although these are all notional numbers, there is no doubt that at the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Early Empire a significant amount of daughters simply could not comply with the criteria.

Other findings of this chapter showed that there were relevant demographical factors that could have influenced the focus of interest of the elite families. Some of the evidence indicates that the end of the Republic was characterized by an overall shortage on aristocratic women eligible for marriage. As a consequence of this overall shortage, the daughters who were available for marriage were probably very popular within the aristocratic circle. This thought is confirmed by a small comparison study with nineteenth century Guyana. Here a similar situation occurred, which illustrated that a shortage on marriageable aristocratic women, combined with the high divorce rate, could lead to a decrease in the price of the dowry. If indeed a decreasing shift in the price of the dowry occurred at the end of the Republic, families of daughters would have benefited strongly from it. It would mean that a marriage-agreement became much cheaper and enticing than before. In addition, due to the high mortality rate, the high divorce rate and the low dowries, a demographic background was created in which remarriage became frequent.

A new form of marriage, *sine manu* marriages, became the customary form of marriage at the end of the Republic. Women remained in the power of their fathers and this way they were kept close to their birth family. Women could inherit substantial property and income by will. This new development was probably a consequence of the high mortality rate. Up to 20% of the elite families had only their daughter left to inherit the family property. As a consequence, the political role of the daughter increased in the Late Republic.

The political role of the Vestal Virgins also increased in the Late Republic. In several ancient accounts we see examples of Vestals who used their power and position for political involvement. The most striking example is the case of Caesar. Sulla thought that Caesar was one of his enemies and Caesar was forced to go into hiding from his men. However, the Vestals used their power to help Caesar and they successfully interfered.
At the end of the Republic, a turning point emerged in Rome’s religious situation. For many years Late Republican Rome has been associated with a significant religious neglect. Scholars claimed that Rome’s religion was manipulated by a disbelieving aristocracy, in order to pursue their own political ambitions. Several ancient sources seemed to support the religious neglect, as they mentioned empty priesthoods and crumbled temples. However, recent studies have emphasized the fallacy of this outdated view. In the preceding chapters of this thesis we noticed how tightly Rome’s religion was interwoven with Rome’s politics. It is therefore almost impossible to distinguish various religious and political factors. Religious and political developments were constantly linked. Rome’s civil wars had an enormous impact on Rome’s religious and political life. Thousands of Romans were killed and others were left poor. Rome’s political life was turned upside down. Entire families who once dominated Rome’s political life disappeared because of various proscriptions.

The unstable political situation during the Late Republic caused a lot of turmoil. The Roman elite had always dominated Roman society; the political and religious power was in their hands. However, the struggle between the populares and the optimates in the Late Republic led to new developments. The populares threatened the religious supremacy of the Roman elite. The establishment of the law from 63 BC gave the selection of the priest to the people and strengthened the power of the populares. The supremacy of the aristocratic families decreased significantly. The Roman elite had to adjust to this new situation and as a result the competition between the elite changed. The fundamental cooperation among the aristocrats in Rome’s religious offices disappeared. Instead, personal strife for public honor increased. The senate was composed more than ever by families who had no consul among their ancestors and many families seized the opportunity to increase their own positions of power. Political alliances among the aristocracy shifted more rapidly than ever. Traditional alliances came under great pressure and members of the same families were involved in conflicting interests and policies.

For this reason, marriage connections which were used to secure the political position became even more important. In light of these arguments it becomes clear how much the elite families could really benefit from the demographical factors which we mentioned before. The high mortality rate, the high divorce rate, the low dowries and a shortage on marriageable women, resulted in frequent remarriages. The frequent remarriages brought significant opportunities. Daughters were used as puppets in a web of political alliances and competition. Marriages and remarriages could be used to form new political bonds when the old ones were
destroyed. It seems likely that by the time a new vacancy opened for the function of Vestal Virgin, at least some of the young available girls would already have been betrothed.

Because of the changing political and religious environment, some of the priesthods lost the priority of the Roman elite. Especially the old traditions remained temporarily behind. This is clearly illustrated by the case of the flamen Dialis, were no priest had been re-appointed for 75 years. However, when we look more closely at our ancient sources, we also see that new temples were erected and several temples were reconstructed by individuals. Rome’s religion had become the public battleground for status and power. These developments, in which religion played an important part, support the view that the religious neglect was strongly exaggerated. Instead, we should consider religion in the Late Republic as being in transition.

With the arrival of Augustus as the new Emperor, again a turning point emerged. Augustus’ religious policy focused on the restoration of tradition, institutions and buildings. He introduced various reforms and some of them concerned the cult of Vesta. To solve the problem of the candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin, he increased the privileges of the priestesses. Additionally, women of his family received some of the same privileges as the priestesses. The priesthood became an important part of Augustus’ religious policy. He linked the cult to his own family and used the priesthood of Vesta for his own imperial propaganda. The establishment of the new monarchy fundamentally altered the ground rule of the competition for power and status. Rome’s elite families who once dominated religion and politics now had to obey the new Emperor. In the Early Empire, the power of the nobility decreased. Augustus’ reforms increased the participation of Rome’s non-citizens. Freedmen benefitted from these reforms and received an active role in Augustus’ religious and political policy. As a consequence, the elite families lost their exclusive control of the priesthoods. Again the elite had to adjust to the new circumstances. This time however, it did not lead to a new competition for power and status.

Concluding we can say that there were various factors that played their part in the lack of interest of the Roman elite for the function of Vestal Virgin. It is impossible to determine which factor was the deciding factor in the lack of candidates for the function of Vestal Virgin. Most factors fit together strikingly well and seem to have influenced each other. The Roman elite had to consider every move in their competition for power and status. Every family had their own priorities. The only thing that we can say with certainty is that somehow a combination of factors resulted in a lack of interest of the Roman elite families in the function of Vestal Virgin and thus led to a lack of candidates during the period of Augustus.


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Appendix

Augustus
Res Gestae Divi Augustus 20
The Capitolium and the theatre of Pompey both works involving great expense, I rebuilt without any inscription of my own name. I restored the channels of the aqueducts which in several places were falling into disrepair through age, and doubled the capacity of the aqueduct called the Marcia by turning a new spring into its channel. I completed the Julian Forum and the basilica which was between the temple of Castor and the temple of Saturn, works begun and far advanced by my father, and when the same basilica was destroyed by fire I began its reconstruction on an enlarged site, to be inscribed with the names of my sons, and ordered that in case I should not live to complete it, it should be completed by my heirs. In my sixth consulship, in accordance with a decree of the senate, I rebuilt in the city eighty-two temples of the gods, omitting none which at that time stood in need of repair. As consul for the seventh time I constructed the Via Flaminia from the city to Ariminum, and all the bridges except the Mulvian and the Minucian.

Aulus Gellius
Noctes Atticae 1.12
“At what age, from what kind of family, by what rites, ceremonies and observances, and under what title a Vestal virgin is ‘taken’ by the chief pontiff; what legal privileges she has immediately upon being chosen; also that, according to Labeo, she is lawfully neither heir of an intestate person, nor is anyone her heir, in case she dies without a will.”

