

ABSTRACT

Vestals Remembered: An Examination of the Myths of Rhea Silvia, Tarpeia, and Tuccia

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This thesis examines three legendary Vestal Virgins and analyzes how they functioned as symbols of the inviolability of Rome. It begins with a preliminary chapter which outlines the cult's regulations and the role of the Vestal Virgins, focusing specifically on the two main responsibilities of the maidens: maintaining the perpetual hearth fire and their vow of chastity. If either the flame was extinguished or unchastity occurred, often seen as consequences of unfavorable events in Rome, a Vestal was put to death. The first Vestal considered is Rhea Silvia, the mother of Romulus and Remus. Despite breaking her vow of chastity, Rhea became the mother of Rome. The second Vestal discussed is Tarpeia, who betrayed Rome to the Sabine army and was crushed to death by the soldiers' shields. Although she was a traitoress, Rome nonetheless increased in population, territory, and political power as a result. The third and final Vestal analyzed is Tuccia, who, falsely accused of the breaking her chastity (*crimen incesti*), proved herself innocent by carrying a sieve full of water from the Tiber to the Vestal temple. She subsequently became a symbol of womanly virtue for over 500 years. These myths reveal that the Romans associated the Vestals with the prosperity and integrity of Rome.

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE MYTHS OF RHEA SILVIA, TARPEIA, AND TUCCIA

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DEDICATION

*To my mother, who embodies selfless and unconditional love,
and who has taught me what it means to be a godly woman.*

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Background of the Vestal Virgins

The Cult of Vesta

The cult of Vesta, goddess of the hearth, existed long before the founding of Rome, and may have its roots in the Hellenistic world. Through a process of syncretism, Latin speakers assimilated Vesta with the Greek goddess Hestia. Greek influence on the Latin cult, however, is somewhat ambiguous, and ancient historians more commonly adopt Alba Longa as the location of the origins and development of what we know as the cult of Vesta.¹ Vesta was goddess of the city, maintaining its safety and stability. As part of the cult of Vesta, six girls, selected between the ages of six and ten and overseen by the Pontifex Maximus,² served as virgins for a thirty-year period, participating in sacrifices, caring for the storehouse (*penus*) of Rome, keeping the eternal flame of the hearth (*ignis Vestae*) lit, and above all, maintaining a vow of chastity.

Vestal Origins

The exact originator of the earliest form of the cult of Vesta remains a mystery. According to the Roman historian Livy, Rome's second king Numa Pompilius established the priesthood in the eighth century BC:

¹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Antiquitates Romanae* 2.65.1. What we know of the cult will be examined in this chapter.

² Plutarch *Numa Pompilius* 9.5; Holt Parker, "Why Were the Vestals Virgins? Or the Chastity of the Women and the Safety of the Roman State," *The American Journal of Philology* 125, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 563.

Virginesque Vestae legit, Alba oriundum sacerdotium et genti conditoris
haud alienum. His ut adsiduae templi antistites essent stipendium de
publico statuit; virginitate aliisque caerimoniis venerabiles ac sanctas fecit.
(*Ab Urbe Condita* 1.20.4-6)

And he (i.e., Numa) chose Vestal Virgins, a priesthood originating in Alba and by no means foreign to the nation of the founder. He set up a stipend from the public treasury for these women so that the priestesses might be at the temple regularly; he made them honorable and sacred by their virginity and other ceremonial sanctions.³

Livy notes that Numa adopted the Alban order at Rome, but he does not say who had established the cult of Vesta in Alba. Either Livy found the initiator of the Alban cult irrelevant to his record of Rome, or he himself did not know the early history of the order. Nevertheless, we know from Livy that the cult originated in Alba and that Numa instituted the priestesses, along with a stipend, a vow of chastity, and other sanctions, thus putting in place the foundations of the cult and its functions throughout subsequent Roman history.

