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THE ETERNAL FIRE OF VESTA

Roman Cultural Identity and the Legitimacy of Augustus

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Vesta and the Vestal Virgins represented the very core of Roman cultural identity, and Augustus positioned his public image beside them to augment his political legitimacy. Through analysis of material culture, historiography, and poetry that originated during the principate of Augustus, it becomes clear that each of these sources of evidence contributes to the public image projected by the leader whom Ronald Syme considered to be the first Roman emperor. The *Ara Pacis Augustae* and the *Res Gestae Divi Augustae* embody the legacy the Emperor wished to establish, and each of these cultural works contain significant references to the Vestal Virgins. The study of history Livy undertook also emphasized the pathetic plight of Rhea Silvia as she was compelled to become a Vestal. Livy and his contemporary Dionysius of Halicarnassus explored the foundation of the Vestal Order and each writer had his own explanation about how Numa founded it. The Roman poets Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Tibullus incorporated Vesta and the Vestals into their work in a way that offers further proof of the way Augustus insinuated himself into the fabric of Roman cultural identity by associating his public image with these honored priestesses.

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Pamela Douglas McElroy in memoriam;
quae me aluit et inspiravit.

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Vestal Virgins: The Guardians of Roman Culture

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

Vesta and the Vestal Virgins represented the essence of purity and decency (*castitas* and *pudor*), epitomizing Roman ethnic and national identity in the political culture of the 1st century BCE, since the Vestals were emblematic of the stability and domestic rituals that reached back to Rome's foundation. They left a clear impression on both the material evidence and literary culture of the Augustan Principate, the regime that

suborned and coopted the Vestal Order's political importance to cement the legitimacy of Augustus after the Actian War, thus securing his heirs dominance. An examination of the cultural evidence from the time of Augustus' Principate reveals that Vestal Virgins, even more than the goddess Vesta herself, were essential to the Roman construction of ethnic identity, which, together with national identity, coalesced into Roman cultural identity, that is the contemporary impression the Romans constructed for themselves. Within the construct of cultural identity, ethnic identity is largely to do with defining the origin and purpose of a community whereas national identity is specific to a given epoch or generation. For Vesta herself, the evidence of her importance to Roman cultural identity stems in part from Ovid's *Fasti* 6, in which the Poet mocks Vesta in his depiction of an attempted sexual assault by Priapus. On the contrary, the Vestal Virgins are well-attested in the cultural record of the Augustan Principate, and these priestesses are a living touchstone of ethnic and national identity, closely linked constructs of unconscious feelings about where the Roman state stood vis-à-vis early Roman historical tradition, the memory of which is obscure.

The primary stricture under which Vestal Virgins operated, a vow of celibacy, was the most remarkable aspect of their existence, and doubtless this promise to forgo family and marriage was a wellspring of the cultural authenticity they possessed. Sexual abstinence enforced by well-known, brutal methods elevated the *castitas* (ritual purity) of the Vestals,¹ for they made a conspicuous sacrifice that earned the priestesses of Vesta a public position with political influence, a social position inferior only to the imperial

¹ Plutarch *Life of Numa* 10.4-7 recounts the terrible punishment for breaking the vow of celibacy in great detail as the guilty party was buried alive near the Colline Gate in an elaborate ritual. “ἡ δὲ τὴν παρθενίαν κατασχύνασα ζῶσα κατορύττεται παρὰ τὴν Κολλίνην λεγομένην πύλιν ἐν ἣ τις ἔστιν ἐντὸς τῆς πόλεως ὁφρὺς γεώδης παρατείνουσα πόρρω.” *Numa* 10.4

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

Triumph, public ritual, or private religious ceremony might require the participation of Vestals, and certain occasions even demanded a Vestal stand together with a male priest to symbolize the mystical dichotomy of female and male. For instance, she must appear with the *Flamen Quirinalis* during the festival dedicated to Consus, the Consualia, and there are emerging theories that this was significant to Roman women because Consus was a god of crops and fertility.² At inaugural public events, such as the opening of a new public building like the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, the *Virgo Vestalis Maxima*, or chief Vestal, whose status was determined by years of seniority, assumed her place among the College of Priests, and many other honors were in store as an outgrowth of her Order's increased importance to religious ritual during the Republican period and the

² For the Consualia as a connection between the Vestals and the *flamen Quirinalis* see Ogilvie on Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* 5.40.7. He cites Tertullian *de Spect.* 507 and Varro *De Ling. Lat.* 6.20-1 for the background of this important festival. The role of Vestals *vis-a-vis* other priests is a major concern of Beard (1995), in which she posits that the seminal article Beard (1980) focused on the interstitial gender role the priestesses had to the detriment of their interactions within the College of Priests at Rome.

Principate. The gradual expansion of the role of the Vestal Order will be examined in Chapter 1, and so I note here primarily the significance Vestals obtained during the onset of the Principate and into the Early Imperial period, especially with the return to domesticity that the Augustan Principate envisioned. The sentiment and nostalgia on which this moral movement thrived were calculated to achieve a new order of the ages, however, their renewed prominence under Augustus stemmed from what had long been one of the foremost Roman cultural institutions. Certainly victory on the battlefield was a prerequisite, but Augustus predetermined to associate his public image with the Vestals since their sanctity was such an ingrained part of public and private life.

Roman worship evolved according to the needs and experiences of those who practiced it and embodied Roman identity distinct from Greek roots or counterparts. One way they affected this was by celebrating Vesta's pre-Roman tradition. Whether the Vestal Virgins predated Rome is dubious, although the foundation story of Rhea Silvia handed down by Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus recorded that her cult was even at Alba Longa and Lavinia. Material evidence of the worship of Vesta proves that her priestesses had a dedicated place for worship and ritual from the sixth century, a short time after the foundation of the city, though whether it was Romulus or Numa who introduced the Order itself remains open to question.³ However much the historical memory had faded when in the 3rd century BCE the Greek author and general Q. Fabius Pictor wrote about Ilia, the Vestals always held primary importance for the cultural identity of Rome, a position that Augustus adapted to suit his political program of promoting sexual morality and domesticity in the Roman elite.

³ R.T. Scott et al. (2009) 1-2. For further details on how the date of construction of the *Aedes Vestae* was established, see page 2 n. 12 below. It is important to distinguish the *Aedes*, the circular temple in which rituals were conducted, from the *Area Sacra Vestae*, as it is to delineate Vesta from the Vestals.

Roman traditions of Vesta evolved parallel to the course of Roman political history, and with Augustus Vestals themselves reshaped their public role, although their responsibility remained to cultivate the favor of the gods for Rome through ritual offerings of drink, *aqua sancta*, and food, *mola salsa*, a salted spelt meal. Their primary duty, propitiating the gods, also included attending the sacred fire of Vesta, and this hearth always remained active as a symbol of the continuous spirit of Rome.⁴ As the size of the city increased, the number of public rituals and private sacrifices followed suit, and as preparers of the holy food and drink the Vestals had no peer. Suetonius commented how Augustus took special measures to increase their prestige, and the same passage claimed that Augustus would have urged his grandchildren become Vestals if the opportunity presented itself.⁵ It seemed to be formerly sought-after honor that had become untenable to elite families by the time of the Principate, although the details of this supposed distaste are obscure, and at that time Roman daughters were as well suited to forging bonds between families as ever, but this nonetheless documented the idea that attitudes toward the Vestal Order changed according to the state of Roman society.

Learned priests invoked Vesta first during important prayers and sacrifices, a primacy that indicates continuity between her Roman identity and its Greek antecedent, even when little else about her Roman adaptation coincides with Hestia. According to

⁴ Cic. De Leg. 2.20.6 “Virginesque Vestales in urbe custodiunto ignem foci publici sempiternum” “Let the Vestal Virgins in the city forever keep watch over the fire of the public hearth.” The rare future imperative form “custodiunto” underscores the necessity of keeping this fire burning. The Ignis Vestae was like a living symbol of the city of Rome’s vitality. The symbolic eternal flame is also kept burning at the grave of former President John F. Kennedy in Arlington National Cemetery.

⁵ Suet. Aug. 31.3 “sacerdotum et numerum et dignitatem sed et commoda auxit, praecipue Vestalium uirginum. cumque in demortuae locum aliam capi oporteret ambirentque multi ne filias in sortem darent, adiuravit, si cuiusquam neptium suarum competeret aetas, oblaturum se fuisse eam.” “He increased the number and importance of the orders of 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 danger of the lot, he solemnly swore that if anyone of his granddaughters were of eligible age, he would have proposed her name.” This translation was adapted from Rolfe (1913). Translations are original unless noted.

Hesiod's *Theogony*, Hestia was born first among the Olympians, although her status as first-born meant that she was the first consumed, and therefore the last to be emitted from Chronos. Homer's *Odyssey* 14 also portrayed a ritual of Hestia that the good swineherd Eumaeus performed before the sacrificial feast with the suitors. Pindar called on Hestia as the invocation to *Nemean* 11, a poem that demonstrates Hestia's civic role in ancient Greek culture. Turning to the Roman poetic tradition, Horace incorporated her into *Odes* 1.2 and 3.5 as part of a focus he maintained on the public and civic role of Vesta in the new order of Augustus. Virgil cataloged her along with the god Fides in the *Aeneid*, and in the *Georgics* Vesta merited mention with the founders Romulus and Remus. Ovid featured her in *Metamorphoses* 15, in which Vesta helped to inaugurate Augustus' new order, and in *Fasti* 6, in which Vesta narrowly escaped the clutches of Priapus. Tibullus *Odes* 1.1 invoked Vesta as well, through the love of the hearth (*focus*) juxtaposed to the avarice of the ambitious person, and *Odes* 2.5 explores the unthinkable scenario of a Vestal deserting the eternal flame.

Prominent Roman intellectuals like Varro and Cicero had different opinions about the precise origin of the goddess, although their writings are best understood in the broader context of the continuity of ancient religions with regard to the *magna mater* archetype. Vesta, therefore, demonstrates the acculturation Greek religion experienced when it diffused into Roman ritual and culture. Although Cicero records that Vesta's name derived from the Greek Hestia (Ἑστία or the Ionian form Ἰστίη), it is clear that Vesta differed significantly from her namesake in terms of what she represented for Roman religious ritual, and, while Varro attributed her name to the Sabines, neither

author ruled out the possibility of obscure influences.⁶ Varro and Cicero claimed that the worship of Vesta evolved from separate yet intersecting influences, and investigating how these influences raised the status of Vestal Virgins as paragons of Roman womanhood illuminates the confluence of religious culture and political culture in the Principate of Augustus. A thematic survey of the Order's cultural significance and historical development will clarify fundamental aspects of Roman cultural identity.

Vestal Virgins: touchstones of Roman cultural identity

Wedded to the state during their childbearing years, Vestal Virgins assumed the cultural identity of the Roman state, and Augustus reshaped this identity with an eye toward maintaining five hundred years of Republican tradition Vesta symbolized. During the Republican period, the Vestals expanded the *Atrium Vestae* to encompass not just the small hut near the *Aedes Vestae*, but also a one-story structure at the base of the Palatine Hill, a sign of the growth of the city and the need to serve her growing multitudes of pious citizens. The religious elite adapted further during the Principate, as the example set by Augustus in regard to honoring the Vestals and rewarding veteran *Vestales maximae* with public pensions and statuary portraits in the *Atrium Vestae* became a long-standing tradition with successive Emperors. Although Augustan cultural reforms sought to legitimize the succession of the Julio-Claudians, the roots of this tradition about Vesta reached back to the foundation, even beyond Romulus to the Alban and Trojan heritage

⁶ Cic. *De Leg.* 2.29.15 “quomque Vesta quasi focum urbis, ut Graeco nomine est appellata—quod nos prope idem <ac> Graecum, <non> interpretatum nomen tenemus—complexa sit, ei colendae <sex> uirgines praesint, ut advigiletur facilius ad custodiam ignis, et sentiant mulieres in <illis> naturam feminarum omnem castitatem pati.” *De Nat. De.* 2.67.11 “nam Vestae nomen a Graecis (ea est enim quae ab illi Ἑστία dicitur); vis autem eius ad aras et focos pertinet, itaque in ea dea, quod est rerum custos intumarum, omnis et precatio et sacrificatio extrema est.” Varro *De Ling. Lat.* 5.74 “Feronia, Minerva, Novensides a Sabinis. Paulo aliter ab eisdem dicimus haec: Palem, Vestam, Salutem, Fortunam, Fontem, Fidem.” Varro and Cicero traced two ways in which Vesta became part of Roman culture, one through the Sabine influence as Varro recorded, the other through the Greek tradition as Cicero wrote.

of proto-Romans like Aeneas and Rhea Silvia, two figures who loomed large in the construction of Roman cultural identity.

A foundation myth like the Roman story of Rhea Silvia or Ilia must have different variants because it was retold many times, and despite a number of conflicting details in other regards, the accounts agree that Rhea Silvia was a Vestal priestess. I argue that this oral tradition of the myth predates the fragments of the first chronicler, Q. Fabius Pictor. Although there is confusion on the historicity of Rhea Silvia, the story of her being forced to become a Vestal by her uncle Amulius was an important aspect of the way 1st century BCE authors like Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Virgil recorded and transmitted their identity to the next generation of authors.⁷ Beyond what literary evidence can illuminate, material culture from the Augustan Principate contains a number of significant references to Vestals, since they are carved on monuments such as the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* and the *Ara Pacis*, both of which reflect a decidedly Augustan perspective on Roman cultural identity, there is cause to view such women as political and revolutionary symbols in the Roman foundation myth and in visual art because they lent an archaic aura of legitimacy to the unrivaled power of Augustus' rule.