Those who have written about ‘taking’ a Vestal virgin, of whom the most painstaking is Antistius Labeo, have stated that 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. Now as soon as the Vestal virgin is chosen, escorted to the house of Vesta and delivered to the pontiffs, she immediately passes from the control of her father without the ceremony of emancipation or loss of civil rights, and acquires the right to make a will. But as to the method and ritual for choosing a Vestal, there are, it is true, no ancient written records, except that the first to be appointed was chosen by Numa. There is, however, a Papian law, which provides that twenty maidens be selected from the people at the discretion of the chief pontiff, that a choice by lot be made from that number in the assembly, and that the girl whose lot is drawn be ‘taken’ by the chief pontiff and become Vesta’s. But that allotment in accordance with the Papian law is usually unnecessary at present. For if any man of respectable birth goes to the chief pontiff and offers his daughter for the priesthood, provided consideration may be given to her candidacy without violating any religious requirement, the senate grants him exemption from the Papian law. Now the Vestal is said to be ‘taken’, it appears, because she is grasped by the hand of the chief pontiff and led away from the parent under whose control she is, as if she had been taken in war. In the first book of Fabius Pictor’s history, the formula is given which the chief pontiff should use in choosing a Vestal. It is this: “I take thee, Amata, as one who has fulfilled all the legal requirements, to be priestess of Vesta, to perform for the Roman people the Quirites.”

Now many think that the term “taken” ought to be used only of a Vestal. But, as a matter of fact, the flamens of Jupiter also, as well as the augurs, were said to be “taken”. Lucius Sulla, in the second book of his Autobiography, wrote as follows: “Publius Cornelius, the first to receive the

207 All translations are from editions published in the LOEB Classical Library, accept where specifically noted.
surname Sulla, was taken to be flamen of Jupiter.” Marcus Cato, in his accusation of Servius Galba, says of the Lusitanians: “Yet they say that they wished to revolt. I myself at the present moment wish a thorough knowledge of the pontifical law; shall I therefore be taken as chief pontiff? If I wish to understand the science of augury thoroughly, shall anyone for that reason take me as augur?”

Furthermore, in the Commentaries on the Twelve Tables compiled by Laber, 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.”

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.

Aulus Gellius

Notices Atticae 7.7.1

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 honours. 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 honours 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.’” Besides, if at the age of forty she should wish to leave the priesthood and marry, the right and privilege of withdrawing from the order and marrying were allowed her, in gratitude for her generosity and kindness in presenting to the people the campus Tiberinus or Martius.

Cicero
De Divinatione 1.24-28

But it is objected, ‘sometimes predictions are made which do not come true’ And pray what art- and by art I mean the kind that is dependent on conjecture and deduction – what art, I say, does not have the same fault? Surely the practice of medicine is an art, yet how many mistakes it makes! And pilots do they not make mistakes at times? For example, when the armies of the Greeks and the captains of their mighty fleet set sail from Troy they, as Pacuvius says, “Glad at leaving Troy behind them, gazed upon the fish at play, Nor could get their fill of gazing – thus they whiled the time away. Meantime, as the sun was setting, high uprose the angry main; Thick and thicker fell the shadows; night grew black with blinding rain.” Then did the fact that so many illustrious captains and kings suffered shipwreck deprive navigation of its right to be called an art? And is military science of no effect because a general of the highest renown recently lost his army and took to flight? Again, is statecraft devoid of method or skill because political mistakes were made many times by Gnaeus Pompey, occasionally by Marcus Cato, and once or twice even by yourself? So it is with the responses of Soothsayers, and, indeed, with every sort of divination whose deductions are merely probable; for divination of that kind depends on inference and beyond inference it cannot go. It sometimes misleads perhaps, but none the less in most cases it guides us to the truth. For this same conjectural divination is the product of boundless eternity and within that period it has grown into an art through the repeated observation and recording of almost countless instances in which the same results have been preceded by the same signs.

Indeed how trustworthy were the auspices taken when you were augur! At the present time- pray pardon me for saying so- Roman augurs neglect auspices, although the Cilicians, Pamphylians, Pisidians, and Lycians hold them in high esteem. I need not remind you of that most famous and worthy man, our guest-friend, King Deiotarus, who never undertook any enterprise without first taking the auspices, On one occasion after he had set out a journey for which he had made careful plans beforehand, he returned home because of the warning given him by the flight of an eagle. The room in which he would have been staying, had he continued on his road, collapsed the very next night. This is why, as he told me himself, he had time and again abandoned a journey even though he might have been travelling for many days. By the way, that was a very noble utterance of his which he made after Caesar had deprived him of his tetrarchy and kingdom, and had forced him to pay an indemnity too. Notwithstanding what has happened, said he, I do not regret that the auspices favoured my joining
Pompey. By so doing I enlisted my military power in defence of senatorial authority, Roman liberty, and the supremacy of the empire. The birds, at whose instance I followed the course of duty and of honour, counselled well, for I value my good name more than riches. His conception of augury, it seems to me, is the correct one. For with us magistrates make use of auspices, but they are forced auspices, since the sacred chickens in eating the dough pellets thrown must let some fall from their beaks. But, according to the writings of you augurs, a tripudium results if any of the food should fall from their beaks. But, according to the writing of you augurs, a tripudium results if any of the food should fall to the ground, and what I spoke of as a forced augury, your fraternity calls a tripudium solistium. And so through the indifference of the college, as Cato the Wise laments, many auguries and auspices have been entirely abandoned and lost.

Cicero  
De Divinatione 2.71  
In my opinion the consuls, Publius Claudius and Lucius Junius, who set sail contrary to the auspices, were deserving of capital punishment; for they should have respected the established religion and should not have treated the customs of their forefathers with such shameless disdain. Therefore it was a just retribution that the former was condemned by a vote of the people and that the latter took his own life.

Cicero  
De Domo 53.136  
But let me return to the official rules that govern dedicatory ceremonies, rules which the pontiffs themselves have invariably adapted not merely to their own ritual, but also to the decrees of the people. You will find in your records that the censor Gaius Cassius submitted to the Pontifical College his project for the dedication of a statue to Concord, and that the reply made to him by the supreme pontiff, Marcus Aemilius, on behalf of the College was, that they did not think that the dedication could be correctly carried out, unless the Roman people should give him express authority in the matter, so that it should be at their mandate that he acted. Again, when Licinia, a Vestal Virgin of noble birth, distinguished by the most sacred of priestly offices, dedicated an altar, an oratory, and a sacred couch under the Rock (*rock on the slope of the Aventine, where there was a temple of Bona Dea) in the consulship of Titus Flaminius and Quintus Metellus, did not Sextus Julius the Praetor, on the senate’s authority refer the question to the decision of this College? On that occasion Publius Scaevola, the supreme pontiff, answered on behalf of the College that “that which Licinia, daughter of Gaius, had dedicated in a public place was not deemed by them to be sacred.” You will have no difficulty in realizing, by an examination of the senate’s actual decree how sternly and how punctiliously they dealt with the affair. (The Decree of the Senate is read.)

