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Annotated Bibliography – Temple of Vesta / House of the Vestals

4.1.23

1. Beard, Mary, John North, Simon Price. *Religions of Rome: Volume I – A History*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
 - The Temple of Vesta is dedicated to Vesta, the goddess of the hearth. Within this temple the eternal flame of Rome was housed, along with other artifacts, most notably a phallus, which symbolize fertility and prosperity.
 - Many of the duties of the Vestal Virgins would be considered “housework” by today’s standards. These duties would include supervising the eternal flame of Rome, which was located in their temple; they looked after and regularly cleaned their storehouse; they produced something called “sacred meal” which was the first ears of corn from the harvest in Rome, which they would grind up and bake. This sacred meal would be used to “sanctify victims” for a sacrifice.
 - The rituals of the Vestals were cyclical in a way. The products from past rituals would take part in future ones. For example, the ashes of the sacrifice calf of the “Fordicidia” were mixed with the dry blood from the “October Horse,” from a ritual in October. This mixture of ashes and blood was then used to spread over the fires of the “Parilia,” a ritual which has an intended purpose of purifying the shepherd and his sheep.

2. Bunson, Matthew. "Vesta" and "Vestal Virgins." In *Encyclopedia of Ancient Rome*, 3rd ed., New York: Facts on File Inc., 2012.
 - The job of being a Vestal Virgin came with many advantages. For starters the Vestals were always accompanied by a lictor whenever they went into public. Vestals had distinctive dress, in order that everyone would be able to recognize them in public settings. Vestals had reserved seats at all public events within the city. Vestals also had the ability to pardon any criminal that they may come across, should the criminal be on their way to execution.
 - The cult of Vesta came from Lavinium with Numa, the second king of Rome. Lavinium is the place where the mythical hero Aeneas settled, and where he brought the flame of Troy as well as his house-hold gods. This information serves as an origin story for the cult of Vesta that we know today.
 - After their thirty-year term, Vestals were allowed to marry, though it rarely happened due to the taboo nature of marrying a retired Vestal.
 - Similar to Greek goddess Hestia, the Roman deity Vesta was goddess of the hearth. In honor of Vesta, the eternal flame of Rome, located in the Temple of Vesta, was renewed every year on March first. Within the Temple, six women, known as the Vestal Virgins, would diligently tend to

and protect this flame, and if they failed to do so, they would face punishment.

3. Lidner, Molly M. "Architecture of the Atrium Vestae." In *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins, Priestesses of Ancient Rome*, 39-61. United States: University of Michigan Press, 2015.

- The House of the Vestals is semi-surrounded by streets, which line three sides of the Vestal's residence. The fourth side of the house abuts the warehouses of Vespasian. The significance of this is the fact that the Vestals, while living out their duties at home were surrounded by the bustling city of Rome. This idea lines up the Rome's identity as a city that houses both sacred and commercial sites within the same area.
- The Vestal's house, contrary to popular belief, would host regular people frequently, be it clients or guests of the Vestals.
- The author of this work makes a point to recognize the similarities and differences between the Vestals and modern-day nuns of the Catholic church. Most importantly she highlights that Vestals would be tried and executed for failing their vow of chastity, and that they were no longer obligated to remain vestals after their thirty-year term.
- The House of the Vestals was pillaged countless times throughout the centuries leading up to the eighteenth century.