The responsibility of holding the wills of Rome's leaders became an especially important one since the final testament of revolutionary leaders of the 1st century BCE like Marcus Antonius, G. Julius Caesar, and Augustus had constitutional repercussions. The responsibility for safeguarding these momentous documents was a very serious one

⁷ Although Virgil chronicles the foundation indirectly, *Aen.* 5.744 "Pergameumque Larem et canae penetralia Vestae," is a clear reference to the Palladium, a sacred object which the Vestals kept safe together with other *sacra* in the inner sanctum of the *Aedes Vestae*. Presumably this *lar* was brought from Troy with Aeneas, and Augustus himself perhaps relocated it to a shrine to Vesta in his Palatine residence. Ovid hints at its existence at the end of the *Metamorphoses*, see 43 n. 79 below for the passage in which Ovid brought together Vesta and the household gods, *lares* and *penates*, of Augustus.

since the succession from Julius to Octavian by posthumous adoption became a crucial element of the rise of the Augustan public persona. Added to this, as Tacitus chronicled, Livia and the Vestals were trusted to safeguard the imperial succession following the death of Augustus in 14 CE.⁸ This was not the first time Augustus exploited a family matter to gain a political advantage. Many years earlier, when he needed a pretext with which to break from Antony and ignite the campaign that finished near Actium, he secured Antony's will from the Vestals to publicize the fact that he planned to recognize his children by Cleopatra in his will, a fact which would have seemed abhorrent to the Roman public.⁹ Without coercing or convincing the priestesses, Augustus would have found another pretext for war, and it is notable that about 33 BCE Augustus was not yet *pontifex maximus*, so he lacked the legal right to coerce the Vestals. However, the example of these three mighty testators provides ample proof of the heavy responsibility of safeguarding the wills of prominent politicians, although the criteria by which a Roman senator might qualify for the honor of keeping his will there remain obscure.

Honored as *virgines* or unwed women, distinguished from *matronae* whom they might have become before being chosen, literary and epigraphic evidence referred to them as *sacerdotes*, and the social standing of the Vestals was of the highest order. Their service to the state was so important to Augustus, according to Dio Cassius, that he

⁸ Tacitus *Ann.* 1.8.1 "Nihil primo senatus die agi passus est nisi de supremis Augusti, cuius testamentum inlatum per virgines Vestae Tiberium et Liviam heredes habuit." "On his first day he allowed the Senate to do nothing but discuss the funeral of Augustus, whose last testament brought in by the maidens of Vesta named as heir Tiberius and Augusta." The importance of being Augustus' heir can hardly be overstated, since Augustus had established a new order in which the *princeps* was dictatorial. Tacitus chronicles that Livia Augusta was co-heir, a status which implies how involved in public affairs she was.

⁹ Suet. Aug. 17.1 "M. Antonii societatem semper dubiam et incertam reconciliationibusque variis male focilatam abruptit tandem, et quo magis degenerasse eum a civili more approbaret, testamentum, quod is Romae etiam de Cleopatra liberis inter heredes nuncupatis reliquerat, aperiendum recitandumque pro contione curavit." "At last he broke off his alliance with M. Antonius, which was always doubtful and unsure, and with difficulty kept alive by various reconciliations; and the better to show that his rival had fallen away from conduct becoming a citizen, he had the will which Antony had left in Rome, naming his children by Cleopatra among his heirs, opened and read before the people," adapted from Rolfe (1913).

granted them the *ius trium liberorum*.¹⁰ Political maneuvering and population dynamics could work together here, as the elite and established families produced fewer children, perhaps there was a need to encourage fathers to offer their daughters for service. Strung together with other details such as the automatic grant of *ius trium liberorum*, a proud place in the theater by the imperial family, and the right to be accompanied by a lictor on public business, lictors being both symbolic of political power and practically necessary to negotiate crowded streets, it becomes clear how Augustus adapted the Vestal Order to suit his political and ideological program, which touted domesticity and family values.

The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* confirms that the Vestals served a special role for the *princeps*, and the way the Vestals were referenced by name in two chapters of the *RGDA* demonstrates Augustus' concern to associate his public image with them.

Augustus first referenced them together with the priests in the section detailing his religious and construction achievements, and again in consecrating an altar, but the two references in Latin do not correspond to any reference to priestesses of Hestia in the Greek translation, which names them simply “τάς ἱέρας” or priestesses. Religious professions were open to women in much of the ancient world, but here we observe a departure from how the worship of Hestia was administered versus her Roman cognate. According to Mika Kajava, although there are instances of the *prytaneum* being curated by women, eight distinct cities in Roman times by Kajava's reckoning,¹¹ it was a necessary function of the *prytaneis* and other functionaries of the city-state to guard the hearth and that included the preparations for public feasts and holidays, a duty done by the Vestals at Rome. Although it was possible to term them παρθένοι Ἑστιάς as Dionysus

¹⁰ Dio 56.10.2 “καὶ ταῖς ἀειπαρθένοις πάνθ' ὅσα περ αἱ τεκοῦσαι εἶχον ἐχαρίσατο.” “And he granted the always chaste [Vestals] all rights just as those who produced children had.”

¹¹ Kajava (2004) 4 “...in Roman times, the *prytaneis* were not necessarily men...” See also n. 17.

of Halicarnassus and predecessors did, the term has little cultural significance in the Greek world, and so was not rendered by the anonymous ancient translator of the *RGDA*.

Livy included the Vestals at critical moments in his history, *Ab Urbe Condita*, such as the episode of Romulus' birth, before which Rhea Silvia is compelled to become a Vestal, a detail that is confirmed in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and fragmentary annalists like Q. Fabius Pictor. Although Livy did not intend the first book to be evaluated like the rest of the work because it is a reconstruction of identity from oral tradition, the wellspring of Roman identity from which it draws is nonetheless conspicuous in the way Livy organized the various strands of this foundation tradition with Rhea Silvia.

The poets of the Augustan Principate incorporate Vesta into their works with diligence and alacrity, and Vesta marks significant signposts in the language of revolution and regeneration that was so crucial to construct the complex public image of Augustus. Virgil plays a prominent role in framing the virtues Vestals represent, such as *pietas*, *pudor*, and *castitas*, which were severely damaged values of public discourse that Virgil reinforced by connecting them to Aeneas. Ovid suborns the conventional image of Vesta by establishing her presence among the Caesarian Penates, and the treatment of the goddess written in the *Fasti* furthers this quest for close association with Augustus. Tibullus, although his contributions were subversive, nevertheless clarifies the role of Vestals as a counterpoint to the profligacy of the elegiac *puella*.

Scholarly treatment of Vesta and her Order became preoccupied with the question of their interstitial nature, since their socio-legal status hovered between man and woman. Mary Beard, in her second article on the Vestals, argued to recast this question in terms

of how the Vestals related to the rest of the religious elite, a question that sheds light on the interconnected nature of the Roman state's religious establishment. She distanced herself from what she argued in her first article on the topic, especially that the interstitial nature of Vestals, the ease with which they transcended the usual social and political strictures on women, was not the full measure of their contribution.¹² This potential for political and cultural influence was what Augustus recognized as the tremendous symbolic power of the Vestal Order, and it was politically expedient to recast his legacy through association with them in cultural memory.

¹² Beard (1995) and (1980) contributed to a renewal of scholarly interest in the Vestals, but it seems that 15 years removed from the initial article, Beard reconsidered the focus on Vestals transcending gender norms in favor of investigating their responsibilities within the Roman state religion.

Vesta and Material Culture

Material evidence for the worship of Vesta reaches back to the remote origins, and highlights the limits of historiography, whose chronicles were not gleaned from oral tradition until Q. Fabius Pictor, whereas recent research by R.T. Scott et al. on the *Area Sacra Vestae* confirms earlier evidence dating the *Aedes Vestae* to the 6th century BCE. Archaeological and epigraphic evidence, which I examine first in this chapter, will offer clues about the venerable antiquity of Roman worship of Vesta and about the domestic renewal Augustus cultivated by promoting their honor and welfare. As a corollary to the epigraphic evidence, chapter 11 of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* demonstrates the critical role Augustus thought the Vestals had played in his religious and public achievements, such as how the Senate instituted the festival of Augustalia with the dedication of the Altar of Fortune the Home-Bringer in the Temple of Honor and Virtue near the Porta Capena, a festival the Vestals inaugurated. With the subsequent reference to the Vestals in RGDA 12.2, which deals with the construction of the *Altar of Augustan Peace* (*Ara Pacis Augustae*), I argue the Vestals participated in constructing a robust public image through the *Ara Pacis*, a work that features all six of them on an interior frieze, although one possible representation of them on the exterior is damaged.

A survey of the archaeological evidence relating to Vesta illuminates a connection between the Vestals and the Augustan vision of the new order, and exhibits how Vesta was an expression of Roman ethnicity and identity. R.T. Scott et al. conducted an eight-year excavation of the temple precinct or *Area Sacra Vestae*, including the *Aedes Vestae* itself, the small circular building that housed the eternal flame, and the northern and western sides of the *Area Sacra* which formed the *Atrium Vestae*, the place where the

priestesses lived. Scott's project confirmed the construction date of the *Aedes Vestae* given by Giacomo Boni, who conducted the first excavation of the area, occurred during the 6th century BCE. According to Scott, on the eastern side of the *Area Sacra* Boni uncovered two wells, which were left to Alfonso Bartoli to excavate. The contents of what Bartoli determined to be the earlier of the two wells suggest it was filled in and sealed due to fire damage during the mid-sixth century BCE, and Scott reckons this damage was caused by the destruction of the second Regia building around this time.¹³

Scott et al. recovered a number of grain and fruit samples from the *Area Sacra Vestae*, and this provides proof that the Vestals and their staff, slaves and freedmen whose existence is confirmed in the epigraphic evidence, threshed and prepared food in small workrooms off the corridors that extended south and west from the *Aedes Vestae*. The second well Bartoli excavated, which has an altar above it aligned to the cardinal points, bears signs that led Scott to suggest that it was the well for sacred water that was used to prepare the grain of which the team found evidence.¹⁴ Of those cereals that could be identified, most were wheat of various species, but spelt accounted for the second most identifiable grain, even though spelt is difficult and time-consuming to process into edible bread, suggesting that much of this grain was used for sacrificial purposes, and therefore the spelt may only have been ground into *mola salsa*, not baked into bread. Furthermore, the team recovered the remnants of fruits, nuts, and leguminous seeds, which were also used as offerings. This aspect of the excavation shed light on the

¹³ Scott (2009) 8; Brown 1974-5 for the second Regia fire which caused the well to be abandoned.

¹⁴ Scott (2009) 130-1. They sampled nearly 432 L of soil from both the *via sacra* (158.75 L) and from the *Atrium Vestae* (273 L), and processed it through an improvised Siraf flotation tank to detect a total of 9,968 plant items, 7,536 of which (75.6%) belonged to soil samples from the *Atrium Vestae*. These samples range from Level VI to III of the excavation, i.e. the 6th century BCE to the 2nd century BCE. This is clear evidence that the Vestals engaged in the preparation and distribution of grain offerings from at latest the 6th century onwards, and probably even before this at their original locations throughout Rome and at the Regia, since they were bound by sacred obligation to the Roman king in these earlier times.

generations of women who inhabited the *Atrium Vestae* and who flourished in celebrating Roman religious tradition, food preparation being among the most sacred rituals of ancient culture, for more than five centuries before Augustus, and this long established legitimacy was what Augustus gained from associating his image with Vestals.

The ancient foundations of the *Aedes Vestae* held the credibility Augustus required to establish popular support, by investigating the archaeological evidence of the *Area Sacra* and the *Atrium Vestae* a modest indication of that antiquity emerges. The excavations of the *area sacra* demonstrate the substantial growth of the construction around the *Aedes Vestae*, as the maturity of the site in the 2nd and 3rd century BCE (Levels IV and III) demonstrates additions to work areas and living quarters for the Vestals that parallel the rise of Rome after the Second Punic War, and the expansion continued down to the 1st century BCE. The evidence provided by Scott et al. contains traces of construction more than 50 meters east from the *Aedes Vestae* to the base of the Palatine Hill, and less than 20 meters south where the Republican living quarters of the Vestals were enclosed by a small courtyard. The first significant phase of Imperial period construction on the *Atrium Vestae* occurred under Nero, and later additions to complete the eastern and southern porticos of the *Atrium* were made by Trajan.¹⁵ Augustus also left 100 million sesterces to the maintenance of the four temples referenced in RGDA 21.2, including the *Aedes Vestae*. As the physical expansion of the *Atrium Vestae* progressed, the emperors who followed Augustus and valued his legacy furthered the process of improving the Vestal precinct. By enriching the religious establishment and providing much needed money for repairs and new construction, Augustus intended to embed his legacy with that of the Vestals, and thereby cement himself in Roman cultural memory.

¹⁵ Scott (2009) 66-7

Vestals in the epigraphic record

Turning to the epigraphic evidence about Vesta, two inscriptions from the Athenian Theater of Dionysius that were dated by Mika Kajava to the first century CE, and they testify to the separate Roman and Greek traditions of worshipping Vesta and the Julio-Claudian imperial family. The reference to Livia and Julia in SIG II² 5096 might even be associated with the "Roman Hestia" of SIG II² 5102, but it nonetheless drew a distinction between "Hestia on the Akropolis" and the Roman goddess Vesta, which is significant beyond its geopolitical overtones. Kajava also noted that a female *prytanis* was known from Sparta in the Roman imperial period, and that female attendants of Hestia were especially prevalent at Ephesus, and she went on to write that the title *Hestia poleos* was in fact an honorific title with few ritual responsibilities, a contrast from the daily burdens of public and private ritual placed on Vestals.¹⁶ While this leads Kajava to speculate that the public service of Vestals may have influenced Greek women to assume a role in the worship of Hestia, this evidence is best suited to discern Vesta as a cultural force under the direction of Augustus.