Plutarch discusses the establishment of the Vestal order as well, but, like Livy, gives no record of the Alban origins.⁴ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, on the other hand, presents us with the most detailed information concerning the history of the order. In his description of its origins, he notes that a temple to Vesta existed in Alba, but in accord with Livy and Plutarch, he associates the investiture of the virgins at Rome with Numa.⁵ Dionysius also alludes to the theory that Romulus may have instituted the cult in Rome,

³ All translations in this thesis are my own, unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Plu. *Num.* 9.5.

⁵ D. H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.64.5. Plutarch at one point associates Numa with the virgins' establishment, but also mentions Romulus's affiliation. See *Num.* 9.5, *Romulus* 22.1.

but concludes that he did not institute the Vestals because of the circumstances surrounding the rape of his mother, who was a Vestal:

οὔτε διὰ παρθένων τὰς θεραπέας κατεστήσατο τῇ θεῷ μεμνημένος ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ τοῦ περὶ τὴν μητέρα πάθους, ἧ συνέβη θεραπευούση τὴν θεὸν τὴν παρθενίαν ἀποβαλεῖν. (*Num.* 2.65.3)

And he did not establish the services of maidens for the goddess, remembering, it seems to me, the things that happened to his mother, who lost her virginity while serving the goddess.

The mother of Romulus, Rhea Silvia, who is discussed in chapter two, was a Vestal Virgin at Alba Longa. She was raped by Mars and became pregnant with Romulus and Remus. Due to her actions, which were a betrayal of Vesta, the familial association with the cult was not of good standing, and as a result it logically follows that Romulus is not likely to have established the virgins in Rome.

Dionysius alludes to the cult's pre-Roman history in his record stating, "the founder (i.e., Romulus) had been reared in Alba, where in ancient times the holy temple of this goddess had been established" (ἐν Ἄλβᾳ τοῦ κτίστου τραφέντος, ἐν ἧ παλαιὸν ἐξ οὗ τῆς θεᾶς ταύτης ἱερὸν ἰδρυμένον ἦν, *Ant. Rom.* 2.65.1). Here he notes that a temple to Vesta existed in Alba, but says that Numa brought the cult to the Romans: "he himself first established the holy seat of Vesta for the Romans and made virgins her priestesses" (αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἱερὸν ἰδρυσάμενος Ῥωμαίος Ἑστίας καὶ παρθένους ἀποδείξας αὐτῇ θυηπόλους, 2.64.5). Dionysius seems to have the best historical record, and implies that the cult's existence in Alba had ancient roots.

One last theory for the origin of the cult is found in the *Aeneid*, where Virgil credits Aeneas with bringing the worship of Vesta from Troy, presumably to Lavinium:⁶

“sacra suosque tibi commendat Troia penatis;
hos cape fatorum comites, his moenia quaere
magna pererrato statuas quae denique ponto.”
sic ait et manibus uittas Vestamque potentem
aeternumque adytis effert penetralibus ignem. (2.293-297)

“And Troy commends the sacred objects and its own *penates* to you; take them as comrades of your fates, seek great walls for them which you will set up at last after wandering through the sea.” Thus he spoke and bore in his hands the fillets and powerful Vesta and the eternal fire from the innermost part of her sanctuary.

This passage reveals that the Romans of Virgil’s day, at least, believed that the cult had originated at Troy. We can conclude that the cult as we know it reaches back to at least Alba Longa.⁷

Selection of the Vestals and Vestal Rites

The Vestals were chosen according to a very particular set of regulations. Aulus Gellius, in the *Noctes Atticae*, gives the requirements for becoming a Vestal Virgin, describing the age qualification, parental regulations (citizenship, marital status, and heritage), as well as restrictions such as having a sister as a Vestal or being in ill health.⁸ Based on this description, it is clear that the young girls chosen had to be from an

⁶ Ascanius, it can be presumed, subsequently brought it to Alba Longa when he established the colony. See Publius Virgilius Maro *Aeneid* 9.258-262, in which passage Ascanius swears by Vesta’s hearth, indicating both his knowledge of her cult and its existence in his house.