Cicero  
De Legibus 2.12.29-33  
Next, our provision for holidays and festivals ordains rest from lawsuits and controversies for free men, and from labour and toil for slaves. Whoever plans the official year ought to arrange that these festivals shall come at the completion of the various labours of the farm. So far as the dates are concerned, in order that the offerings of first fruits and offspring of the flocks, which are mentioned in the law, may be maintained, care must be taken in arranging for the insertion of intercalary months, a custom which was wisely instituted by Numa, but has now become obsolete through the neglect of the pontiffs of later periods. Now, no change should be made in the prescriptions of the pontiffs and soothsayers as to the offerings appropriate for each of the gods, as to which should receive full-grown victims, which sucklings, which males, and which females. The custom of having a number of priests for the worship of all the gods, and also one particular priest for every god, is conductive both to the interpretation of the law and the confession of offences against religion. And since Vesta, who gets her name from the Greek, (for we preserve the Greek word almost exactly, instead of translating it) has taken the city hearth under her protection, virgins should have charge of her worship, so that the care
and guardianship of the fire may be more easily maintained, and other women may perceive by their example that the sex is capable by nature of complete chastity.

The provision which follows really has to do with the condition of the state as well as with religion, its object being that private worship may not be satisfactorily performed without the assistance of those in charge of the public rites; for the people constant need for the advice and authority of the aristocracy helps to hold the state together.

(((…My provisions for priests omit no legitimate type of worship. For some are appointed to win the favour of the gods by presiding over the regular sacrifices; others to interpret prophecies of the sooth-sayers—though not of too many of them, for that would be an endless task—and in such a way that no one outside the college of priests shall have knowledge even of those prophecies which are recognized by the state. But the highest and most important authority in the State is that of the augurs, to whom is accorded great influence. But it is not because I myself am an augur that I have this opinion, but because the facts compel us to think so. For if we consider their legal rights, what power is greater than that of adjourning assemblies and meetings convened by the highest officials, with or without imperium, or that of declaring null and void the acts of assemblies presided over by such officials? What is of graver import than the abandonment of any business already begun, if a single augur says, On another day? What power is more impressive than that of forcing the consuls to resign their offices? What right is more sacred than that of giving or refusing permission to hold an assembly of the people or of the plebeians, of that of abrogating laws illegally passed? Thus the titian law was annulled by a decree of the college of augurs, and the Livian Laws by the wise direction of Philippus, a consul and augur. Indeed, no act of any magistrate at home or in the field can have any validity for any person without their authority. A. One moment, please; I am already familiar with these powers and admit they are great; but there is a great disagreement in your college between Marcellus and Appius, both excellent augurs. For I have consulted their books and find that the one thinks that those auspices were invented to be of practical use to the State, while the other believes that your art is really capable of divination in some degree. I should like to have your opinion on this matter…)) (…)

12.33 (…) But there is no doubt that this art and science of the augurs has by now faded out of existence on account of the passage of time and men’s neglect. Therefore I cannot agree with Marcellus, who denies that this art was ever possessed by our college, nor do I subscribe to Appius’ opinion that we still possess it. What I believe is that among our ancestors it had a double use, being occasionally employed in political crisis, but most often in deciding on a course of action.

Cicero
De Legibus 2.29
Now, no change should be made in the prescriptions of the pontiffs and soothsayers as to the offerings appropriate for each of the gods, as to which should receive full-grown victims, which sucklings, which males, and which females.

The custom of having a number of priests for the worship of all the gods, and also one particular priest for every god, is conducive both to the interpretation of the law and the confession of offences against religion. And since Vesta, who gets her name from the Greek (for we preserve the Greek word almost exactly instead of translating it), has taken the city hearth under her protection, virgins should have charge of her worship, so that the care and guardianship of the fire may be more easily maintained, and other women may perceive by their example that their sex is capable by nature of complete chastity.

Cicero
De Natura Deorum 1.82
Among these you will find a belief in certain animals more firmly established than is reverence for the holiest sanctuaries and images of the gods with us. For we have often seen temples robbed and images of gods carried off from the holiest shrines by our fellow-countrymen, but no one ever even heart of an Egyptian laying profane hands on a crocodile or ibis or cat. What therefore do you infer? That the Egyptians do not believe their sacred bull Apis to be a god?
“Again, prophecies and premonitions of future events cannot but be taken as proofs that the future may appear or be foretold as a warning or portended or predicted to mankind — hence the very words ‘apparition,’ ‘warning,’ ‘portent,’ ‘prodigy.’ Even if we think that the stories of Mopsus, Tiresias, Amphiaras, Calchas and Helenus are mere baseless fictions of Romance (Though their powers of divination would not even have been incorporated in the legends that they been entirely repugnant to fact), shall not even the instances from our own native history teach us to acknowledge the divine power? Shall we be unmoved by the story of the recklessness of Publius Claudius in the first Punic war? Claudius merely in jest mocked at the gods; when the chickens on being released from their cage refused to feed, he ordered them to be thrown into the water, so that as they would not eat they might drink; but the joke cost the jester himself many tears and the Roman people a great disaster, for the fleet was severely defeated. Moreover did not his colleague Junius during the same war lose his fleet in a storm after failing to comply with the auspices? In consequence of these disasters Claudius was tried and condemned for high treason and Junius committed suicide.”

Caelius writes that Gaius Flaminius after ignoring the claims of religion fell at the battle of Trasimene, when a serious blow was inflicted on the state. The fate of these men may serve to indicate that our empire was won by those commanders who obeyed the dictates of religion. Moreover of we care to compare our national characteristics with those of foreign peoples, we shall find that, while in all other respects we are only the equals or even the inferiors of others, yet in the sense of religion, that is, in reverence for the gods, we are far superior. Or are we to make light of the famous augural staff of Attus Navius, wherewith he marked out the vineyard into sections for the purpose of discovering the pig? I would agree that we might do so, had not King Hostilius fought great and glorious wars under the guidance of Attus’s augury. But owing to the carelessness of our nobility the augural lore has been forgotten and the reality of the auspices has fallen into contempt, only the outward show being retained; and in consequence highly important departments of public administration, and in particular the conduct of wars upon which the safety of the state depends, are carried on without any auspices at all; no taking of omens when crossing rivers, none when lights flash from the points of the javelins, none when men are called to arms (owing to which wills made on active service have gone out of existence, since our generals only enter on their military command when they have laid down their augural powers).

But among our ancestors religion was so powerful that some commanders actually offered themselves as victims to the immortal gods on behalf of the state, veiling their heads and formally vowing themselves to death. I could quote numerous passages from the Sibyline prophecies and from the oracles of soothsayers in confirmation of facts that no one really ought to question.

Cicero

De Natura Deorum 2.3.7-10

Cicero

Philippics 11.24

But if provinces seem to consuls desirable things – as they have often been desired by the nobles men-first restore to us Brutus, the light and ornament of the community, who should be preserved as carefully as that statue which fell down from heaven, and is kept in the custody of Vesta, and whose safety means we also shall be safe. Then we will, if it be possible, lift you to the very sky on our shoulders; at any rate we will choose for you the most worthy provinces; now let us set ourselves to the issue we have at hand.