Further epigraphic evidence suggests that a movement to commemorate the Vestals and the legacy of Augustus revolved around the fact the Vestal Virgins symbolized Roman identity to the Athenians, just as it was to Romans. It therefore seemed best when memorializing the Imperial family of Augustus to include a reference to Vesta, but specifically Roman Vesta, who was apparently distinct enough at Athens to require such qualification. Two inscriptions on marble dated to the early 1st century CE

¹⁶ Kajava (2004) 17, "the possibility exists that Rome and its Vestal priestesses gave the impetus [for Greek women to honor Hestia]." It became fashionable at Athens around the same time to worship the *genius* of the deified emperor Augustus as well as the personification of the city of Rome itself, the goddess Roma, whom Greeks had begun to worship in the 2nd century BCE. Divine ruler cults like these were familiar to the Greek East from the Hellenistic period, and therefore were already well-known at Athens.

from the Acropolis excavations that appear in a critical examination of the Vestals in the Imperial period give evidence of this.¹⁷ Nina Mekacher contributes a great deal to scholarship on the Vestals, and the inscriptions for which she established the text and provides translations, dates and descriptions merit further study, for they witness the multiplicity of ritual and ceremonial responsibilities entrusted to the Vestals, from preparing the *mola salsa* and fetching sacred water to attending social functions and working with the pontifical college, and how this dutiful service was represented as a paragon of Roman virtue in Athens. Beginning with the reign of Augustus, Mekacher catalogues more than fifty Latin inscriptions, and two other Greek inscriptions that make a total of four inscribed in Greek, and here it is best to highlight three of those written in Latin because they shed light on the daily life of the Vestals as well as record the existence of their slaves.

During the development of the Vestal Order, the necessity arose to employ slaves to thresh, grind, and prepare a large amount of grain offered in religious rituals, and as the Vestals expanded this support staff under Augustus' supervision we find evidence of these slaves in the epigraphic record for the 1st century CE. There were funerary monuments with grave inscriptions found for several freed slaves who had worked for a Vestal Virgin in the evidence collected by Mekacher.¹⁸ Perhaps CIL 20852 refers to the

¹⁷ CIA III 875 “[Ο] δῆμος / [Οὐβιδίαν] ἱερὰν παρθένον / [Σέξτου Οὐβιδίου] Οὐίρρωνος / [θυσιατέρα εὐ]σεβείας ἔνεκα.” “The people (honor) Vibidia, a Vestal Virgin, the daughter of Sextus Vibidius Virro, because of her piety.” CIA III 876 “Ο δ[ῆμος] / Οὐαλερίαν / ἱερὰν παρθένον / εὐσεβείας ἔνεκα.” “The people (honor) Valeria, Vestal Virgin, because of her piety.” These texts are from Mekacher (2006) 199, the translations are based on her German ones. Both inscriptions were found on the Acropolis at Athens, and are dated by Mekacher to the 1st century CE. These two represent half of the four Greek language inscriptions included in this important new edition of texts about the Vestals and their worship around the Greco-Roman world. It is the first scholarly effort to bring together a corpus of inscriptions on this theme.

¹⁸ CIL VI 20788, “Caio Iunio Torquatae / v(irginis) V(estalis) lib(erto) Felici / Iunia Phllis colliberto / carissimo fecit et sibi / posterisque suis et eorum / in fronte p(edes) XIII in agro p(edes) XIII.”

sister of the freedman in CIL 20788, otherwise, the two might have taken the same Roman name, Junia, after manumission. Furthermore, another inscription contains the ambiguous term “favorite slave”, which Mekacher interprets with the German, “die Lieblignssklavin” of the Vestal Virgin Rufina,¹⁹ and although this epithet is difficult to interpret, it proves how much a part of daily life slaves were for the Vestals. This subgroup of inscriptions develops the themes that Augustus meant to exploit when he positioned the Vestals as part of his public image to appeal to as wide a group as possible, even former slaves like those who served at the *Aedes Vestae*.

Apart from the development of Augustan methods and themes in the 1st century CE inscriptions of this corpus of epigraphy, the majority of the material from the *Atrium Vestae* that Mekacher examined were dated to the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, whereas the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, an inscription that distills the essence of how Augustus projected his persona, provides further evidence that the Vestals are central factors in the regeneration of Roman identity in the last quarter of the 1st century BCE. Although Roman political life excluded women, they did possess *auctoritas* with which they exerted considerable social and economic influence. The Vestals held a proud place in the hierarchy of Roman women since they embodied the chthonic and the pure, both of which stem from their guardianship of the sacred flame in the *Aedes Vestae*. They tended this sacred flame, which represented this dichotomy, as Beard described it, “the wide range of oppositions associated with the fire...reveals it to be a classic mediating force in

CIL VI 20852, “Iunia / Torquatae / v(irginis) V(estalis) l(iberta) / Alce / fecit sibi et / carissimo / C(aio) Iunio Epapho / conliberto et / viro optimo.” CIL VI 28768, “Sex(tus) Vibidius v(irginis) V(estalis) l(ibertus) [---] / Phileros [---] / Vibid[---].” Mekacher (2006) 209 dates these inscriptions to the 1st century CE.

¹⁹ CIL VI 27133, “D(is) M(anibus) / Teiae Euphrosynes / Rufinae v(irginis) V(estalis) / delicatae.” This grave inscription Mekacher dated to the 2nd or 3rd century CE.

the centre of a cult, reconciling apparently irreconcilable extremes”.²⁰ Although she reconsidered her earlier approach in 1995 by emphasizing the relationships of Vestals with other priesthoods, having determined that her previous work focused excessively on how Vestals transgressed traditional gender roles and failed to ask integral questions about the Vestals and the sources on their origin, the symbolism of Vestal fire, which took the place of a cult image for the *Aedes Vestae*, both of which remain important lines of inquiry to approach the Augustan concept of Vesta.

The Queen of Inscriptions: Vestals and the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*

Augustus himself sought purification in writing the *RGDA*, not reconciliation, for this might imply he did wrong and used the inscribed biography as a new lens on himself for posterity. As Yavetz posits, the *RGDA* founded the actions of Augustus, illegal but with precedence, on a solid foundation of tradition and law.²¹ Yet the Vestals existed in a special legal category, under the *tutela* of no man, and wedded to the state for a considerable term of service. They spent political capital to protect their relations or even a certain young priest who was under threat of execution during the early 1st century BCE, a life-long member of the religious elite, when according to Suetonius they used this influence to remove G. Julius Caesar’s name from the proscription lists of L. Cornelius Sulla.²² It was this extra-legal legitimacy and this unfettered religious authority, with which Augustus sought to align himself in his legacy, the *RGDA*, and to that end, he

²⁰ Beard (1980) 25; although this paper focuses primarily what Beard takes to be their tripartite gender role (virginal, matronal, male) 18, see 19, and esp. 24-25 about the potential symbolism of fire within this gender construct. Staples (1998) 15-17 envisions the dichotomy being between fire and water, male and female. See also Dumézil (1970) 311-326 for detailed discussion of the *ignis Vestae* and its historical context.

²¹ Yavetz (1984) 26, “He conveyed his achievement and not his feelings... All he wanted to convey in the *Res Gestae* was the fact that his rule was not arbitrary.”

²² Suetonius *Jul.* 1.2 “donec per uirgines Vestales perque Mamercum Aemilium et Aurelium Cottam propinquos et adfines suos ueniam impetravit.” “[Sulla hunted him] until he obtained forgiveness through the Vestal Virgins and through Mamercus Aemilius and Aurelius Cotta his relatives.”

made two significant references to the Vestals and their involvement in his religious program of renewal and rebuilding.

It seems the *RGDA* made those two specific references not only to legitimize Augustus' political position as the *princeps* by association with the Vestals but also to increase regard for the Vestals themselves, whose prestige ebbed as popular attention had shifted toward luxury and cycles of civil war. This focus on the Vestals in the *RGDA* demonstrates the palpable energy and political capital at stake in the dealings of the *princeps* with the religious elite, and careful cultivation of his public image. Chapter 11 details the origin of the festival known as Augustalia, a festival that Augustus accepted instead of a triumph which by the end of the 1st century CE had evolved to be celebrated for more than a week. The Senate dedicated the *Altar of Fortune the Home-Bringer* (*Aram Fortunae Reducis*) in the *Temple of Honor and Virtue* (*Aedes Honoris et Virtutis*) to memorialize Augustus' safe return from a long absence in the eastern provinces on October 12, 19 BCE,²³. This building was not technically a *templum*, but an *aedes*, which put it in the same category of religious buildings as the *Aedes Vestae*, which had a special circular architecture.²⁴ So the *Altar of Fortune the Home-Bringer*, at which the priests and Vestals were enjoined to sacrifice during Augustalia, was in a temple similar to Vesta's own, and therefore became a particular point of pride for Augustus in his effort to coopt the image and legitimacy the Vestals possessed. This holiday and new festival was

²³ Cooley (2009) 151; see 152 for the growth of Augustalia, which became a 10-day long festival. The *Aedes Vestae* is the only building in the Roman Forum constructed in the shape of a circle.

²⁴ See Dumézil (1970) 316-317 for the significant differences between an *aedes* and a *templum*. Most notably, the Senate could not meet at an *aedes* because it was never inaugurated, thus any decree the Senate passed would not be valid. However, Dumézil rejects the hypothesis that men were forbidden to enter the *Aedes Vestae*. It seems that the Temple of Vesta was, nonetheless, primarily dedicated to women and to maternity, although little research exists on the ways in which Vestals were connected to motherhood other than the cursory examination done in two essays composed in Latin by H.J. Rose (1926) and (1928) which erroneously concluded that Vestals were more akin to daughters of the Roman state than mothers of it, "ergo [Vestales], mea quidem sententia, non matris sed filiarum obibant munera," 80 (1928).

not the crowning achievement that Augustus had created for himself, as a matter of fact his proudest and most majestic religious honor, the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, he saved for *RGDA* 12.

Chapter 12 began with a deputation of leading citizens and magistrates meeting Augustus in Campania, and it ends with the dedication of the magnificent artwork of the *Ara Pacis*, and he commands the Vestals to carry out annual sacrifices there in his honor. This second direct appeal to the name of the Vestals is, like the first, a touchstone of the Augustan program of moral and religious reform. Zanker cataloged the possible identifications of the fertility goddess relief as Ceres, Tellus, or Pax.²⁵ It does not represent Vesta, the virgin goddess, of whom not even the *Aedes Vesta* contained an image according to Ovid,²⁶ but the image does suggest Rhea Silvia, also called Ilia, especially because she holds twins that recall Romulus and Remus. In *RGDA* 12.2 the group of sacrificial attendants included with the Vestals is broader than it was in *RGDA* 11, and “magistratus et sacerdotes” replace “pontifices” of the previous chapter. These sacrifices were state occasions of the highest importance, attended by the citizens *en masse*, and the political subtext of the *Ara Pacis* explain some of the differences between the sacrificial attendants grouped with the Vestals in *RGDA* 11 and 12.2. The inclusion of magistrates, in *RGDA* 12.2, demonstrates that these sacrifices had a political bent. The opening of the new altar at the *Aedes Honoris et Virtutis* was a religious ceremony appropriate for *sacerdotes* and *pontifices*, and the opening ceremony of the *Ara Pacis* provided the opportunity to stage a more elaborate and political public occasion.

²⁵ Zanker (1988) 171-179

²⁶ Ovid *Fas.* 6.295-6 “esse diu stultus Vestae simulacra putavi, / mox didici curvo nulla subesse tholo” “How long it was that I, a fool, thought there were cult images, soon I learned that there are none under the curved dome of Vesta.” Despite this feigned humility, Ovid showed no hesitation to write about Vesta at great length, and he treats her at length both in the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*.

Vestals on the *Ara Pacis*: the visual language of legacy



Figure 1



Figure 2 Source: Mary Ann Sullivan²⁷

The *Ara Pacis* was completed in 13 CE after the Senate decreed it be built to celebrate the Emperor's returning from campaigns in Gaul and Spain, and it offers proof that the public image of Augustus, a complex artifice, sought to incorporate the ethnic and social significance of the Vestal Order. Figure 1 depicts the six Vestals and evinces a number of remarkable characteristics from the orderly arraignment of the women by height to their proud station inside the religious elite with the high priests, who bracket the women and face them. Figure 2 shows the ritualized scene of joyous sacrifice around the altar that suggests a large procession in which the Vestals were participating.

The interior frieze positions the Vestals to participate in Augustan glory as prominent members of a religious class that served not only to include the matrons of Rome as symbolic participants in the celebration of Augustus' regime but also as agents of social and political stability under that regime. The fact that all six Vestal Virgins are depicted at these inaugural sacrifices signifies that this moment of appreciation for the regime was of particular note and that all members of the religious elite were in attendance. There is no doubt that the Vestals wore religious vestments, cloaks wrapped

²⁷ Sullivan, Mary Ann. 2006. Images of the Ara Pacis, Museo dell'Ara Pacis, Rome. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

on top of traditional *stolae*, depicted to lend dignity to the occasion, which also demanded that they adorn their hair in the familiar *sex crines* style and that they secure it with linen *vittae* or headbands, which were powerful symbols of purity, of religious devotion, and of faithful execution of solemn vows.



Close-up of Figure 1

Although the exterior of the *Ara Pacis* may contain the most ornate friezes, the interior and the altar, where the people might visit but only religious elites transacted business, extends the artistic language of regeneration and rebirth to the core of the monument. The interior frieze captures the Vestals at an occasion of tremendous importance, and Joanna Thompson in her unpublished dissertation draws attention to the arrangement of the Vestals in order of height.²⁸ While her assertion that the height of each corresponds to their status within the Order seems valid *prima facie*, leading one to surmise the depiction might symbolize their status rather than denote height. However, it is more probable that they were arranged this way for symbolic purposes, with an eye

²⁸ Thompson (2005) 44-45, "It has been suggested that the tallest of the Vestals may be the *virgo Vestalis maxima*, with the ordering of the figures by height thus an indication of rank or perhaps the widely varying ages of the priestesses," and Thompson accepted the theory of Morretti (1948) 280-1.

toward the diminishing vitality of the human soul, and therefore the *virgo Vestalis maxima* was the shortest and engraved at the front of the procession of Vestals.²⁹ A company of three priests with staffs surrounds the images of the six priestesses, and on a nearby interior frieze also above the altar and flanked by the same winged lions is a long train of priests, victims, and sacrificial attendants. The honor accorded to them in this detailed relief stemmed from their prominent place among the religious elite, and many of these religious and quasi-religious figures are on the exterior of the monument.