4. Livy. *The Early History of Rome: Books I-V of The History of Rome from Its Foundation*. Translated by Aubrey De Sélincourt. London: Penguin Books, 2002.
 - This source will purely be used to cite specific anecdotes of Vestal Virgins, mythical or otherwise. The following are such anecdotes:
 - The story of Rhea Silvia, the mother of the mythical founders Romulus and Remus. Rhea Silvia was a Vestal Virgin, given the honor by her uncle Aemilius, who bore the twin founders of Rome from the god of war, Mars (34). The existence of this mythical figure suggests that the Vestals existed long before the founding of Rome, however this is not true according to Livy.
 - The mentioning of Oppia, a Vestal Virgin who was found guilty of being “unchaste” and was thus sentenced to death (160).
 - The story of Postumia, the Vestal Virgin acquitted of committing a “sexual offense,” one example of Vestals proving their innocence when accused of a crime against their role (341).
 - According to Livy, the Vestals originated from Alba, and were a cult brought to Rome by Numa, the second king of Rome (53). As a result, the story of Rhea Silvia, previously mentioned, is suggested to be entirely mythical, and just a piece of Roman lore.

5. Scott, Russell T., Paul Henderson, Charlotte Steffensen, Christina Trier, Lorenzo Costantini, John Giorgi, and A. J. Ammerman. “The Excavations”. In

“Excavations in the Area Sacra of Vesta (1987–1996).” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* 8 (2009): i–167.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25759485>.

- Not much is known of the House of the Vestals, at least what it would have looked like exactly during the time of the Republic. At the site, excavations have revealed that the building likely contained six bedrooms, as well as a common space. The existence of a portico, as well as an inner courtyard is theorized as well.
 - Even less information is known about the house of the Vestals during the time of the monarchy. However, there is strong evidence to suggest that the building was remodeled between those two times in Roman history.
 - Even after the Republican period, the House of the Vestals underwent severe remodeling over time which was built over top the existing site.
6. Staples, Ariadne. “The Vestals and Rome.” In *From Good Goddesses to Vestal Virgins: Sex and category in Roman Religion*, 131-156. London: Routledge, 1998.
- The punishment of a Vestal Virgin for acts of unchastity was to be buried alive- interment- however, this was not viewed by the Romans as putting the Vestal to death. Instead, it was viewed as the Vestal being put in a “habitable room” for eternity. While we understand today that this was

being buried alive, it is all now understood to be an “elaborate fiction” to dissuade the Roman public from what was actually occurring.

- There are only two recorded executions of Vestals within Rome, and both occurred during a time where the Roman military was falling short of expectations. The author of this book suggests that the virginity of the Vestal Virgins is thus representative of the stability of Rome on all accounts. Essentially, if the Vestals do not uphold their chastity, Rome will crumble; thus, those that disobey the rules of priesthood must be punished.
- The two executions of the Vestal Virgins, one in 216 BCE and the other in 114 BCE, are two of the three examples of human sacrifice within the age of the Roman republic. This author views these sacrifices as “scapegoats” for the events that were occurring alongside the executions; these being the threat of defeat by Hannibal (216 BCE), and a minor defeat in Thrace orchestrated by Scordisci (114 BCE).
 - The trial in 216 BCE ended with one Vestal being sacrificed, while the other committed suicide.
 - The trial in 114 BCE resulted in what is believed to be the sacrifice of all three Vestals accused.

7. Takács, Sarolta A. "Rome Eternal." In *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons: Women in Roman Religion*, 80–89. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2008.
- There were many requirements to become a Vestal Virgin. Firstly, Vestals were selected at the ages of six to ten years old. If selected, the girl had to be both socially adept and physically "unblemished." From what I understand this likely meant physically healthy rather than virginal considering their young age. In addition to the physical requirement, Vestals had to come from families where the parents of the girl were both alive and married, however socio-economic status was not a factor in selection.
 - When a Vestal was suspected of having committed a sexual act in her term serving the Temple of Vesta, it was known as an "incestum." Only nineteen cases of "incestum" were reported to have occurred during the existence of the Vestal Virgins.
 - If convicted of "incestum" a Vestal was sentenced to death. The method of execution was interment, where the Vestal was buried alive in a box after being paraded through the streets of Rome for her crime. It is important to note that many scholars believe that this interment symbolizes the idea of being sewn into the earth, as one might do with a seed. Thus, the mistakes of a "failed" Vestal were seen as opportunities for growth in the future.