⁷ Mary, Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 51.

⁸ Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 1.12.1-8; Pliny the Elder describes this as well in *Naturalis Historia* 7.19.1.

upstanding Roman household and of “good quality” in other respects. They were selected between six and ten years old because this age preceded puberty and the desires for sexual activity, but was old enough for them to understand their duties for the service of Vesta. By giving these regulations, and the others listed, Gellius provides a clearer view into the formalities of the cult of Vesta. He delineates the specific background required for the women who protect the hearth of Rome and who represent and uphold the city.⁹

There were several types of duties in which the Vestals took part. As Robin Wildfang argues, these can be categorized into purification rites and rites related to the storage of religious substances.¹⁰ One of the main responsibilities of the Vestals was to maintain the fire of the *aedes Vestae* that represented the protection of the Roman state.¹¹ The fire symbolized not only the hearth of individual Roman homes, but also the safety of Rome itself. This fire continually burned, and if it went out, it was a sign that the state of Roman affairs was in danger.¹² The virgins were to keep the flame lit for a year until March 1, when the rituals celebrating the new annual cycle took place.¹³ Because March

⁹ Parker, “Why Were the Vestals Virgins?,” 563.

¹⁰ Robin Wildfang, *Rome’s Vestal Virgins: A Study of Rome’s Vestal Priestesses in the Late Republic and Early Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 6-36.

¹¹ Wildfang, *Rome’s Vestal Virgins*, 6. Plutarch claims that Numa instituted the fire (*Num.* 9.5), but contradicts himself later saying Romulus did (*Rom.* 22.1). Either leader could have introduced the flame since they are both early kings.

¹² Wildfang, *Rome’s Vestal Virgins*, 7; Ariadne Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 148.

¹³ Sarolta A. Takács, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons: Women in Roman Religion* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2008), 41.

It signified a seasonal renewing, the flame would be extinguished and a new one kindled.

This is the only instance in which the flame could go out.

Not only the fire, but also the *penus*, or storehouse, of Rome was under the care of the Vestal Virgins. As Wildfang notes, there is a dispute over the exact contents of the *penus* among modern scholars, but according to her the exact contents were not as important as the care for these contents, which played a part in the continuation of Rome's existence.¹⁴ The *penus* was also a symbol of Rome and yet another representation of how secure her state of affairs was. As long as the Vestal Virgins cared for the *penus*, the city of Rome remained fortified and at peace.

When examining both the fire and the *penus*, we must consider a deeper symbolism that pertains to the Vestals themselves. The fire, according to Plutarch, has a direct correlation to the virginity of the Vestals:

...εἴτε ὡς καθαρὰν καὶ ἀφθαρτοντὴν τοῦ πυρὸς οὐσίαν ἀκηράτοις καὶ ἀμίαντοις παρατιθεμένου σώμασιν, εἴτε τὸ ἄκαρπον καὶ ἄγονον τῆ παρθενίᾳ συνοικειοῦντος. (*Num.* 9.5)

...either because he (i.e., Numa) thought that the nature of the fire was pure and undefiled and so handed it over to pure and undefiled bodies, or because he associated its infertility and barrenness with virginity.

For Plutarch, the fire, which the Vestals protected, represented more than peace and civic stability; it symbolized the personal chastity of the Vestals as well. As long as the fire remained lit, so too did the maidens remain free of suspicion. As Ariadne Staples mentions, Vesta's "cult was indistinguishable from virginity itself. Vesta . . . was

¹⁴ Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, 17. For a list of the supposed contents in the *penus*, see Plutarch, *Camillus*, 20.5.

represented by the sacred fire in the *aedes Vestae* which spontaneously extinguished itself at the first whiff of Vestal unchastity.”¹⁵ The Romans believed that if the fire went out, one of the virgins must be guilty of breaking her virginal vow and that the state was in danger.¹⁶