The exterior friezes of the *Ara Pacis* display the pious and stern public image that Augustus cultivated by the religious and domestic setting in which the monument captures the visage of the *princeps*. The Imperial family and Augustus appear on the south frieze, with Augustus clothed as a priest and carved in high relief, and the children mixed into the scene contribute to an overt feeling of celebration and transition to the next generation. Various natural patterns are incorporated through much of the monument. The respect with which Augustus treated the Vestals might suggest a position of honor like the south frieze for them, and Thompson theorized that the Vestals might have been present on the damaged areas of the frieze, but the extent of the damage here is too great to support such speculation by her own admission.³⁰ So while the appearance of the Vestals with Augustus and the religious elite might be plausible, it is impossible to prove that they figure on the exterior as well as the interior friezes. The south frieze is not the only place on the exterior that might project an image of a Vestal; the northeastern frieze could suggest a famous Vestal priestess, Rhea Silvia or Ilia.

²⁹ Ryberg (1955) 41 suggested that the arraignment was for processional effect. Many ceremonies require people to be sorted by height to maximize visibility and make an even appearance.

³⁰ Thompson (2005) 59, "The only members of the *collegium pontificum* thus far not mentioned as appearing on the south frieze of the *Ara Pacis* are the *virgines Vestales*." Note 43 on that page laments, "I find the fragments in the upper right corner to be nearly illegible in terms of costume details."

The identification of the northeastern frieze, which portrays a seated female holding twin offspring, is problematic because the imagery contained could point to several female figures associated with the harvest and domesticity. The northeastern exterior, indeed, presents a difficult interpretive problem, especially in the figure that Paul Zanker hypothesized to be the goddess Pax, but there might be purposeful ambiguity in this instance to suggest a deeper appreciation of Augustus' achievements. Some follow Paul Zanker in identifying this figure as Pax, who otherwise has no place on the monument that bears her name, but Zanker was careful to elaborate that the identity might be Venus or Tellus.³¹ Moreover, the symbolism here, on the East-facing public facade, might attempt to suggest several cultural memories at once, and might encode layers of meaning into the portrait, which gains complexity if liberated from the identity of one figure. Berczelly first hypothesized that the figure was Rhea Silvia,³² whose twins seem apposite, although the prevailing opinion that the twins represent prosperity in the hands of Pax seems plausible too and need not be disputed if the artistic intent was to let the viewer decide. In this way, Augustus manipulated a vast wellspring of emotional memory concerning the foundation, Rhea Silvia, and the worship of Vesta, a cornerstone of his cultural program.

The intervening centuries produced an aura of legitimacy around the Vestal Order that Augustus intertwined into his own narrative about the stable order of public life he instituted. Material culture confirms this conclusion with archaeological and epigraphic evidence, which assert the distinct Roman Identity Vesta had among the

³¹ Zanker *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (1988) 179

³² Berczelly (1985) 114-122 for the argument that the panel should be identified with Ilia not Pax or Tellus. Ultimately, the panel suggests several figures because the image in question, like the origin story and the deities themselves, are intended to be unclear and ill-defined. Such cognitive dissonance gave majesty to a static image that was crafted in order to convey the grandeur of Roman culture and Augustus.

Greeks. The excavations undertaken by Scott outline the gradual expansion of the Order under successive generations of Vestals, who enjoyed the patronage of Augustus, who secured their high station in the religious elite of the new order. The *RGDA* refers to the Vestals twice in the section on public achievements, and provided a windfall, about 25 million sesterces, to protect the *Aedes Vestae* from harm in a subsequent section. The memory of the Vestals also occurred in the context of the *Ara Pacis*, a monument to the renewal of peace and the return to stability under Augustus. Apart from this material evidence, the construction of Vesta in Roman Historiography, especially Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, sheds light on the 1st century BCE concept of her origin as well as the cultural significance of a famous Vestal like Rhea Silvia to Augustus and to Roman historiography.

Livy, Augustus, and the Vestal Virgin

Livy's account of Rhea Silvia integrates the Vestals into the historiography and political culture of the 1st century BCE, and through Livy's account the Vestal Virgins, especially Rhea Silvia, whose son Romulus and successor Numa were both analogues for Augustus' regime, I argue the Vestals became the political focus for the new order of Roman power, peace, and piety. Although the Vestals always held sway at Rome, Augustus adapted them to his political plan as no predecessor had done, and incorporated them into the keystone of his reforms, the institution of sweeping moral reform by marriage laws and through soft power, especially socio-religious forces like the Vestals. The sincerity of these moral reforms is debatable, one cannot know whether Augustus sincerely intended them to increase marriage and reproduction rates among the elite, or if it was merely lip service to empty platitudes, but there is little doubt that Augustus gained popularity and legitimacy from association with an order so ancient as to touch the mother of the founder of the City. Livy capitalized on this cultural memory to raise Rhea Silvia as a paragon of Roman feminine strength, and in doing so he recorded the definitive narrative of her symbolic significance.

Rhea Silvia, also known by the Trojan Name Ilia, symbolized the fundamental courage of Roman womanhood, and for Livy, perhaps based on Q. Fabius Pictor and owing to the oral tradition of Roman history, she was a Vestal Priestess in the service of King Amulius. While the material evidence linking Rhea Silvia to the Pax figure from the Ara Pacis offers some support to the claim that Rhea Silvia was a Vestal, at least it confirms the outlines of her story as told by Livy, the literary sources on Rhea Silvia,

even those written before Livy such as Cicero, record much the same as to her position.³³

Such an ephemeral cultural icon was, therefore, a ripe target to be appropriated by Augustus in the process of building legitimacy, a necessary process to build beyond his hard-won position as the last man standing in the Roman civil wars.

Also, there is the question of how Livy intended to present Rhea Silvia, and to what extent her character can be or should be allegorized as the spiritual mother of Rome. Tacitus offers only enough evidence to confirm Livy's political allegiance but leaves open the more tantalizing question of how this influenced the composition of narrative in *Ab Urbe Condita*.³⁴ As the great quantity of ink spilled over authorial intent and the author's friendship with Augustus demonstrates, there are competing interpretations of how Augustus' consolidation of authority influenced Livy's perspective.³⁵ As stated above, I forgo detailed treatment of the well-established theme of authorial intent to examine Livy's portrayal as it relates to the 1st century BCE concept of Roman national identity, what emotions Livy's portrait of her evoked among his contemporary historians and poets, and how Augustus adapted these nostalgic, nationalistic feelings to augment his regime's legitimacy beyond the battlefield victories by which he won power. After the historical portrait of Rhea Silvia, Livy chronicled Numa's foundation of the Vestals to demonstrate their part in the affairs of civic and religious life, in which Augustus' vision of renewed morality was preeminent, and he preserved Rhea Silvia, notably eschewing

³³ Cic. *Div.* 1.20.40 names her a Vestal but the Ennius fragment he quotes does not support this.

³⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 4.34 "Titus Livius, eloquentiae ac fidei praeclarus in primis, Cn. Pompeium tantis laudibus tulit ut Pompeianum eum Augustus appellaret; neque id amicitiae eorum offecit."

³⁵ Those who argue that Livy's affiliation with Pompeii and his staunch Republicanism soured the historian against Augustus, e.g. Mette (1961), Peterson (1961), Walsh (1961), find the presentation of the Roman Monarchy in AUC to be a condemnation of the Augustan state of affairs. Syme (1959) posited that Livy and Augustus demonstrated mutual respect and shared intellectual curiosity. Deininger (1985) evaluated Livy's friendship with Augustus from the perspective of structuralism, while Badian (1993) 9 extolls the balanced approach, "as usual, the extremes cannot be defended."

the Trojan epithet *Ilia* in favor of more stolid Roman names, as a touchstone of identity for future Romans.³⁶ After this investigation of Livy's account of Rhea Silvia, the etymology of the name Vesta and origins of the Order at Rome will be considered, followed by a discussion of the account of the same which Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote.

Rhea Silvia: a study in hagiography

Folklore is cultural capital invested in shaping ethnic, social, or political, in short cultural identity, and Augustus accrued popularity and legitimacy by positioning his public image next to the Vestal Virgins. Reputed Vestal Rhea Silvia was a customary starting point for annalistic historians of Rome, but what Livy made clear in his account was the suffering and punishment she endured, perhaps symbolic of Rome's own pain, and how this redemptive suffering gave rise to Rome. Among the first historical figures to be introduced, Romulus and his Vestal mother shaped all Romans' concept of their own origin and identity, and, irrespective of authorial intent, I argue Livy reinforced the prestige of the Augustan state with this narrative about the legendary founding. The historicity of Rhea Silvia, called *Ilia* in poetic sources like Ovid, belied Livy's concept of her as the mother of the Roman state, a demi-god whose actual existence was immaterial to her status as *de facto* origin of Rome's greatness. By compressing the account of Rhea Silvia to a few lines Livy expects the reader to understand that legends so far removed from Livy's own time must be relegated to the dustbin of history, a rubble heap from which only shards remain of what was a golden age.

³⁶ Livy 1.3.11 "Rheae Silviae" and, for the foundation of the Vestal Order by Numa, 1.20.3. It is largely a reflection of whether the writer wishes to convey the figure's Trojan heritage with the name *Ilia* or her Roman side with Rhea Silvia. So where Greek authors and Roman poets in imitation of them name her *Ilia*, Livy chooses a term that evokes the rustic and the earthy. The name Rhea Silvia suggests both the Roman earth-mother Gaia and the Latin word for the forest, *silva*.

The Golden Age as a poetic *topos* will be examined in Chapter 3, but even as Livy engages the same theme he approaches it as an astute observer of political dynamics, and it is evident that the oral tradition of Rhea Silvia, Romulus, and the foundation of the city form the core of Roman identity in Livy's history. I argue that Livy recast the foundation of Rome and of the Vestal order into a reflection of the power politics of 1st century Rome, in which historical figures such as Rhea Silvia, Romulus, and Numa gave narrative voice and emotional depth to what Augustus constructed as his social, political, and legal program of moral reform. Livy's intention to write such a symbolic narrative, whether or not it was part of a monolithic Augustan program, is less important in light of the moral qualities Rhea Silvia represented for Livy, namely shame (*pudor*) and ritual purity (*castitas*), and from these roots we may trace how the origin of the Vestal Order influenced the portrayal of Vestal Virgins during the Principate of Augustus.

Historical sources on the foundation of the Vestal Order offer vague evidence, so although these sources agree that Romulus' mother, Rhea Silvia, was a Vestal Virgin, differences in the presentation of her between authors such as Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus will be examined to determine the essential elements of her imprint on ancient historiography. I argue that in Livy's account, Rhea Silvia was a victim of the cruelty of Amulius, and she symbolized the violence done to domestic tranquility during the civil strife of the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE. Dionysius examines the foundation of the Vestals in more detail and with greater detachment, dedicating much more space in his narrative to pre-history and early Rome than Livy, and even more than Livy stresses the importance of the Vestal Virgins and their central role in expressing the essence of what

it meant to be Roman at that time.³⁷ His account of the establishment of the Vestals at Rome will offer a counterpoint to the emotional and sometimes obtrusive fervor of Livy, and by comparing their accounts it will be evident how co-opting Vesta augmented the public perception of the *princeps* and cemented his pious religious image.

Cultural identity expresses itself in shared perception of history and myths, but these myths evolve according to socio-political necessity, as Livy's account of Rhea Silvia demonstrates. Desperate times for the *res publica* and revenge for the assassination of his Father, Julius Caesar, were what motivated Augustus in the beginning of his career, not to mention lofty ambition, and the following passage of *AUC* book 1 mirrors the unceasing treachery and cold-blooded nature of Roman civil wars, the history of which cut through the ranks for more than 100 years by the time of the famous naval engagement near Actium:

addit scelere scelus, stirpem fratris virile interimit, fratris filiae Rheae Silviae per speciem honoris cum Vestalem eam legisset perpetua virginitate spem partus adimit. sed debebatur, ut opinor, fatis tantae origo urbis maximique secundum deorum opes imperii principium. vi compressa Vestalis cum geminum partum edidisset, seu ita rata, seu quia deus auctor culpa honestior erat, Martem incertae stirpis patrem nuncupat. sed nec dii nec homines aut ipsam aut stirpem a crudelitate regia vindicant; sacerdos vincta in custodiam datur; pueros in profluentem aquam mitti iubet. 1.3.11-1.4.3

He [Amulius] piles wicked deed upon wicked deed, he kills the son of his brother [Numitor], on the pretext of giving an award to the daughter of his brother Rhea Silvia, he takes away the hope of children by eternal maidenhood, since he had chosen her to be a Vestal Virgin. But it was owed to fate, as I think, the foundation of such a city, the beginning of the greatest empire, except only the wealth of the gods. The Vestal Virgin was raped, and gave birth to twins, whether she thought it to be so, or because it was more chaste that a god was the author of the crime, she names Mars the father of her bastards. But no god, no man protects her or her children from royal brutality; the captive priestess is taken to prison; he orders the boys be put into the flowing river.

³⁷ Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Antiquitates Romanae* 2.64.5 “ὅτι ὅν ὀλίγα καὶ αὐτὰ τὰ ναγκαίωτα τῆς ὑποθέσεως ἀπαιτούσης ἀναγκαῖον εἶπεν. ἔστι γὰρ ἃ καὶ ζητήσεως ἡξίωται παρὰ πολλοῖς τῶν τόπων τοῦτον, ὃν οἱ τὰς αἰίας οὐχ ἐξητακότες ἐπιμελῶς εἰκαιότερας ἐξήνεγκαω τὰς γραφάς.” “But concerning them [Vestals] 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 connection with this topic and those authors who have not diligently examined into the causes of these matters have published rather worthless accounts,” adapted from Cary (1960).