Cicero

Pro Caelio 34

When thou hast passed, by marriage, from a family of high nobility into a most illustrious house, why was Caelius so closely connected with thee? Kinsman? Relative by marriage? Friend of thine husband? None of these. What then was thy reason, if it was not some reckless passion? If the images of the men of our family did not touch thine heart, did not even the famous Quinta Claudia, a daughter of my own race rouse thee to show thyself a rival of those virtuous women who have brought glory
upon our house? Wast thou not roused by Claudia, that famous Vestal who, at her father’s triumph, held him in her embrace and did not suffer him to be dragged down from his chariot by a hostile tribune of the commons? Why did thy brother’s vices move thee rather than the virtues of thy father and of thine ancestors, kept alive since my time not only by men, but also by the women of our family?

**Dio Cassius**  
*Historia Romana 47.19*  
These were the honours which they granted to Caesar; they also allowed the Vestal Virgins to employ one lector each, because one of them, not being recognized, had been insulted while returning home from dinner toward evening. And they assigned the offices in the city for several years ahead, thus at the same time honouring their friends and strengthening their cause for a longer time by controlling the succession of those officials.

**Dio Cassius**  
*Historia Romana 48.12*  
After recording this action on tablets and sealing them, they delivered them to the Vestal Virgins to keep; and they gave command to Caesar, who was present, and to the other party through an embassy, to present themselves for the trial at Gabii on a stated day.

**Dio Cassius**  
*Historia Romana 51.19*  
During this time and still earlier the Romans at home had passed many resolutions in honour of Caesar’s naval victory. Thus they granted him a triumph, as over Cleopatra, an arch adorned with trophies at Brundisium and another in the Roman Forum. Moreover, they decreed that the foundation of the shrine of Julius should be adorned with the beaks of the captured ships and that a festival should be held every four years in honour of Octavius; that there should also be a thanksgiving on his birthday and on the anniversary of the announcement of his victory; also that when he should enter the city the Vestal Virgins and the senate and the people with their wives and children should go out to meet him. But it would be quite superfluous to go on and mention the prayers, the images, the privilege of the front seat, and all the other honours of the sort.

**Dio Cassius**  
*Historia Romana 54.16*  
Among the laws that Augustus enacted was one which provided that those who had bribed anyone in order to gain office should be debarred from office for five years. He laid heavier assessment upon the unmarried men and upon the women without husbands, and on the other hand offered prizes for marriage and the begetting of children. And since among the nobility there were far more males than females, he allowed all who wished, except the senators, to marry freedwomen, and ordered that their offspring should be held legitimate.

**Dio Cassius**  
*Historia Romana 54.36.1.*  
At this same period the priest of Jupiter was appointed for the first time since Merula, and the quaestors were ordered to preserve the decrees passed at various times, inasmuch as the tribunes and aediles, who had previously been entrusted with this duty, were performing it through their assistants, and in consequence some mistakes and confusion occurred.

**Dio Cassius**  
*Historia Romana 55.22*  
This same year Agrippa was enrolled among the youths of military age, but obtained none of the same privileges as his brothers. The senators witnessed the Circensian games separately and the knights also separately from the remainder of the populace as is the case to-day also. And since the noblest families did not show themselves inclined to give their daughters to be priestesses of Vesta, a law was passed that the daughters of freedmen might likewise become priestesses. Many vied for the honour, and so
they drew lots in the senate in the presence of their fathers, so far as these were knights; however, no priestess was appointed from this class.

Dionysius Halicarnassus  
Antiquitates Romanae 2.64-65

The fifth he assigned to the virgins who are the guardians of the sacred fire and who are called Vestals by the Romans, after the goddess whom they serve, he himself having been the first to build a temple at Rome to Vesta and to appoint virgins to be her priestesses. But concerning them it is necessary to make a few statements that are most essential, since the subject requires it; for there are problems that have been thought worthy of investigation by many Roman historians in connexion with this topic and those authors who have not diligently examined into the causes of these matters have published rather worthless accounts.

At any rate, as regards the building of the temple of Vesta, some ascribe it to Romulus, looking upon it as an inconceivable thing that, when a city was being founded by a man skilled in divination, a public heart should not have been erected first of all, particularly since the founder had been brought up at Alba, where the temple of this goddess had been established from ancient times, and since his mother had been her priestess. And recognizing two classes of religious ceremonies— the one public and common to all the citizens, and the other private and confined to particular families— they declare that on both these grounds Romulus was under every obligation to worship this goddess. For they say that nothing is more necessary for men than a public hearth, and nothing more nearly concerned Romulus, in view of his descent, since his ancestors had brought the sacred rites of this goddess from Ilium and his mother had been her priestess. Those, then, who for these reasons ascribe the building of the temple to Romulus rather than to Numa seem to be right, in so far as the general principle is concerned that, when a city was being founded, it was necessary for a hearth to be established first of all, particularly by a man who was not unskilled in matters of religion; but of the details relating to the building of the present temple and to the virgins who are in the service of the goddess they seem to have been ignorant. For in the first place, it was not Romulus who consecrated to the goddess this place where the sacred fire is preserved (a strong proof of this is that it is outside of what they call Roma Quadrata, which he surrounded with a wall whereas all men place the shrine of the public hearth in the best part of the city and nobody outside of the walls); and, in the second place, he did not appoint the service of the goddess to be performed by virgins, being mindful, I believe, of the experience that had befallen his mother, who while she was serving the goddess lost her virginity; for he doubtless felt that the remembrance of his domestic misfortunes would make it impossible for him to punish according to the traditional laws any of the priestesses he should find to have been violated. For this reason therefore, he did not build a common temple of Vesta nor did he appoint virgins to be her priestesses; but having erected a hearth in each of the thirty curiae on which the members sacrificed, he appointed the chiefs of the curiae to be the priests of those hearths, therein imitating the customs of the Greeks that are still observed in the most ancient cities. At any rate, what are called prytaneia among them are temples of Hestia, and are served by the chief magistrates of the cities.

Dionysius Halicarnassus  
Antiquitates Romanae 2.66-69

Numa, upon taking over the rule, did not disturb the individual hearts of the curiae, but erected one common to them all in the space between the Capitoline and the palatine (for these hills had already been united by a single wall into one city, and the Forum, in which the temple is built, lies between them), and he enacted, in accordance with the ancestral custom of the Lins, that the guarding of the holy things should be committed to virgins. There is some doubt, however, what it is that is kept in this temple and for what reason the care of it has been assigned to virgins, some affirming that nothing is preserved there but the fire, which is visible to everybody. And they very reasonably argue that the custody of the fire was committed to virgins, rather than to men, because fire is incorrupt and a virgin is undefiled, and the most chaste of mortal things must be agreeable to the purest of those that are divine. And they regard the fire as consecrated to Vesta because that goddess, being the earth and occupying the central place in the universe, kindles the celestial fires from herself. But there are some
who say that beside the fire there are some holy things in the temple of the goddess that may not be revealed to the public, of which only the pontiffs and the virgins have knowledge. As a strong confirmation of this story they cite what happened at the burning of the temple during the First Punic War between the Romans and the Carthaginians over Sicily. For when the temple caught fire and the virgins fled from the flames, one of the pontiffs, Lucius Caecilius, called Metellus, a man of consular rank, the same who exhibited a hundred and thirty-eight elephants in the memorable triumph which he celebrated for his defeat of the Carthaginians in Sicily, neglecting his own safety for the sake of the public good, ventured to force his way into the burning structure, and, snatching up the holy things which the virgins had abandoned, saved them from the fire; for which he received great honours from the State, as the inscription upon his statue on the Capitol testifies. Taking this incident, then as an admitted fact, they add some conjectures of their own. Thus some affirm that the objects preserved here are a part of those holy things which were once in Samothrace; that Dardanus removed them out of that island into the city which he himself had built, and that Aeneas, when he fled from the Troad, brought them along with the other holy things into Italy. But others declare that it is the Palladium that fell from Heaven, the same that was in the possession of the people of Ilium; for they hold that Aeneas, being well acquainted with it, brought it into Italy, whereas the Achaens stole away the copy, - an incident about which many stories have been related both by poets and by historians. For my part, I find from very many evidences that there are indeed some holy things, unknown to the public kept by the virgins, and not the fire alone; but what they are I do not think should be inquired into too curiously, either by me or by anyone else who wishes to observe the reverence due to the gods.