Likewise, through the *penus*, the Vestals were associated with the protection of Rome.¹⁷ According to Plutarch, the *penus* supposedly stored the *fascinus*, a phallic charm that kept its wearer from harm.¹⁸ If this is the case, then the *penus* stored fertile images, and if the Vestals protected the *penus*, in a sense they protected fertility from escaping. The entrapment of the phallic symbol represents their protection over their own chastity. The *penus* also contained the *sacra* (sacred items) of Rome: important documents, the Palladium, and other items that today remain undiscovered.¹⁹ Symbolically, by holding so many significant contents, the *penus* contained the necessities for Roman life to function properly, therefore, the two main duties of the Vestals were their virginity and the city. This brings us to the next discussion concerning the law of chastity for the Vestal order.

¹⁵ Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins*, 106.

¹⁶ See, for instance, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.67.

¹⁷ Wildfang disagrees with this notion, but I argue otherwise. For her discussion, see *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, 17n57.

¹⁸ Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, 17n57.

¹⁹ Parker, “Why Were the Vestals Virgins?,” 568. For the Palladium, which is a statue of Minerva, see Parker, 568n22. Wildfang states that the contents of the *penus* “were both secret and Rome’s most holy *sacra*,” *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, 17.

The Crimen Incesti

The most important duty for the Vestals was to uphold their oath of chastity. The punishment of a virgin who broke this vow, a violation called the *crimen incesti*, was live burial. This punishment, introduced by the Roman king Tarquinius Priscus, was a later addition to the cult.²⁰ While a Vestal, a woman was bound by this virginity, but Dionysius relates that she could be married after she completed her thirty-year term of service.²¹ A Vestal who broke her vow before her service was complete, however, suffered the punishment for the *crimen incesti*. Plutarch explains what the punishment entailed.²² The Romans buried the women in a chamber-like tomb, in which they were given a bed (κλίνη), a lamp (λύχνος), water (ὕδωρ), bread (ἄρτος), milk (γάλα), and oil (ἔλαιον). Such a punishment sent them quite literally to their graves. Staples considers this chamber as symbolic of a habitable room and the ritual of the virgin descending of her own accord as voluntary death rather than murder.²³ Voluntary death implies that the virgins were willing to accept and admit their fault and perhaps through this admission Roman affairs would not be in danger.

²⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus mentions this, but he even notes that it came from the Sibylline oracles, and we can conclude that the sources are sparse concerning this fact. See *Ant. Rom.* 3.67.3. See also Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, 78.

²¹ D. H. *Ant. Rom.* 67.2.

²² Plu. *Num.* 10.4-7.

²³ Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgin*, 133.

Wildfang posits an intriguing argument to explain the methods of the Vestal interment.²⁴ She thinks that the virgins were buried alive as a sacrifice to the goddess Vesta, an earth goddess,²⁵ and that burial alive was an immediate sacrificial response to a virgin's disavowal of her order. According to Wildfang, the virgin's "grave" and the elements within her chamber all point towards the ceremonies of a sacrifice and thus serve as a means of appeasement to the goddess Vesta.²⁶ Vestals were buried alive near the Colline Gate, a location still within the city of Rome. This detail is significant because other citizens charged with similar crimes were exiled or drowned outside of borders in order to purge the city of sexual criminals.²⁷ In the case of the *crimen incesti*, the virgins were buried within the city, a sign that both points to a sacrificial death and reflects the people of Rome ensuring their safety via a living sacrifice.

It is no coincidence that many live interments were linked to political or social turmoil in Rome.²⁸ As stated, a Vestal Virgin was often accused of the *crimen incesti* either because the flame in the *aedes* went out, because she was actually guilty, or because the city faced some political or societal strife and the Romans were looking for a scapegoat to restore the *pax deorum* (literally, "peace of the gods"). Livy, for instance, tells about the punishment of the virgin Oppia:

²⁴ Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, 58-61.

²⁵ There is some uncertainty concerning the role of Vesta in the ancient world, but for the sake of this argument, I will agree with Wildfang and Staples that Vesta serves as a goddess of the earth.