Putting aside this passage's implication of there being an Order of Vestal Virgins at Alba Longa, the initial focus on violent deeds piled one upon another (*sceleri scelus*) reflects the brutality of Roman politics, a kill or be killed enterprise over which presided the religious establishment, epitomized by the Vestal Virgins. Nonetheless, Amulius turns this purity to his advantage by using the Order to further his political agenda against Amulius, and it is at that point the voice of the author intrudes to express doubt about such an ancient account couched as certainty about the greatness of Rome.³⁸ The emotional impact of the story on Romans scarred by civil war and its importance to Roman identity cannot outweigh Livy's doubts, so he records it with significant qualification, positing that Fate was the ultimate point of origin for Rome (*ut opinor, fati...*), and Livy's account leaves much to be interpreted and assumed by the reader.

Livy assumes the reader will approach this thumbnail sketch with an impression of Rhea Silvia already in mind, even a lifelike portrait, perhaps, from oral traditions or previous historians like Q. Fabius Pictor. He lays out only the bare bones of the story and trusts that her fame will carry the weight of explanation. In a fashion that illuminates the obscure corners of this particular historical memory, Livy equivocates over the explanation Rhea Silvia offered as to the identity of her assailant (*seu ita rata...*), and implies that in a popular version of the tale Amulius was impugned to be the criminal, Mars being a convenient fiction who offered a "better" (*honestior*) alternative. Historical and cultural memory can evolve to incorporate fickle, suitable half-truth, and this malleability provided ample opportunity for the Augustan program, by no means a monolithic movement, to appropriate Rhea Silvia and the Vestals, who are her cultural

³⁸ 1.4.1 "*ut opinor*" cf. *praefatio* 1.6-7 "*nec refellere nec confirmare...*", 1.3.2 "*quis...adfirmet?*"

heirs. Although many centuries had passed since the foundation of the city by the time of Livy, the story of Rhea Silvia, like that of Romulus, Caesar, and others, became the bedrock on which Roman cultural identity was founded.

The pathos in this passage assumes a religious tone with the sentence, “sed...vindicant” (1.4.3). Livy’s voice as narrator fades away, and with supreme sympathy for her plight, the author details the misery Rhea Silvia and her twin offspring endured and, I argue, the sadness and religious language around Rhea Silvia is an expression of grief about the state of affairs during the Roman civil wars. Livy had dispatched the account of the death of Aegestus in a few words (1.3.11), a son whose gender marked him for slaughter before Rhea Silvia was forced into being a Vestal.³⁹ Being a vague prolog to the story of Rhea Silvia, Aegestus represents a later addition to the story, I argue, a detail intended to address the concerns of a misogynistic society that might doubt that a woman was the spiritual center of the Roman foundation myth.

This compressed account of the birth of Romulus and Remus, all the violence, intrigue, and cruelty with which they were conceived and born, as I suppose, reconciled Augustus’ brutality with the customs of earlier generations (*mos maiorum*), and established him as a cultural hero of Romulus’ stature. In this way, Livy was a harbinger of the preeminent role the Vestals would take in the creation of the religious and peaceful facets of the Augustan persona. The Vestals were central in the religious rituals of the state, just as Rhea Silvia was critical to the construction of Rome’s mythical origin, and Augustus required the legitimacy their Order possessed because it cemented the loyalty of the nobility and the plebian alike. The solid foundations of Rome seemed to rest on the

³⁹ The only other account in which Rhea Silvia has a brother is Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ant. Rom.* 1.76. It is therefore evident that these contemporary historians were drawing from the same sources, e.g. Q. Fabius Pictor who composed more than 500 years after the fact, for their accounts of Rhea Silvia.

continuation of the sacred fire in the *Aedes Vestae*, and Augustus was keenly aware of the prominence the Order had in the oldest traditions of Rome's religious rituals, and he sought to align his historical image with Rome's mythical founder and his Vestal mother and to reflect his own piety in the law-giving and pious Numa.

The Indo-European Origin of the Goddess

The names Vesta and Hestia derive from the same Proto-Indo-European root, and, while Cicero only traces the origin of the Latin goddess as far as her Greek antecedent, a preponderance of evidence supports the hypothesis that these names share a common root. I argue for the connection of Vesta and Hestia to the PIE root **eus-*, to burn since this etymology satisfies the concerns her order had for maintaining the hearth, a shining beacon of domestic tranquility. Hesiod's *Theogony*, as far back as Flach's 1878 edition, has not “Ἑστία” but “Ἰστία”, and this Ionic spelling shows how the vowel contraction from the PIE root produced words such as ἵστημι and ἑσπέρα, which both involve shining or being brilliant, ἑσπέρα in the literal sense of where the sun sets, and ἵστημι in the verbal sense, to stand or to shine. Georges Dumézil, well known for his research on the three functions of Indo-European culture,⁴⁰ argued that this PIE root also was evident in the Homeric Greek εἶω and the in Vedic Sanskrit ṛṣati, both of which mean burn or singe.⁴¹ Plato in the *Cratylus* argues through Socrates that Ἑστία must be connected to the verb εἶμι, an etymology that is less accurate because, like many of the discussions about etymology in the *Cratylus*, Socrates makes an *a priore* assertion about a word root without realizing that the verb “to be” developed from the IE root, not vice versa.⁴² When

⁴⁰ Dumézil *L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens* (1958)

⁴¹ Dumézil *Archaic Roman Religion* (1970) 322

⁴² cf. Goux (1983) for the case in favor of this etymology, “And it is above all the closeness between Ἑστία (Hestia) and the third person singular of the present indicative of the verb to be (ἔσται),

one considers the many points of difference between Vesta and Hestia, a common root between the Greek and Roman names associated with this Goddess constitutes their primary connection, since the rituals and priestly orders of Vesta and Hestia developed independently.

As stated above, the introduction of the Vestal Order at Rome and the foundation of the *Aedes Vestae*, much like the myth of Rhea Silvia, had a complicated and obscure origin that the historiographers Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus researched during the Age of Augustus. It was not Livy who best captured the dim memory of this important epoch, but Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a 1st century BCE Greek contemporary of Livy. That Livy arrives at the same conclusion as Dionysius is not at all curious, although, in ascribing the foundation of the order to Numa, they raise the question why Romulus neglected to do so, a question which only Dionysius attempts to rationalize. When Livy chronicles Romulus and Numa in book 1, he reflects the popular perception of these figures in the 1st century BCE Roman political culture, in which Romulus represents the invincible warrior whose deeds were as eternal as the city itself, Numa the ascetic intellectual whose religious acumen was legendary.⁴³ This popular perception clarifies why they attributed the foundation this Order to Numa, who should be understood as an analog for the pious, religious aspects of Augustus' public image, and Romulus as representative of its militaristic, victorious aspects.

which tends to strengthen this comparison." I argue that the verb "to be" was a later development, and might be a later development from the same PIE root (EU-) from which Vesta and others derive. The joke about Hermogenes' name shows from the start that this dialogue will be a playful investigation of etymology (383b-384c). If the tone of the work is jocular from the onset, it stands to reason that many of the explanations do not stand up to sustained analysis.

⁴³ 1.18.1 *Inclita iustitia religioque ea tempestate Numae Pompili erat*. "There was a reputation for Numa Pompilius of Justice and Piety at that moment in time."

Livy left posterity to wonder whether his brief account of Rhea Silvia and the origin of the Vestal Virgins is credible, especially in light of what Dionysius has recorded, but the literal truth of these matters belies how important the Vestals became during the social and political turbulence of the late 1st century BCE. It was an arduous century full of civil war, half-truth, and moral degradation, and in the Vestals Romans found a touchstone of a higher truth, the truth of Roman national identity, the integrity of which was embodied by their purity and chastity. How integral the Vestals are to the Roman sense of national identity is evident in Livy's terse account of Numa founding the Order, which begins, "legit Virgines Vestales," and the next passage is a statement difficult to reconcile with the preceding clause, "Alba oriundum sacerdotium et genti conditoris haud alienum."⁴⁴ In this way, Livy is able to acknowledge the popular misperception, common in the second half of the 1st century BCE, that because Rhea Silvia was a Vestal Romulus must have founded the Order. While many authors besides Livy and Dionysius record that she was a Vestal, an historical motherhood celebrated in the poetry of Ovid, Horace, Virgil, among others, this is a vague historical memory that blends fact and fiction. For the Vestals and Rhea Silvia in particular, their prominence in public ritual and their social standing made them an integral part of Roman cultural identity, and by extension part of the image that Augustus wished to project.

It seems that the misconception that Romulus founded the *Aedes Vestae* was prevalent enough that it needed to be addressed and corrected, since the sources on which

⁴⁴ 1.20.3 Huic duos flamines adiecit, Marti unum, alterum Quirino, virginesque Vestae legit, Alba oriundum sacerdotium et genti conditoris haud alienum. "He [Numa] selected two flamens, one to Mars, and the other to Quirinus, and he chose the Vestal Virgins, priestesses (sacerdotium) originating in Alba and by no means unknown to the clan of the founder [Romulus]." The last clause seems an implicit nod to the popular story that Romulus founded the Temple of Vesta, although Livy does not seem convinced by its merit to go beyond a subtle hint. Whether Numa or Romulus instituted the official state cult seems less relevant than how confused the sources seem to be on this subject. It was, after all, an epoch long before the advent of systematic historiography such as Herodotus wrote.

Livy was reliant, perhaps Q. Fabius Pictor and other non-extant accounts, pointed to Numa over Romulus, and Dionysius has a fascinating theory on why Romulus did not found the Order himself.⁴⁵ Dionysius argued that because of Romulus' experience of being born to a Vestal, his very existence a heinous crime, he did not consider himself equal to the task of inflicting the punishment for *crimen incesti*, an argument that interprets the facts too literally in this instance. It is much more likely that Romulus, a convenient fiction for the early leaders of the settlement, would postpone the centralization of the worship of Vesta because the earliest incarnation of Rome sustained little in the way of public space. The fact that the Senate and other fundamental institutions were still incipient would mean that the community lacked a highly developed set of public values that would allow the selection of new priestesses from the population of aristocratic girls.

The religious and law-giving function that Numa served in the Roman historical landscape made it natural to attribute the foundation of the Order to him, and the domestic tradition about the establishment of the *Aedes Vestae* and the Vestal Virgins was misattributed to Romulus only because he was supposed to have founded the city, and the city seemed inconceivable without the Vestals. In fact, the Vestal Order was believed to have predated the city of Rome, since Romulus' own mother was reputed to be a Vestal, but whether or not there were Vestals who preceded Rome herself, it is no doubt the Roman Vestals with whom Livy is primarily concerned. Livy deferred

⁴⁵ Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Antiquitates Romanae* 2.65.3 οὔτε διὰ παρθένων τὰς κατεστήσατο τῇ θεῷ, μεμνημένος ὡς ἔμοι δοκεῖ τοῦ περὶ τὴν μητέρα πάθους...ὡς οὐχ ἱκανὸς ἐσόμενος, ἐὰν τινα τῶν θυηπόλων εὖρη διεφθαρμένην, κατὰ τοὺς πατρίους τιμωρήσασθαι νόμους διὰ τὴν ἐπὶ ταῖς οἰκείαις συμφοραῖς ἀνάμνησιν. "Nor did he [Romulus] appoint the service of the goddess to be performed by virgins, being mindful, I believe, of the experience that had happened to his mother...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 in violation," adapted from Cary (1960).

judgment on these matters in the preface, which betrays both his ambivalence about such fantastic stories and his detachment from the initial composition of the first book.⁴⁶ The fact that he confined the history of this period to one book of the nearly 150 also demonstrates his disinterest in the Roman Monarchy, a period which was only notable for Livy because it was the one from which the Republic rose to prominence, even though he was obliged to cover it by the weight of annalistic tradition, to which Livy is much indebted, more so than Tacitus, for example.⁴⁷ As David Levene wrote there is a static naïveté to these traditional tales,⁴⁸ so while there are canonical parts of famous stories, it was Livy's duty to acknowledge even an apocryphal aspect like Romulus founding the Vestal Order, even if Livy did not consider any part of these stories from pre-history to be historical. Judging by the small portion of narrative Livy devoted to monarchical and pre-history, it seems that while the bulk of the religious and mythological tradition of early Roman history was unappealing to Livy as material for his chronicle, he nevertheless operated within a framework of cultural identity that accepted this version of events to be the canonical one, even without having real proof of it. As a contemporary author, Dionysius of Halicarnassus can also offer evidence of the origin of the worship and rituals of Vesta at Rome.

⁴⁶ Livy *Praef.* 1.6 “ea nec adfirmare nec refellere in animo est.” “It is not my intention to confirm nor to deny these matters [the early and pre-history of Rome].” This sentiment evinces the passive-aggressive tone of a political press conference, and elucidates the complex calculus of pre-history. The pre-history of Rome is Livy's opportunity to establish the tone of the work, and yet the coyness evinced by this sentiment betrays the author's own mistrust of the way cultural memory filled in the blanks of Rome's origin and hints at the difficult task of writing from inadequate or, even in Livy's own day, no longer extant source material.

⁴⁷ Fox (1996) 97, identifies in Livy “...the lack of interest in the period that is expressed by his decision to treat it in such a short space.” Livy's area of expertise as an historian was the Republican Era.

⁴⁸ Levene (1993) 34, “Some stories would have become canonical in a particular version, and it is always possible that a story would have been so famous that it could not be omitted, and that certain aspects of it would have been so firmly ingrained in the tradition that they could not be altered.” Romulus' association with the foundation of the Vestal Order was one such aspect that could not be fully eradicated from living memory, and, although aspects, like Rhea Silvia being a Vestal, remained fixed, others seem less ingrained, e.g. her name (Rhea Silvia or Ilia) or her assailant (Mars or Amulius).