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 to six, and has so remained down to our time. They live in the temple of the goddess, into which none who wish are hindered from entering in the daytime, whereas it is not lawful for any man to remain there at night. 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 honours have been granted them by the commonwealth, as a result of which they feel no desire either for marriage or for children; and severe penalties have been established for their misdeeds. It is the pontiffs who by law both inquire into and punish these offences; those 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. For 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.

However, it is also well worth relating in what manner the goddess has manifested herself in favour of those virgins who have been falsely accused. For these things, however incredible they may be, have been believed by the Romans and their historians have related much about them. To be sure, the professors of the atheistic philosophies, - if, indeed, their theories deserve the name of philosophy, - who ridicule all the manifestations of the gods which have taken place among either the Greeks or barbarians, will also laugh these reports to scorn and attribute them to human imposture, on the ground that none of the gods concern themselves in anything relating to mankind. Those however, who do not absolve the gods from the care of human affairs, but, after looking deeply into history, hold that they are favourable to the good and hostile to the wicked, will not regard even these manifestations as
incredible. 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 of 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.

But what I am going to relate is still more wonderful and more like a myth. They say that
somebody unjustly accused one of the holy virgins, whose name was Tuccia, and although he was
unable to point to the extinction of the fire as evidence, he advanced false arguments based on
plausible proofs and depositions; and that the virgin, being ordered to make her defense, said only this,
that she would clear herself from the accusation by her deeds. Having said this and called upon the
goddess to be her guide, she led the way to the Tiber, with the consent of the pontiffs and escorted by
the whole population of the city; and when she came to the river, she was so hardy as to undertake the
task which, according to the proverb, is among the most impossible of achievement; she drew up water
from the river in a sieve, and carrying it as far as the forum, poured it out at the feet of the pontiffs,
after which they say her accuser though great search was made for him, could never be found either
alive or dead. But though I have yet many other things to say concerning the manifestations of this
goddess, I regard what has already been said as sufficient.

Horatius
Odes 3.6.1-4
Though guiltless, you will continue to pay for the sins of your forefathers, Roman, until you repair the
crumbling temples and shrines of the gods, and the statues that are begrimed with black smoke.

Hyginus
De Condicionibus Agrorum C. 82
“From antiquity they learn this, so that they also use the ancient names, such as the rented (vectigalis)
land of the Vestal Virgins, and altars, temples tombs and the like”

Livius 1.20
He then turned his attention to the appointment of priests, although he performed very many priestly
duties himself, especially those which now belong to the Flamen Dialis. But inasmuch as he thought
that in a warlike nation there would be more kings like Romulus than like Numa, and that they would
take the field in person, he did not wish the sacrificial duties of the kingly office to be neglected, and
so appointed a flamen for Jupiter, as his perpetual priest, and provided him with a conspicuous dress
and the royal curule chair, To him he added two other flamen, one for Mars, the other for Quirinus. 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. That they might be perpetual priestesses of the temple, he
assigned them a stipend from the public treasury, and by the rule of virginity and other observances
invested them with awe and sanctity.

Livius 4.20.7
Having heard from the lips of Augustus Caesar, the founder or renewer of all the temples, that he had
entered the shrine of Jupiter Feretrius, which he repaired when it had crumbled with age and had

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himself read the inscription on the linen breast-plate, I have thought it would be almost sacrilege to rob Cossus of such a witness to his spoils as Caesar, the restorer of that very temple.

**Livius 5.40**
Meanwhile the flamen of Quirinus and the Vestal virgins, with no thought for their own belongings, were consulting which of the sacred things they should carry with them, and which, because they were not strong enough to carry them all, they must leave behind, and, finally, where these objects would be safe. They judged it best to place them in jars and bury them in the shrine adjoining the flamen’s house, where it is now forbidden to spit; the rest of the things they carried, sharing the burden amongst them, along the road which leads by the Sublician Bridge to Janiculum. As they mounted the hill they were perceived by a plebeian named Lucius Albinius, who had a wagon in which he was conveying his wife and children, amidst the throng of those who, unfit for war, were leaving the City. Preserving even then the distinction between divine and human, and holding it sacrilege that the priestesses of his country should go afoot, bearing the sacred objects of the Roman People, while his family were seen in a vehicle, he commanded his wife and children to get down, placed the virgins and their relics in the wagon, and brought them to Caere, whither the priestesses were bound.

**Livius 8.15.7-8**
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.

**Livius 22.55**
To discover and ascertain what the Fathers themselves must do, since there were not magistrates enough, was this: quell the panic and confusion in the City; keep the matrons off the streets and compel them each to abide in her own home; restrain families from lamentation; procure silence throughout the City; see that hearers of any news were brought before the praetors – every man must wait at home for tidings that concerned himself; and, besides this, post sentries at the gates, to keep anyone from leaving the City, and make the people rest all hope of safety on the safety of Rome and of its walls.

**Livius 22.57.2-3**
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. Lacius 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.

**Livius 28.11.6**
More terrifying to men than all the prodigies, whether reported from outside or seen in the city, was the extinction of the fire in the Temple of Vesta; and the Vestal who had been on duty that night was scourged by order of Publius Licinius, the pontifex. Although the thing had happened without a portent from the gods but by a mortal’s negligence, it was nevertheless decided that it should be expiated by full-grown victims and that a day of prayer at the Temple of Vesta should be observed.
Livius

*Periochae 63a*

Consul Gaius Porcius lost a battle against the Scordisci in Thrace. The half-decade was formally closed by the censors; the number of citizens counted was three hundred and ninety-four thousand, three hundred and thirty-six. Aemilia, Licinia, and Marcia, Vestal Virgins, were condemned for unchastity; an account is given of the manner in which this offence was committed, detected, and punished.