The Italic traditions of Vesta and her maiden attendants originated in prehistoric times well before the city of Rome was founded, and the Order at Rome continued and adapted these traditions inherited from cities in Etruria and in Latium, especially from Alba Longa and from Lavinia, but it also demonstrated an innovation by building the *Aedes Vestae* separately but not far from the Regia, a layout that marked a departure from the Hellenic traditions of Hestia, whose public worship and rituals took place in the *prytaneum* of a Greek city. Although the very idea of applying a cohesive label like “Greek” (τό Ἑλληνικόν) to the disparate religious traditions about Hestia is dubious, even as late as the early to a middle 5th century when Herodotus wrote, it will be a necessary term used to contrast Greek religion from that of the Romans.⁴⁹ In fact, a remarkable adaptation from the Hellenic Hestia into Italic Vesta took place in terms of ritual, mythology, and history, and these Italic traditions also influenced Roman foundation myth in the form of Rome’s founding mother, Rhea Silvia. This maternal tradition is on display when Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote of how Numa added to the traditions of Vesta Romulus laid down, “He enacted, in accordance with the ancestral custom of the Latins, that the guarding of the holy things should be committed to women,”⁵⁰ a system

⁴⁹ Herodotus *Histories* 1.56.1-2 “μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐφρόντιζε ἱτορέων τοὺς ἄν Ἑλλήνων δυνατωτάτους ἐόντας προσκτῆσταιτο φίλους, ἱστορέων δὲ εὔρισκε Λακεδαιμονίους καὶ Ἀθηναίους προέχοντας τοὺς μὲν τοῦ Δωρικοῦ γένους τοὺς δὲ τοῦ Ἰωνικοῦ. ταῦτα γὰρ ἦν τὰ προκεκριμένα, ἐόντα τὸ ἀρχαῖον τὸ μὲν Πελασγικὸν τὸ δὲ Ἑλληνικὸν ἔθνος.” “After these things he inquired carefully who were the most powerful **Greeks** whom he should win over as friends, and found by investigating that the Lacedaimonians and the Athenians held sway, the former over the Doric race and the latter over the Ionian. For those were the most eminent ones, the Dorians originating from Pelasgian and the Ionians from **the Hellenic** people.” Chamberlain (1991) 9-10, cites only one instance where Herodotus uses the first person pronoun with “the Greeks” [*Histories* 2.154.4]. On the origin of “Greekness” see Cartledge (1995) 80-81 and 78, which terms this concept “an unstable compound,” and, on the distinction between γένος and ἔθνος, see Jones (1996) esp. 317-318 on this passage. In this study I will use the term Greek regardless of the anachronistic nature of the word, nevertheless it would take centuries to coalesce this concept into anything resembling what modern historians might term nationalism.

⁵⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Antiquitates Romanae* 2.66.2 “τὴν τε φυλακὴν τῶν ἱερῶν κατὰ τὸν πατριὸν τῶν Λατίνων νόμον διὰ παρθένων ἐνομοθέτησε γίνεσθαι.” The next passage proceeds to question the exact nature of these sacred items (τά ἱερά), wondering whether or not it was a copy of the famous

that was to supplant the older form of worship, done in the Greek style at each of the *curiae* in the different precincts of early Rome, not more than a collection of primitive villages at that time. As the city itself grew and consolidated its urban landscape, the *Aedes Vestae* no doubt matured along with it, and the Roman rituals and institutions associated with Vesta evolved in terms of the central role the Vestals played in Roman religious culture, the power and prestige they enjoyed as part of the religious establishment, and the way in which leaders like Augustus associated his public and historical image with them.⁵¹ It is clear that Augustus' conception of this public role the Vestals held became more compelling to him as he consolidated power and commissioned the artwork, history, and poetry that was the legacy of his regime.

Conclusion

In associating his public image with the Vestals, Rhea Silvia, and Rome's first two kings Augustus hit upon a strategy for obtaining legitimacy and for entrenching his regime. It was a feat to win power; it was another to remain in power. Livy's account of Rhea Silvia provides evidence of how the Augustan persona was suggested by the figure of Romulus during the pre-history and foundation of Rome. Augustus, as implied by Livy's narrative of Rhea Silvia, displayed the same determination in pursuit of victory

Palladium, brought with Aeneas from Troy. These sacred items are also of concern to Ovid in *Fasti* 6.295-298 a passage in which he claims there are no such statues or other items, which he, being foolish (*stultus*), thought there were. The architectural layout of the *Aedes Vestae* does not offer any clue as to whether or not there was such an inner sanctum, although it is difficult to disprove it by looking at the floorplan alone.

⁵¹ In the chapter before Livy introduced the Vestal Order (*AUC* 1.20) he mentioned the campaign that culminated at Actium, a victory which closed the doors of the Temple of Janus. Livy *AUC* 1.19.3 "Bis diende post Numae regnum clausus fuit, semel T. Manlio consule post Punicum primum perfectum bellum, iterum, quod nostrae aetati di dederunt ut videremus, post bellum Actiacum ab imperatore Caesare Augusto pace terra marique parata" "Twice since the reign of Numa was it closed, once in the consulship of T. Manlius after the first Punic War was concluded, again, which the gods granted to our generation to see, after the Actium campaign when peace was brought about on land and on sea by the commander Caesar Augustus." The translation of "imperator" is difficult here, and one must resist the temptation to use the derivative "emperor", for that is not what Livy meant in this context.

and the same resolve in settling a debt of honor, and mimicked Romulus also in his cold, calculating brutality, which was especially crucial to the more violent and triumphant aspects of his public persona. Whether Livy intended his audience to be attuned to such references, whether he was in favor of such aggressive leadership is immaterial to the point that his audience brought their own experience to the reading, and their experiences fighting such a long civil war guided their perception of Livy's narrative far more than the intentions of the author, whose annalistic approach demanded that he record events in a certain order. No matter how much plausible deniability he built into the preface after the fact, the act of chronicling a poetic fiction like Rhea Silvia had a major impact on the way Romans idolized or interpreted Augustus as part of their cultural identity.

The evidence Dionysius provides can illuminate the more obscure passages of Livy's narrative of Rhea Silvia and the origin of the Vestals at Rome, but even with these passages for comparison, it seems that the vague historical memory of Roman cultural identity was a morass of semi-fact and half-truth. The fabric of Roman cultural identity is too finely wrought to admit much parsing of the threads, and these vestiges of the Italic past, feminine strength, and Greek roots become more than the sum of their parts to produce, sustain, and welcome an ascendant Emperor Augustus. In the midst of this confusion Dionysius' account, less tinged by fervor and by patriotism,⁵² gives expression to what are mere suggestions in the work of Livy, such as the reasons why Romulus was mistakenly thought to have founded the Vestal Order, and minor variations on the Rhea Silvia episode that by preserving in his own style had a profound impact on the tradition

⁵² Polybius 1.14-15 notes that Dionysius himself contains such pro-Roman sentiment, which is clear considering the understanding of the subtleties of Roman historiography he demonstrated (cf. *Antiquitates Romanae* 2.65.4 above), but Livy's ethnic bias toward Roman culture reaches such heights that Dionysius seems less prejudiced by comparison.

about her. In their collection of fragmentary Roman historians, Cornell et al. print Dionysius' account of Rhea Silvia as a fragment of Q. Fabius Pictor, the self-evident reason being that Dionysius names Fabius as a source.⁵³ In this way, he represents a fine point of comparison to Livy and offers a second-hand perspective on the 2nd and 3rd centuries, when Roman literary culture was yet in its infancy, and had not an inkling of the great poets who would rise in 1st century BCE Rome.

⁵³ Cornell et al. (2013) 53, "Concerning the children born of Ilia, Quintus Fabius who is called Pictor, whom Lucius Cincius, Cato Porcius, Piso Calpurnia, and the majority of the other historians have followed, has written as follows [story of Romulus and Remus]."

Vesta, Hestia, and Poetic Tradition

The civil strife of the previous century permeated the literary culture of Rome during the late 1st century BCE. Virgil, a poet whose impact on European poetic culture was enduring, the lyric poet Horace, the elegiac poets Ovid and Tibullus each seem to have established a poetic investment in Vesta, and an investigation of their contributions to the Roman poetic tradition about Vesta is essential to understanding her role in the traditional formulation of religious culture and ritual that Augustus sought to sustain and to increase. This blossoming of poetic and literary culture was patronized by Augustus and by his friend Maecenas, and although it has been debated how much this patronage influenced the compositions of these poets, here there is no detailed treatment of authorial intent because this question is adjacent Vesta's prominent place as a touchstone of domesticity in the poetry of the fledgling Roman Empire ruled by Augustus.⁵⁴ Whether the prevalent theme of Vesta and the close association of Augustus with her was intended becomes a secondary concern at best when, as I hold, the Roman poets of the Principate and Early Empire celebrated Vesta in a way unparalleled by Greek poetic antecedents like Hesiod, Homer, and Pindar, although still connected by religious tradition.

In highlighting two epic poets and one lyric epinikian poet for comparison, it is possible to compare Rome's literary portrait of Vesta with the archetype of Hestia that is preserved in the early Greek poetic tradition, for while Attic dramatists like Euripides were undoubtedly influential on Roman poetry, the work of Hesiod, Homer, and Pindar

⁵⁴ For those who favor the interpretation that poets like Virgil, for instance, sought to further the agenda of Augustus, see Otis (1961), Cairns (1989), Nadeau (2004), and Yavetz (1990) 34, "Virgil could put the major part of the blame for the outbreak of the civil war Caesar without worry." For those who oppose this interpretation, notably the Harvard School, see Brooks (1953), Parry (1963), Clausen (1964), and Thomas (2001). Putnam (1995) casts this as "the pessimistic Harvard school" and "the optimistic European school," although, as Badian (1993) declared about Livy, the extremes are indefensible.

contains the best representation of how Greek religious traditions of Hestia enshrined themselves in literature when Roman traditions of Vesta were nascent. Although Hestia is an afterthought in the Greek poetic imagination, the outlines of her rituals and traditions are visible to a degree, but as Denis Feeney warned, “the gods of epic... are of a different order from the gods of the philosophers or the gods of cult.”⁵⁵ As was mentioned above there must be caution in the process of discerning Greek rituals around Hestia during a time when the very idea of τό Ἑλληνικόν was not a fixed concept, and deducing the ritual practices of a widely worshiped deity like Hestia from the ephemeral stories of poets might seem difficult.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it is possible to detect the outlines of the popular rituals Greek-speaking people used to venerate Hestia, rites which can be compared with Roman poetry and Vestal traditions. A few quotations about her from the early Greek poetic tradition may be instructive to show the contrasting styles of representation Greek and Roman poets have in regard to the Goddess of the hearth.

Greek Hestia: Hesiod, Homer, and Pindar on Hestia

The work of Hesiod contains two significant references to Hestia, the famous passage that pertains to her birth in the *Theogony*, and a less famous passage near the end of the *Works and Days* that gives insight to the theme of domestic life, with which Hestia is concerned. Plato, within his chariot of the soul metaphor in the *Phaedrus*, wrote that Hestia is unable to attend processions of the gods, and perhaps this explains her scarcity in epic poetry.⁵⁷ Granting that to define these traditions as Hellenic or Greek is to stretch the term, Greek religious ritual concerning Hestia is remarkably evasive to identify in

⁵⁵ Denis Feeney *The Gods in Epic* (1991) 46

⁵⁶ See note 49 above, the idea of a “Greek” concept of Hestia is fraught with uncertainty. I forgo a more detailed treatment of the matter, but city-specific analysis of Hestia would be the best lines of inquiry.

⁵⁷ Plato *Phaedrus* 247a “μένει γὰρ Ἑστία ἐν θεῶν οἴκῳ μόνη,” “[When they go on procession] Hestia alone stays at the home of the gods.”

Hesiod's poetry, but seems to center around the hearth fire, a powerful symbol of mutuality and a natural place for social interaction or casual meeting. Hesiod's poetic persona contains none of the self-referential bluster of Homer and often evokes the simple sensibility of a fireside story. Barbara Tsakirgis cogently wrote, "Heat and food, two requirements of life," and the hearth cannot be underestimated as a place of fundamental importance to the everyday life of civilization, which has a primordial root in such gatherings.⁵⁸ What follows the two requirements of heat and food, of course, are stories and poems, and the Kronos and Rhea passage of *Theogony* is of particular importance to Hestia's place in the Greco-Roman poetic tradition, so when Hesiod details the birth of Hestia and seems to use no epithet to describe her, an observant eye notes that the epithet *φαίδιμα* "shining", although applied to all the children of Kronos and Rhea in the previous line, describes Hestia especially.⁵⁹ The lack of epithet also juxtaposes her with Demeter, perhaps suggesting that Hestia is connected to her mythical sister somehow, and it also has the effect of separating them in line 454 from the royally adorned "golden-sandaled" Hera. This very brief introduction to Hestia gives no indication of the purpose or substance of her rituals, but one enigmatic passage in the *Works and Days* may shed some light on what exactly was the focal theme of her traditions.

The passage of Hesiod's *Works and Days* that refers to Hestia occurs in the section of injunctions near the end of the work and pertains to the necessity of being physically clean before enjoying the conviviality and warmth of the hearth. While this

⁵⁸ Barbara Tsakirgis (2007) 225. A temple to Hestia would be one of the first buildings a typical Greek colonial settlement might have. It would be both for assembly and for administering public business.

⁵⁹ 453-4 "Ρείη δὲ δμηθεῖσα Κρόνω τέκε φαίδιμα τέκνα, / Ἰστίην Δήμητρα καὶ Ἥρην χρυσοπέδιλον" "Rhea being the wife of Kronos bore him shining children, Hestia, Demeter, and golden-sandaled Hera".

passage of Hesiod does not mention Hestia by name, it references the Greek word ἑστία or hearth which must be the area of the home where religious rituals concerning Hestia took place.⁶⁰ In the facile style that characterizes much of the poet's persona, Hesiod has given a strong indication that ritual purity (ἡ ἀγνεία) formed an important part of Hestia's Greek ritual, and this provides an avenue of comparison because there is continuity with Vesta and *castitas* in the Roman tradition. The Roman ritual of appointing virgin priestesses to attend Vesta evolved out of the necessity for purity of Hestia in Greek ritual since sexual abstinence guaranteed *castitas* and embodied *pudor*. Although remaining unwed was not usually encouraged in the Greek or Roman cultural traditions, by abstaining from the difficult work of child-bearing Vestal Virgins retained the purity of maidenhood and prevented the natural changes of body and of mind that accompany this rite of passage and this purity, associated with Hestia by Hesiod, was crucial for performing state business. In early Greek poetic tradition Hestia was associated with Demeter, as in the *Theogony* passage above, an association that illuminates why the Vestal Virgins and their slaves were involved in the large-scale production of bread and demonstrates that Hestia's worship centered around the private hearth with a strong element of ritual purity, a tradition the Romans carried over to their worship of Vesta.

Besides ritual purity, evidence from a sacrifice scene in Homer's *Odyssey* 14 demonstrated that food preparation was another important aspect of Hestia's Greek tradition of ritual. The purity of food shared at a social gathering was of the utmost importance, and the good swineherd Eumaeus performed a small ritual of Hestia to give thanks for the food they were about to enjoy. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the

⁶⁰ 733-4 “μηδ’ αἰδοῖα γονῇ πεπαλαγμένος ἔνδοθι οἴκου ἱστίῃ ἐμπελαδὸν παραφαινέμεν, ἀλλ’ ἀλέασθαι.” “Being dirty do not expose your genitals to your kin by the fireside in your house, but avoid this.”

kind figure of Eumaeus was the man in charge of these sacrifices, since he was a character of impeccable moral standing in the community, not to mention that cooking was considered a high mark of social distinction in Mycenaean culture and was, therefore, the purview of men. Here are a few of the lines that narrate the sacrifice of a boar:

αἶψα δέ μιν διέχευαν· ὁ δ' ὠμοθετεῖτο σὺβώτης,
 πάντων ἀρχόμενος μελέων, ἐς πίονα δημόν,
 καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐν πυρὶ βάλλε, παλύνας ἀλφίτου ἀκτῇ,
 427-430

Quickly they butchered it [the boar], and the swineherd wrapped raw pieces in rich fat, first offering of all the limbs, and threw them into the fire having sprinkled them the spelt meal.

These rites Eumaeus celebrated were simple but powerful signs of gratitude, and it is clear that men predominate in honoring Hestia, whereas among the Romans women were exclusively the celebrants of Vesta. The highly ritualized preparation of the meat-offering also includes a sprinkling of grain flour, perhaps spelt meal, which was used in the preparation of the *mola salsa* or the salted spelt meal used at every sacrifice of the Roman state.⁶¹ The preparation of food goes hand in hand with ritual purity, and it is these two elements above all others that form the basis of the Greek traditions of worshipping Hestia. Having surveyed a selection of private rituals associated with her, it will be instructive to investigate Hestia's public rites.

Nemean 11 is a fine example of how Hestia held sway as the protector of the town hall or *prytaneum*, and the public hearth within it was an excellent place for community leaders and important visitors to gather and to socialize. As usual, Hestia is not participating in the mythological episode *per se*, but receiving Pindar's appeal for Aristagoras of Tenedos to have a successful twelve-month term as *prytanis* did require a

⁶¹ For *mola salsa* see also Cicero *Div.* 2.37 “ac **molam** et vinum inspersionis” and Virgil *Ec.* 8.82 “sparge **molam**”. In each instance the offering is a standard one as gratitude or in the interpretation of portents or dreams, and in Plautus' *Amphitruo* 2.2.109 “aut **mola salsa** hodie aut ture comprecata oportuit,” it is parallel with an incense offering.

considerable and thoughtful appeal to the goddess Hestia as a way of propitiating the public guardian whose rites were undertaken at the public hearth.⁶² The exhortation for Aristagoras' political success is short-lived, only the first ten lines or so, and the encomium to his victories in events like pankration, a mix of boxing and wrestling with few if any rules, is perhaps just as important to the poet as his election. The poem assumes a juridical aesthetic as Pindar deprecates the idolatry of ambition with which he began the poem, "and at the end of it all, he will wear dirt," a phrase that seems to indicate the poet's concern that Aristagoras might become too infatuated with power.⁶³ It seems that Pindar worries that too much feasting at the public hearth as a way of thanking the gods for the gifts of prosperity and of power might disgrace Aristagoras and sabotage the virtues that won him the office. Hestia's public feasts were reserved for the most elite citizens, those whose ambition for public service brought them to the public hearth as an officer, like Aristagoras, or as a distinguished guest. Since the Greek tradition of Hestia has provided few examples from which to judge, a selection of Roman poets is necessary for comparison with the adaptation of Hestia whom the Romans named Vesta.

Roman Lyric and Epic: Virgil and Horace on Vesta

Virgil and Horace demonstrated different poetic perspectives on Vesta, since Horace concentrated on her public and civic aspects, whereas Virgil was concerned with her venerable antiquity and majestic mystery. Virgil drew on the standard version of the foundation of Rome also found in Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and although his critics have wavered about whether or not he incorporated his true convictions about the

⁶² 1-3, "παῖ Πέας, ἧ τε πρυτανεῖα λελογχας, Ἑστία, / Ζηνὸς ὑψίστου κασιγνήτα καὶ ὁμοθρόνου Ἥρας, / εὖ μὲν Ἀρισταγόραν δέξαι τὸν ἐς θάλαμον," "Child of Rhea, Hestia who protects the meeting house, sister of highest Zeus and Hera that shares his throne, welcome Aristagoras to your chamber."

⁶³ 16 "καὶ τελευτὰν ἀπάντων γῆν ἐπιεσσόμενος"

political cause of Augustus into his work, evidence will show that he framed the pre-history of Rome as a struggle to define what it meant to be Roman in much the same terms as Augustus framed his own legacy in works like the *Ara Pacis Augustae*. The first mention of Vesta by Virgil was near the close of *Georgics* 1, and it treated the well-known poetic *topos* of the golden age.⁶⁴ Hesiod was famous for immortalizing the golden age among others, and Virgil took a subtler approach to this familiar poetic theme by interweaving Vesta's literal or symbolic presence into many pivotal moments when Roman heritage from bygone generations evoked nostalgia. In this passage from *Georgics* 1, there are a number of words that bring the reader into a utopian frame of mind, such as "Indigentes", national heroes raised to the status of deities such as the Aeneas, and even the phrase "everso...saeclo" seems to reference the golden age by reverse logic. Much more can be deduced from the remaining evidence, especially from the *Aeneid*, and Virgil's initial reference to the goddess Vesta begins a clear pattern of associating Vesta with Augustus.

Aeneid 1 establishes a prime role for Vesta among the oldest Roman deities, and this prominence and antiquity builds the prestige of Augustus as well as his legitimacy as a leader. Although victory on the battlefield was indispensable because it brought fame and power, cultural and political legitimacy remained elusive for Augustus even as the first decade of his Principate progressed. Concerning the lack of stability in the first decade of his regime, Sabine Grebe wrote, "Despite his military and political power, Augustus' position remained politically insecure," and to improve his position Augustus

⁶⁴ 498-500 "di patrii Indigentes et Romule Vestaque mater / quae Tuscum Tiberim et Romana Palatia servas, / hunc saltem everso iuvenem succurrere saeclo / ne prohibete." "O gods of our ancestors and Romulus and mother Vesta, who protect the Tuscan Tiber and Roman Palatine, don't prevent this man at least from repairing our broken age." Rhea Silvia is meant by *mater*, and the presence of Augustus (iuvenem) is unmistakable.

took action and mercilessly dispatched his perceived rivals such as M. Licinius Crassus, grandson of the triumvir, and C. Cornelius Gallus, the elegiac poet and *praefectus* of Egypt.⁶⁵ Commissioning Virgil to write the *Aeneid* was a cultural and social power play that was intended to entrench Augustus' early political and military successes during the turbulent consolidation period following Actium. Vesta played her part in this Augustan program, and, although Virgil's complicity in this program is controversial, a passage from *Aeneid* 1 offers proof of Vesta's status as the centerpiece of Augustus' public image and honored her among the oldest gods of the Pantheon.⁶⁶ Being symbols of the moral authority of the Roman establishment, Virgil established that Fides and Vesta were key components of the new age of peace and prosperity, and Vesta's position so close to the law-giving twin founders of the City was no coincidence. Virgil's choice to describe Fides and Vesta as "white-haired" (*cana* 1.292) also emphasized the great antiquity of these deities in the Roman tradition, and this diction remained consistent during the depiction of Vesta and her ritual after Aeneas bade farewell to his father near the end of *Aeneid* 5.

The death of Anchises and the subsequent funeral games provide a backdrop for one of the most direct references to the Vestals in the *Aeneid*, although, in typical Virgilian fashion, the allusion to the tradition of Roman Vesta is beneath the surface. The description of Vesta in *Aeneid* 5 emphasizes not only her venerable age, but also the purity and sense of decency (*castitas* and *pudor*) for which the Vestals were well-known,

⁶⁵ Grebe 2004 42, see also 44-46 on the Roman concept of *auctoritas*, which is perhaps the best ancient equivalent to the modern concept of political legitimacy, i.e. the right to hold power, which Augustus won after the Actium campaign.

⁶⁶ 291-293 "aspera tum positae mitescent saecula bellis: / cana Fides et Vesta, Remo cum fratre Quirinus / iura dabunt," "the savage times then will soften with wars put aside: hoary Faith and Vesta, Quirinus with his brother Remus will give laws." The famous description of Furor imprisoned in the temple of Janus follows this appeal for faith by Jupiter to Venus. See Green (2000) 307 for comparison of the prison imagery of 293-296 to similar descriptions of "imprisoning" war itself in Ovid's *Fasti* 1.124.

and with this simple offering, Aeneas further demonstrated the religious and domestic attributes of the ancient Order of Vesta. Aeneas said his final words to Anchises, repeated to Dido in the subsequent book, and he gave thanks.⁶⁷ He conducted this ritual:

haec memorans cinerem et sopitos suscitāt ignis,
Pergameumque Larem et canae penetralia Vestae
fare pio et plena supplex veneratur acerra.
(743-745)

Remembering this he rekindled the ash and settled fires, and as a suppliant, he paid homage to the Lar of Pergamum and the inner sanctum of hoary Vesta with holy spelt and a full cup.

As Aeneas revived the embers of the dying fire, symbolic of the nadir his journey had reached near the end of Book Five, he carried out a hearth ritual involving sacred spelt, which was the same *mola salsa*, salted spelt meal, that the Vestals would prepare for state sacrifices. The juxtaposition between the Lar of Pergamum and the inner shrine of Vesta in line 744 suggests the famous Palladium, or at least a copy of the relic, which might have been housed in the *Aedes Vestae* and perhaps was moved to the shrine of Vesta Augustus built in his residence on the Palatine.⁶⁸ Although the *lares* and *penates* were distinctly Roman, it is not surprising that Virgil imagined the roots of their tradition to extend to Aeneas himself, and one critic pointed out that line 744 is the only instance in Augustan poetry where the words *lar* and *Vesta* appear in the same passage,⁶⁹ which indicates that this simple sacrifice is a significant ritual to Augustus' cultural program.

⁶⁷ *Ec.* 2.60; *Aen.* 5.742; 6.466, "quem fugis?" The words are a baleful plea more than a question. See Belfiore (1984) 19 where other instances of, "Aeneas' futile attempts to embrace ghosts," are enumerated. It is often the case in the *Aeneid* that the dead are just as important to the poem as the living, with characters like Dido and Anchises exerting influence even when they are encountered as ghosts.

⁶⁸ Balbuza (2014) 61, "the house of Augustus and the Princeps himself are connected with the cult of Vesta," and 60 n. 70, "The dispute on the character of Vesta's cult on the Palatine, as well as on the appearance and function of this temple (?) has long continued, because of the vagueness in the sources." On the mysterious nature of this shrine to Vesta see also Degrassi (1955), Guarducci (1971), and Fishwick (1993), and for the inscription that gave rise to the theory about the shrine to Vesta see Degrassi (1963) vol. 13.2, 452.

⁶⁹ Philips (1976) 249, "Aeneas shows concern for both his private and civic past when he worships the *Lar* and *Vesta*." It is also a way for Virgil to remind the reader that Augustus, like Aeneas, watched over Vesta and the Vestals, perhaps even by establishing their worship within his household on the Palatine.

Having examined the venerable antiquity of Vesta as discerned in the work of Virgil, who supposed her traditions to reach as far back as the legendary Aeneas, the lyric poet Horace offered a depiction of Vesta that focused on the public and ritualized aspects of the Order to form a public-facing poetic aesthetic in the two odes that treat this goddess.

As way of dedicating the collection to Augustus, *Odes* 1.2 touched on Vesta's public and civic role in the construction of Roman cultural identity, and Horace even invoked the memory of Rhea Silvia to harken back to the obscure but potent idea of the foundation of the city. Horace took notice of the aspects of the Order that overlapped with public life, especially in regard to the constantly evolving demand for the explanation of portents and natural phenomena, in this case a flood that occurred between 31 and 27 BCE, a disaster which one scholar argued Horace was quick to portray as a positive omen in this ode.⁷⁰ The flood was explained with a passage in which the juxtaposition of Vesta and Ilia is clear:

vidimus flavum Tiberim retortis
litore Etrusco violenter undis
ire deiectum monumenta regis
 templaque Vestae,
Iliae dum se nimium querenti
iactat ultorem, vagus et sinistra
labitur ripa Iove non probante u-
 xorius amnis.
(13-20)

We saw the yellow Tiber with waters shoved back fiercely from the Tuscan shore destroy the Regia and the shrines of Vesta, as he boasted he was the overzealous [nimium] avenger for crying Ilia, and the wandering uxorious river overflows the left bank without Jove's approval.

⁷⁰ Clark (2010) 263, "Whether in reaction to the historical flood of 27 B.C. or some other unrecorded flood in the short interval after Actium in September 31 B.C., the challenge facing Horace in creating this ode was how to harmonize the ill omen which a superstitious people might attach to the occasion, with his chosen theme introduced by the phrase *ruentis imperi rebus* at 25-6, of Octavian as the heaven-sent saviour capable of restoring orderly government in the contrasting second part of the ode." The choice to employ Vesta and the memory of Rhea Silvia in that rationalization indicates the sway this goddess and her attendants held at Rome. It was this shared cultural memory into which Augustus insinuated himself through the various artists and writers under his patronage.