Orosius 4.5.6-9

481 years after the foundation of the City, a great plague flared up at Rome, I am content to mention it in these terms, as I am unable to describe its horrors in words. If someone asks how long it lasted, its devastation extended for more than two years; if they ask about the death it brought, the census is our witness – it does not record the number of men who perished, but the number who survived; if he asks about the violence with which it raged, the Sibyline Books bear witness to this, saying that the plague was brought about by Divine Wrath. But in case anyone is struck by a specious form of quibbling from the fact that the Sibyline Books say that the gods were angry, while I appear to have described this episode as the result of Divine Wrath, let him hear and learn that although the majority of these things are brought about by incorporeal spirits, they would not come to pass without the consent of Almighty God. At this same time, the Vestal Virgin Caparronia was convicted of defiling herself and died by hanging. Her seducer and the slaves who were his accomplices were executed.\(^\text{209}\)

Orosius 5.15.20-22

At this time, an obscene, tragic prodigy occurred. A Roman knight, Lucius Helvius, was returning with his wife and daughter to Apulia from Rome. He was caught in a storm and when he saw that his daughter was terrified, he abandoned his coaches and took to the horses so that they might reach the neighboring houses more quickly, sitting his maiden daughter on a horse in the middle of his party. The girl was at once struck dead by a bolt of lightning. All her clothes were stripped from her, though none of them were torn, her girdle and the straps of her sandals were broken loose, and her necklace and rings scattered far and wide. Her body too remained untouched, though in an obscene posture, lying naked and with the tongue sticking out a short way. The horse on which she had been riding lay dead a good way off with its saddle, reins, and harness undone and scattered about. A little after this, another Roman knight, Lucius Veturius, polluted the Vestal Virgin Aemilia by secretly having sex with her. This same Aemilia offered and gave to the companions of her own seducer two other Vestal Virgins whom she had enticed into taking part in this pollution. Their actions were betrayed by a slave and they were all executed.\(^\text{210}\)

Ovidius

*Fasti 1.527-528*

Anon pious Aeneas shall hither bring his sacred burden, and, burden no whit less sacred, his own sire; Vesta, admit the gods of Ilium! (* The Vestal fire and the Penates of the Roman people were believed to have been brought by Aeneas from Troy.*)

Ovidius

*Fasti 6.249-318*

O Vesta, grant me thy favour! In thy service now I open my lips; it is lawful for me to come to thy sacred rites. I was wrapt up in prayer; I felt the heavenly deity, and the glad ground gleamed with a purple light. Not indeed that I saw thee, O goddess (far from me be the lies of poets!), nor was it meet


that a man should look upon thee; but my ignorance was enlightened and my errors corrected without the help of an instructor. 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 wovem 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 round season. 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. 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 virginit.

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. The earth stands by its own power; Vesta is so called from standing by power (vistando); and the reason of her Greek name may be similar. But the hearth (focus) is so named from the flames, and because it fosters (fovet) all things; yet formerly it stood in the first room of the house. Hence, too, 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 heart and to suppose that the gods were present at table; even now, when sacrifices are offered to ancient Vacuna, they stand and sit in front of her hearts. Something of olden custom has come down to our time: a clean platter contains the food offered to Vesta. Lo, Loaves are hung on asses decked with wreaths, and flowery garlands veil the rough millstones. Husbandmen used formerly to toast only spelt in the ovens, and the goddess of ovens has her own sacred rites: the heart of itself baked the bread that was put under the ashes, and a broken tile was laid on the warm floor; Hence the baker honours the hearth and the mistress of hearts and the she-ass that turns the millstones of pumice.

Plinius Minor  
Epistulae 6.3
I am much obliged to you for undertaking the care of that little farm I gave to my nurse. It was worth, when I made her a present of it, an hundred thousand sesterces, but the returns having since diminished, it has sunk in its value: however, that will rise again, I doubt not, under your management. But, remember, what I recommend to your attention is not the fruit-trees and the land (which yet I by no means except), but my little benefaction; for it is not more the good woman’s concern as a recipient, than mine as the donor, that it should be as profitable as possible.

Plinius Major  
Historia Naturalis 34.24-25
And as Octavius was killed while on this embassy, the senate ordered a statue to be erected to him ‘in the spot most eyed’ and that statue stands on the Platform. We also find that a decree was passed to erect a statue to a Vestal Virgin named Taracia Gaia or Fufetia ‘to be placed where she wished’, an addition that is as great a compliment as the fact that a statue was decreed in honour of a woman. For the Vestal’s services I will quote the actual words of the Annals: ‘because she had made a gratuitous present to the nation of the field by the Tiber’
Plutarchus

Camillus 20-21

Now had the Gauls, after this battle, followed hard upon the fugitives, naught would have hindered Rome from being utterly destroyed and all those who remained in her from perishing, such was the terror which the fugitives infused into the occupants of the city, and with such confusion and delirium were they themselves once more filled. But as it was, the Barbarians could not realize the magnitude of their victory, and in the excess of their joy, turned to revelry and the distribution of the good things captured in their enemy’s camp. For this reason the throngs who were for abandoning the city had ample time for flight, and those who were for remaining plucked up hope and prepared to defend themselves. Abandoning the rest of the city, they fenced the Capitol with ramparts and stocked it, with missiles. But their first care was for their sacred things, most of which they carried away to the Capitol; 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. 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. For fire produces more motion than anything else in nature, and all birth is a mode of motion, or is accompanied by motion. All other portions of matter, in the absence of heat, lie inert and dead yearning for the force of fire to inform them, like a spirit, and on its accession in any manner soever, they become capable of acting and being acted upon. 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, it might image forth the ever-living force which orders the universe aright. 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. 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 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.”

However that may be, these virgins took the Choicest and most important of the objects and fled away along the river. There it chanced that Lucius Albinus, a man of the common people was among the fugitives, carrying of his wife and little children, with the most necessary household goods, upon a wagon. When he saw the virgins with the sacred symbols of the gods in their bosoms, making their way along unattended and in great distress, he speedily took his wife with the children and the household goods, down from the wagon, and suffered the virgins to mount upon it and make their escape to a Greek city. This pious act of Albinus, and the conspicuous honour which he showed the gods in a season of the greatest danger, could not well be passed over in silence. But the priests of the other gods, and the aged men who had been consuls and celebrated triumphs could not endure to leave the city. So they put on their robes of state and ceremony, following the lead of Fabius, the pontifex maximus, and vowed the gods that they would devote themselves to death in their country’s behalf. Then they sat themselves down, thus arrayed, on their ivory chairs in the forum, and awaited their fate.

Plutarchus

Cato Minor 19.3-9

At one time he opposed Clodius the demagogue, who was reasing 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, and when Cicero thanked him, Cato told him he ought to be thankful to the city, since it was for her sake that all his public work was done. In consequence of this he was held in high repute, so that an orator, at a trial where the testimony of a single witness was introduced, told the jurors that it was not right to give heed to a single witness, not even if he were Cato; and many already, when speaking of matters that were strange and incredible, would say, as though using a proverb. “This is not to be believed even though Cato says it.”

**Plutarchus**

*Cicero 19-20*

It was now evening and the people were waiting about the temple in throngs, when Cicero come forth and told his fellow-citizens what had been done. They then escorted him to the house of a friend and neighbor, since his own was occupied by the women, who were celebrating mysterious rites to a goddess whom the Romans call Bona Dea, and the Greeks Gynaeceia. Sacrifice is offered to her annually in the house of the consul by his wife or his mother in the presence of the Vestal Virgins. Cicero then, having gone into his friend’s house, began to deliberate with himself – and he had only very few companions – what he should do with the men. For he shrank from inflicting the extreme penalty, and the one befitting such great crimes, and he hesitated to do it because of the kindliness of his nature, and at the same time that he might not appear to make an excessive use of his power and to trample ruthlessly upon men who were of the highest birth and had powerful friends in the city; and if he treated them with less severity, he was afraid of the peril into which they would bring the state. For it they suffered any milder penalty than death, he was sure they would not be satisfied, but would break out into every extreme of boldness, having added fresh rage to their old villainy; and he himself would be thought unmanly and weak, especially as the multitude already thought him very far from courageous.