Horace made sense of this momentous sign by characterizing it like an overzealous husband who was outraged at the turmoil and civil strife the Roman state had endured, as if the Roman state herself were an abused wife, in need of the protection of someone like Augustus.⁷¹ The appeal to the predominant female figure in the myth of the foundation of the city, Rhea Silvia or Ilia, together with the references to the Regia and the *Aedes Vestae*, among the oldest structures in the Forum, drew attention away from the negative potential the omen held and promoted acceptance of this contrived explanation of the flood to make it seem favorable to Augustus. *Odes* 1.2 returned to the public aspects of Vesta, once again at the end of a stanza, in lines 26-28, “prece qua fatigent / virgines sanctae minus audientem / carmina Vestam?”⁷² This time the public role of the Vestals to intercede with chants and prayers rose to the foreground for Horace, and in this passage the poetic purpose of the piece, to set up Augustus as the avenger of past wrongs when traditional institutions were in disastrous circumstances, obliged Vesta to be portrayed as cold and heedless by comparison. The next reference to Vesta by Horace also revolved around the civic prominence of the Vestals and even explored the unimaginable shame of a Roman citizen forgetting his duty to honor Vesta.

A remarkable poem for the way it grappled with the failure of M. Licinius Crassus’ leadership at Carrhae in 53 BCE and the disgrace of his captured soldiers, *Odes* 3.5 furnishes evidence about Vesta’s public and civic functions within the religious and political elite of Rome. It seemed to Horace that Vesta was the epitome of what it meant to be Roman, and it was a terrible disgrace upon the captured soldiers of Crassus’ army when they forgot their shields and eternal Vesta and disgraced themselves in this

⁷¹ This interpretation depends on taking “nimium” with “ultorem,” see Womble (1970) 6, “too ready settle an old score,” but Womble offers other interpretations of the syntactical ambiguity.

⁷² “With what prayer will the holy women tire out Vesta who hardly listens to their songs?”

passage.⁷³ The Regulus Ode presented a positive moral example for Romans to emulate, and the former soldier of Crassus, who had become, in the words of one critic, “oblivious to the past, forgetful even of the unforgettable,” formed a sharp contrast compared to the virtue of Regulus.⁷⁴ It became paramount for Horace to represent Vesta as the embodiment of civic virtue and private morality when he contemplated a Roman defeat and a failure of the valor of its citizens, especially in an incident that had become a national embarrassment, because the Order of Vesta offered a unique palliative quality for such disasters. For they warded off harm from the city, especially in such times. The public and political symbolism of Vesta was a prime concern of Horace in the Regulus Ode, and she represented the cultural identity both Virgil and Horace articulated within the framework of their poetry. As much as Virgil and Horace put their own mark on Roman poetic depiction of Vesta, with Virgil emphasizing the great age and respectability of the Order and Horace concentrating on the civic and political elements, Ovid and Tibullus established a more irreverent theme in relation to Vesta, although she remained for them the consummate symbol of Roman cultural identity.

Elegiac Vesta: Ovid and Tibullus on Vesta

Ovid made use of Vesta in *Fasti* 6, bringing her into the erotic world of Roman Elegiac poetry as Tibullus had done, and she appeared to be associated with Augustus in the personal and civic aspects of the new order he fostered. Although Ovid hesitated over his worthiness to treat the morally righteous goddess, evidence that he brought her name

⁷³ 9-12 “sub rege Medo Marsus et Apulus, / anciliorum et nominis et togae / oblitus aeternaeque Vestae, / incolumi Iove et urbe Roma?” “Marsus and Apulus under a Persian king, forgetting their shields, and name, and toga, and eternal Vesta, while Jove and the city of Rome are unharmed?”

⁷⁴ Morgan (2005) 320-1, “In losing contact with the past and its guidance, of course, the soldier [of Crassus] has lost contact with his Roman identity altogether, his *toga* and his *nomen* as well as the *ancilia*, emblems of Rome’s divinely sanctioned existence, and Vesta, the very embodiment of Rome and its continuity.”

into his work more often and employed her symbolism better than any other Augustan writer in spite of this supposed unworthiness is abundant.⁷⁵ Vesta played such an important role in *Fasti* 6 that Elaine Fantham wrote, “Vesta is herself the focus of Book 6,” with ample cause given the way Ovid delved deeply into the rich Roman mythology surrounding her, and he even added to this trove of folklore with the Priapus interlude of lines 319-348.⁷⁶ After enumerating some of the more well-known aspects of Vesta’s worship, Ovid narrated the failed seduction of Vesta by Priapus, there were aspects of comedy as Murgatroyd noted,⁷⁷ but the poetic purpose of the shameful encounter was to reinforce Elegiac irreverence while still maintaining respect for a goddess who was so important to the *princeps*. After recounting in lines 437 to 454 the famous rescue of the Palladium from a fire by L. Caecilius Metellus in 241 BCE, Ovid wrote about Augustus as the protector of a shrine to Vesta, and this passage emphasized the true respect that the poet had for Vesta, even incorporating her into the Elegiac tradition, as well as the great lengths Augustus went to in order to associate his name with that of Rome’s eternal guardian.⁷⁸ The weaving of connections between Augustus and Vesta, a fabric which Ovid deliberately crafts I argue, continues to be apparent in *Metamorphoses* 15 when

⁷⁵ 250 “ad tua si nobis sacra venire licet,” a passage which also played on the exclusion of men from the festival of the Good Goddess (*Bona Dea*), a time-honored tradition in which the Vestals participated. Phillips (1976) 247 counted forty references to Vesta in the poetry of Ovid, a total which exceeds even Livy, who treats the goddess infrequently compared to her priestesses.

⁷⁶ Fantham (1983) 206, and see 203-206 for Fantham’s hypothesis that Ovid wrote the Priapus and Vesta tale with a Hellenistic Greek model in mind (205 n. 75) and for her analysis of this episode compared with the Priapus and Lotis story from *Fasti* 1.415-440 and briefly summarized at *Meta.* 9.347-8. Priapus was a mischievous figure and appeared in the opening of Tibullus *Odes* 1.4, evidence of the god’s frequent association with the lusty *amator* in Roman Elegy.

⁷⁷ For analysis of the humorous aspects of the episode see the short note Murgatroyd (2002). For more detailed analysis of the Priapus and Vesta scene see Murgatroyd (2005) 81-95.

⁷⁸ 455-8 “nunc bene lucetis sacrae sub Caesare flammæ: / ignis in Iliacis nunc erit usque focus, / nullaque dicetur vittas temerasse sacerdos / hoc duce nec viva defodietur humo.” “Now under Caesar, sacred fires, you shine brightly. The fire will now be ever upon the Ilian hearth, and no priestess will be said to have disgraced her headbands (*vittae*) while he’s our leader, nor will she be buried alive in the earth.” See Gallia (2014) 225-229 for the *vittae*, a head dress that was part of the Vestal Virgin’s religious garb, and note especially how it was connected to the costume of the Roman bride.

Ovid highlighted the way Vesta had become part of the household gods, known as *penates*, of the Imperial family itself.

Besides positioning Vesta under the guardianship of Augustus in *Fasti* 6, Ovid approached the end of *Metamorphoses* 15 with the idea of adapting Vesta to the inauguration of the new order envisioned for Rome. The three significant references to Vesta in *Metamorphoses* 15 each serve a specific purpose, with the first (731) recalling the eternal fires of “Trojan” Vesta, the second (778) associating the name of Vesta with Julius Caesar, and the third (864-5) bringing Vesta together with the *penates* of Augustus.⁷⁹ This progression of appeals to the strong cultural bonds of Roman heritage contained in this goddess was Ovid’s way of honoring Augustus as *pontifex maximus*, since he had gained the power to consecrate the shrine to Vesta on the Palatine with this office, and each passage reflected part of a powerful triad consisting of the fire of Vesta, Julius Caesar, and Augustus. If the final act of the poem was intended to inaugurate a new and expansive order of the ages, then to incorporate Vesta’s co-opted image together with that of Augustus, thereby imposing on Rome’s omnipresent protecting goddess the latest political actor, was a master stroke in a final act of epic proportions. Ovid begins to intentionally confuse the word order in lines 864-5, and this passage’s doubling of the epithet “Caesarea” was also a unique touch for describing Vesta, whom one commentator compared to Apollo because of the way in which she had been incorporated among the

⁷⁹ 730-1 “quaque ignes, Troica, servant, / Vesta, tuos, laetoque deum clamore salutant.” “And those who keep your fires, Trojan Vesta, and greet the god (Aesculapius) with a happy shout.” 777-8 “quos prohibete, precor, facinusque repellite, neve / caede sacerdotis flammam extinguite Vestae.” “Stop those deeds [killing Caesar], stave off the crime, do not extinguish the fires of Vesta with the blood of her priest.” 864-5 “Vestaque Caesareos inter sacra Penates / et cum **Caesarea** tu, Phoebae domestice, **Vesta**.” “And [I beg you] Vesta among the holy, the Caesarian Penates, and you, Phoebus of the home, with **Caesarian Vesta**.” The close association of Augustus and Vesta reaches a crescendo with the last of the three references, and it seems that Vesta was every bit as much a public symbol of Augustus as Apollo was, since the adjective “Caesarian” connects the *princeps* and the goddess and Julius Caesar.

Emperor's household gods.⁸⁰ Beyond her involvement in the inauguration of the new order, the fire of Vesta formed a core element of Ovid's portrayal of the goddess in both the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*, and the guardianship of the holiest flame in Rome, deemed synonymous with its continued existence, was also the focus of Tibullus' poetry in regard to Vesta, whom he treated in two odes from the Roman Elegiac tradition.

Tibullus created his poetic persona by eschewing the paltry rewards of rank and wealth, and instead he elevated the pursuit of domestic pleasures, especially with *Odes* 1.1 and 2.5. He crafted both of these poems to evoke the comforts of home, but they serve different purposes within the careful construction of Tibullus' poetic persona. In *Odes* 1.1 the small harvest was enough for Tibullus to be content, and this poem contains two oblique references to Vesta that will show the way Tibullus captured the popular spirit of the elite Order of Vesta. First, line 6, "while my hearth shines with continual fire," contains a subtle inauguration of the poem with the fire of Vesta that Tibullus seems to create for himself.⁸¹ Likewise in the next passage it seemed enough for Tibullus that his rustic estate, a utopian fantasy of the highest order, be protected only by rustic gods and the Lares, whose ancient ancestor, the Palladium, Aeneas brought from Troy, and Tibullus offered sacrifices to them in lines 19-20, "you too, once happy, now guardians of our meager field, take your gifts, Lares."⁸² One critic compared this rural fantasy to the sylvan paradise of the *Georgics*, and she argued, "the security of both worlds is to be secured by *pietas*," a value which Tibullus touched on with these two references to the

⁸⁰ Bömer *Kommentar Buch XIV-XV* (1986) 486, "Auf diese Weise wurde Vesta ebenso wie Apollo (*Phoebus domesticus* [s.u.]; Tempel auf dem Palatin) unter die Hausgötter (*di penates*) des Augustus aufgenommen."

⁸¹ 6 "dum meus assiduo luceat igne focus." The use of "assiduo" here mirrors and forms the antithesis of the phrase "labor assiduus" in line 3. It is clear Tibullus preferred the comfort of home to the slog of battle, and he valued continual hearth fires over the unceasing slaughter of military life.

⁸² 19-20 "vos quoque, felices quondam, nunc pauperis agri / custodes, fertis munera vestra, Lares."

worship of Vesta.⁸³ However, it was Ilia's breach of faith and failure of *pietas* that Tibullus drew on for his reference to Vesta in *Odes* 2.4.⁸⁴ With a fervor that is the hallmark of Roman Elegy and with an attention to detail only Tibullus can muster, Ilia allowed her duty to attend the hearth to be forgotten while she seems to relish the ravishing of Mars. Tibullus introduced much of the Elegiac aesthetics surrounding Vesta that Ovid sought to emulate with his association of Augustus and the goddess, and with the tremendous respect Vesta garnered among the poets of this time it was clear that while Tibullus was less overt about promoting the Augustan program he nevertheless understood what made Vesta so important to Roman culture and therefore to Augustus.

Poetic Vesta: a chorus of pious virtue

Although the Greek and Roman poets depicted Hestia and Vesta for distinct poetic and cultural purposes, it stemmed from a common thread that even the finest poets and intellectuals were loathe to fully dissect, for its power derived from the mystery of the eternal flame, a harbinger of Rome's destiny. References to Vesta among the Roman poets were far more frequent than Greek invocations or appeals to Hestia, a fact that demonstrates one of the keys to differentiating the two interpretations of the hearth goddess has to do with Vesta's association with *lares* and *penates*, household gods for whom the Romans dedicated daily prayers and occasional offerings. The Greek poets Hesiod, Homer, and Pindar possessed not the faintest indication what Hestia would become in the hands of Roman poets like Virgil and Horace, who created a whole new generation of symbolic significance for Vesta, a trend that centered on her respectable

⁸³ Boyd (1984) 274

⁸⁴ 51-2 "te quoque iam video, Marti placitura sacerdos / Ilia, Vestales deseruisse focos, / concubitusque tuos furtim vittasque iacentes / et cupidi ad ripas arma relictas dei." "I even see you now, priestess Ilia about to delight Mars, has left behind the Vestal hearths, and your secret rendezvous, throwing away headbands, and the gear of the lustful god abandoned near the shore."

age as well as her public importance. Augustus took advantage of the popular preoccupation with Vesta, a feeling best represented in the poetry of Ovid and Tibullus, to inaugurate his new order under the auspices of the most essentially Roman goddess of all, one who bore the honor and dignity of the tradition about Rhea Silvia, often called Ilia, who gave birth to the famous twins, Romulus and Remus. The memory of Vesta and the deep impact she made on the Roman cultural landscape would become the core element of what Augustus imagined to be the dawning of a new golden age with Vesta proudly brought under the auspices of Caesar for his protection and his continued prosperity, for no one doubted the sincerity, integrity, and honesty of the Vestal Virgins.

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