While Cicero was in this perplexity, a sign was given to the women who were sacrificing. The altar, it seems, although the fire was already though to have gone out, sent forth from the ashes a burnt bark upon it a great bright blaze. The rest of the women were terrified at this, but the sacred virgins bade Terentia, the wife of Cicero go with all speed to her husband and tell him to carry out his resolutions in behalf of the country, since the goddess was giving him a great light on this path to safety and glory. So Terentia, who was generally of no mild spirit nor without natural courage, but an ambitious woman, and, as Cicero himself tells us, more inclined to make herself a partner in his political perplexities than to share with him her domestic concerns, gave him this message and incited him against the conspirators; so likewise did Quintus, his brother, and Publius Nigidius, one of his philosophical companions of whom he made the most an greatest use in his political undertakings.

**Plutarchus**

*Crassus 1.1-2*

Marcus Crassus was the son of a man who had been censor and had enjoyed a triumph; but he was reared in a small housewith two brothers. His brothers were married while their parents were still alive, and all shared the same table, which seems to have been the chief reason why Crassus was temperate and moderate in his manner of life. When one of his brothers died, Crassus took the widow to wife, and had his children by her, and in these relations also he lived as well-ordered a life as any Roman. 2 And yet when he was further on in years, he was accused of criminal intimacy with Licinia, one of the vestal virgins, and Licinia was formally prosecuted by a certain Plotius. Now Licinia was the owner of a pleasant villa in the suburbs which Crassus wished to get at a low price, and it was for this reason that he was forever hovering about the woman and paying his court to her, until he fell under the abominable suspicion. And in a way it was his avarice that absolved him from the charge of corrupting the vestal, and he was acquitted by the judges. But he did not let Licinia go until he had acquired her property.

**Plutarchus**

*Antonius 58.3-4.*

This will was on deposit with the Vestal Virgins, and when Caesar asked for it, they would not give it to him; but if he wanted to take it, they hold him to come and do so. So he went and took it; and to begin with, he read its contents through by himself; and marked certain reprehensible passages; then
he assembled the senate and read it aloud to them, although most of them were displeased to hear him do so. For they thought it a strange and grievous matter that a man should be called to account while alive for what he wished to have done after his death. Caesar laid most stress on the clause in the will relating to Antony’s burial. For it directed that Antony’s body, even if he should die in Rome, should be borne in state through the forum and then sent away to Cleopatra in Egypt.

Plutarchus
Numa 9-11
To Numa is also ascribed the institution of that order of high priests, who are called Pontifices and he himself is said to have been the first of them. According to some they are called Pontifices because employed in the service of the gods, who are powerful and supreme over all the world; and “potens” is the Roman word for powerful. Others say that the name was meant to distinguish between possible and impossible functions; the lawgiver anjoining upon these priests the performance of such sacred offices only as were possible, and finding no fault with them in any serious obstacle prevented. But most writers give an absurd explanation of the name; Pontifices means, they say, nothing more nor less than bridge-builders, from the sacrifices which they performed at the bridge over the Tiber, sacrifices of the greatest antiquity and the most sacred character for “pons” is the Latin word for bridge. They say moreover, that the custody and maintenance of the bridge, like all the other inviolable and ancestral rites, attached to the priesthood, for the Romans held the demolition of the wooden bridge to be not only unlawful, but actually sacrilegious. It is also said that it was built entirely without iron and fastened together with wooden pins in obedience to an oracle. The stone bridge was constructed at a much later period, when Aemilius was quaestor. However, it is said that the wooden bridge also was later than the time of Numa, and was completed by Ancus Marcius the grandson of Numa by his daughter, when he was king.

The chief of the Pontifices, the Pontifex Maximus had the duty of expounding and interpreting the divine will, or rather of directing sacred rites, not only being in charge of public ceremonies, but also watching over private sacrifices and preventing any departure from established custom, as well as teaching whatever was requisite for the worship or propitiation of the gods. He was also overseer of the holy virgins called Vestals; for to Numa is ascribed the consecration of the Vestal virgins, and in general the worship and care of the perpetual fire entrusted to their charge. It was either because he thought the nature of fire pure and uncorrupted, and therefore entrusted it to chaste and undefiled persons, or because he thought of it as unfruitful and barren, and therefore associated it with virginity. Since wherever in Greece a perpetual fire is kept, as at Delphi and Athens, it is committed to the chargem not of virgins, but of widows past the age of marriage. And if by any change it goes out, as at Athens during the tyranny of Aristion the sacred lamp is said to have been extinguished and at Delphi when the temple was burned by the Medes, and as during the Mithridatic and the Roman civil wars the altar was demolished and the fire extinguished, then they say it must not be kindled again from other fire, but made fresh and new, by lighting a pure and unpolluted flame from the rays of the sun. And this they usually effect by means of metallic mirrors, the concavity of which is made to follow the sides of an isosceles rectangular triangle, and which converge from their circumference to a single point in the centre. When therefore, these are placed opposite the sun, so that it rays as they fall upon them from all sides, are collected and concentrated at the centre, the air itself is rarefied there, and very light and dry substances placed there quickly blaze up from is resistance, the sun’s rays now acquiring the substance and force of fire. Some, moreover, are of the opinion that nothing but this perpetual fire is guarded by the sacred virgins; while some say that certain sacred objects, which none others may behold, are kept in concealment by them. What may lawfully be learned and told about these things, I have written in my Life of Camillus.

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; that at a later time two others were added by Servius, making the number which has continued to the present time. It was ordained by the king that the sacred virgins should vow themselves to chastity for thirty years; during the first decade they are to learn their duties, during the second to perform the duties they have learned, and during the third to teach others these duties. Then, the thirty years being now passed, anyone who wishes has liberty to marry and adopt a different mode of life, after laying down her sacred office. We are told,
however, that few have welcomed the indulgence, and that those who did so were not happy, but were a prey to repentance and dejection for the rest of their lives, thereby inspiring the rest with superstitious fears, so that until old age and death they remained steadfast in their virginity.

But Numa bestowed great privileges upon them, such as the right to make a will during the lifetime of their fathers, and to transact and manage their other affairs without a guardian, like the mothers of three children. 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. 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. But 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 thought 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 making the place level with the rest of the mound. Such is the punishment of those who break their vow of virginity.

Furthermore, it is said that Numa built the temple of Vesta, where the perpetual fire was kept, of a circular form, not in imitation of the shape of the earth, believing Vesta to be the earth, but of the entire universe, at the centre of which the Pythagoreans place the element of fire and call it Vesta and Unit. And they hold that the earth is neither motionless nor situated in the centre of surrounding space, but that it revolves in a circle about the central fire, not being one of the most important nor even one of the primary elements of the universe. This is the conception we are told, which Plato also in his old age had of the earth, namely that it is established in a secondary space and that the central and sovereign space is reserved for some other and nobler body.

Propertius
2.6.25-36
What profits it for maids to found temples in honour of Chastity, if every bride is permitted to be whate’er she will? The hand that first painted lewd pictures, and set up objects foul to view in chaste homes, first corrupted the unsullied eyes of maids and refused to allow them to be ignorant of its own wantonness. May he groan in torment who by his vile art fist wakened strife ’twixt lovers, strife lurking secret under silent joy! Not with such figures did men of old adorn their houses; then their walls had no foul deeds painted on them. But deservedly have cobwebs gathered o’er the temples and rank herbage has overgrown the neglected gods.

Propertius 3.13.47
But now the shrines lie neglected in deserted groves: piety is vanquished and all men worship gold. Gold has banished faith, gold has made judgment to be bought and sold, gold rules the law, and, law once gone, rules chastity as well.
Sallust

*Jugurtha 41.5*

For the nobles began to abuse their position and the people their liberty, and every man for himself robbed, pillaged, and plundered. Thus the community was split into two parties, and between these the state was torn to pieces.

Seneca

*De Beneficiis 3.16*

Is there any woman that blushes at divorce now that certain illustrious and noble ladies reckon their years, not by the number of consuls, but by the number of their husbands, and leave home in order to marry, and marry in order to be divorced? They shrank from this scandal as long as it was rare; now, since every gazette has a divorce case, they have learned to do what they used to hear so much about. Is there any shame at all for adultery not that matters have come to such a pass that no woman has any use for a husband except to inflame her paramour? Chastity is simply a proof of ugliness.

Suetonius

*Augustus 31.3*

He 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.

Suetonius

*Augustus 44.3*

He would not allow women to view even the gladiators except from the upper seats, though it had been the custom for men and women to sit together at such shows. Only the Vestal virgins were assigned a place to themselves, opposite the praetor’s tribunal.

Suetonius

*Augustus 101*

He had made a will in the consulship of Lucius Plancus and Gaius Silius on the third day before the Nones of April, a year and four months before he died, in two note-books, written in part in his own hand and in part in that of his freedmen Polybius and Hilarion. These the Vestal virgins, with whom they had been deposited, now produced, together with three rolls, which were sealed in the same way.

Suetonius

*Iulius 1.1*

In the course of his sixteenth year he lost his father. In the next consulate, having previously been nominated priest of Jupiter he broke his engagement with Cossutia, a lady of only equestrian rank, but very wealthy, who had been betrothed to him before he assumed the gown of manhood, and married Cornelia, daughter of that Cinna who was four times consul, by whom he afterwards had a daughter Julia; and the dictator Sulla could by no means force him to put away his wife.

Suetonius

*Iulius 1.2.6*

Therefore besides being punished by the loss of his priesthood, his wife’s dowry, and his family inheritances, Caesar was held to be one of the opposite party. He was accordingly forced to go into hiding and though suffering from a severe attack of quartan ague, to change from one covert to another almost every night, and save himself from Sulla’s detectives by bribes. But at last, through the good offices of the Vestal virgins and of his near kinsmen, Mamarcus Aemilius and Aurelius Cotta, he obtained forgiveness. Everyone knows that when Sulla had long held out against the most devoted and eminent men of his party who interceded for Caesar, and they obstinately persisted, he at last gave way and cried, either by divine inspiration or a shrewd forecast: “have your way and take him; only
bear in mind that the man you are so eager to save will one day deal the death blow to the cause of the aristocracy, which you have joined with me in upholding; for in this Caesar there is more than one Marius.”

Suetonius
Iulius 83
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.

Suetonius
Tiberius 2.4
Even a Vestal virgin mounted her brother’s (Claudius) chariot with him, when he was celebrating a triumph without the sanction of the people, and attended him all the way to the Capitol, in order to make it an act of sacrilege for any one of the tribunes to forbid him or interpose his veto.

Tacitus
Annales 1.8
The only business which he allowed to be discussed at the first meeting of the senate was the funeral of Augustus. The will, brought in by the Vestal Virgins, specified Tiberius and Livia as heirs, Livia to be adopted into the Julian family and the Augustan name.

Tacitus
Annales 2.86
The emperor 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 household. As a solatium to the rejected candidate, the Caesar presented her with a dowry of a million sesterces.

Tacitus
Annales 4.16
Nearly at the same date, the Caesar spoke on the need of choosing a flamen of Jupiter, to replace the late Servius Maluginensis, and of also passing new legislation. “Three patricians,” he pointed out, “children of parents wedded by cake and spelt”, were nominated simultaneously; and on one of them the selection fell. The system was old-fashioned, nor was there now as formerly the requisite supply of candidates, since the habit of marrying by the ancient ritual had been dropped, or was retained in few families. “Here he offered several explanations of the fact, the principal one being the indifference of both sexes, though there was also a deliberate avoidance of the difficulties of the ceremony itself.”.. and since both the man obtaining this priesthood and the woman passing into the parital control of a flamen were automatically withdrawn from paternal jurisdiction. Consequently a remedy must be applied either by a senatorial resolution or by special law, precisely as Augustus had modified several relics of the rough old world to suit the needs of the present.” It was decided, then, after a discussion of the religious points, that no change should be made in the constitution of the flamenship; but a law was carried that the flamen’s wife, though under her husband’s tutelage in respect of her sacred duties, should otherwise stand upon the same legal footing as any ordinary woman. Maluginensis’ son was elected in the room of his father; 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; while Augusta, whenever she entered the theatre, was to take her place among the seats reserved for Vestals.
Tacitus
*Annales* 12.42
The exaltation of her own dignity also occupied Agrippina: She began to enter the Capitol in a carriage, and that honour, reserved by antiquity for priests and holy objects, enhanced the veneration felt for a woman who to this day stands unparalleled as the daughter of an Imperator and the sister, the wife, and the mother of an emperor.

Valerius Maximus 1.1.10
The same sentiments were also to be found in the hearts of private citizens. When our city was captured by the Gauls, the flamen of Quirinus and the vestal virgins were carrying sacred objects, sharing the burden among them. They crossed the Wooden Bridge and were beginning to go up the hill that leads to the Janiculum, when they were spotted by Lucius Albanius, who was bringing his wife and children in a wagon. The religion of the state meant more to him than his personal feelings for his family, so he ordered them to get off the wagon. He put the virgins and their sacred objects on the Wagon, abandoned his previous journey, and brought them all the way to the town of Caere. The people there welcomed the sacred objects with the greatest veneration. A testimony of our gratitude for their hospitality and kindness survives to this very day: we adopted the term “ceremonies” for sacred rites at that time, because the people of Caere had faithfully honored our rites when the Republic was shattered, just as they had done when it was flourishing. That dirty farmyard wagon had come just in time to carry our sacred objects, and its glory equals and perhaps surpasses the glory of our most brilliant triumphal chariot.  

*CIL 2146*
Besitz der Calpurnia Praetextata, Virgo Vestalis maxima, steuerfrei.  

*CIL 2147*
Besitz der Flavia Publica, Virgo Vestalis Maxima, steuerfrei, am Joch.  

*CIL 2148*
Besitz der Sossia, Virgo Vestalis.

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213 Ibidem.

214 Ibidem.