²⁶ See Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, 57-61. Parker agrees with this notion, see "Why Were the Vestals Virgins?," 575-578.

²⁷ See Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgin*, 132-135 and Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, 58.

²⁸ Parker, "Why Were the Vestals Virgins?," 580-582.

Bellum inde Veiens initum, et Volsci rebellarunt . . . Accessere ad aegras iam omnium mentes prodigia caelestia, prope cotidianas in urbe agrisque ostentantia minas; motique ita numinis causam nullam aliam vates canebant... quam haud rite sacra fieri; qui terrores tamen eo evasere ut Oppia virgo Vestalis damnata incesti poenas dederit. (AUC 2.42.14-18)

Then the Veian war began, and the Volscians revolted . . . Heavenly portents were added to the universal anxiety, revealing threats almost daily in the city and the country alike. And the prophets were saying... that there was no other cause for the divine disturbance except that the sacred rites had not been performed according to custom. These terrors nevertheless resulted in the following: Oppia the Vestal Virgin was condemned for unchastity and paid the penalty.

Oppia was accused of and punished for the *crimen incesti* because the internal political strife and war with the Veians and Volscians suggested that something was wrong in the house of Vesta. This death sentence given to a Vestal on account of social or political trouble is a pattern found in ancient records of live burial, and further emphasizes the direct correlation between the upkeep of the sacred vow of virginity and the upkeep of the city as a whole.²⁹

Three Mythical Vestals

Throughout Roman myth and history, many guilty and innocent women were convicted of the *crimen incesti*. Not all of these women faced the punishment of live interment, however. The remaining chapters of this thesis will focus on three mythical Vestals who either committed the *crimen incesti* or somehow became involved with dishonoring Vesta and Rome. It is essential to discuss briefly the difference between historical and mythical Vestals. Historical Vestals are women who actually lived in

²⁹ See Holt Parker's argument concerning this, "Why Were the Vestals Virgins?," 580-583.

Rome and about whom we have undisputed evidence as to their physical existence. Mythical Vestals, on the other hand, are Vestals that appear in historical records but cannot be indisputably proven to have existed. The three Vestals I focus on are mythical Vestals that play an essential part in the Roman perception of the past.

Rhea Silvia is the first Vestal of whom there is a record. She is said to be the daughter of Numitor, an Alban king.³⁰ Mars raped her, as she claimed, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Romulus and Remus, the legendary founders of Rome. Breaking the vow of chastity was, for Rhea, unintentional, since it was forced upon her in rape. Rhea, however, was not punished for this crime in the way we might think; instead, she became the mother of Rome and the accusation of her unchastity diminishes. I will explore further Rhea Silvia's story and the reasons for her evasion of punishment in my second chapter.

Tarpeia is a second mythical Vestal who did not commit the *crimen incesti* in its traditional sense, but committed another form of unchastity: treason.³¹ Tarpeia let in Titus Tatius and his Sabine army when they were attacking the city after the Romans had seized their women. Either Tarpeia was bribed by Tatius to admit the troops, or she made a bargain with him.³² Whether bribed or tempted, she becomes a traitor of Rome. She

³⁰ Titus Livius Patavinus *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.3.10.

³¹ For a detailed discussion on the relationship between the *crimen incesti* and *traditio*, see Parker, "Why Were the Vestals Virgins?," 582. Parker discusses the traditional Roman connection between the "penetration" of a Vestal with the "penetration" of trust.

³² L. *AUC* 1.11.6-9. As will be elaborated in chapter three, Sextus Propertius gives a third account, saying she was infatuated with Titus Tatius and made a bargain that if he agreed to marry her, she would let them enter Rome; Propertius *Elegiae* 4.

was crushed by the soldiers' shields, which Livy says may have been her just punishment, but she nonetheless becomes a symbol for Rome.³³ Her story will be the subject of my third chapter.

Tuccia is a very mysterious Vestal because there are not many ancient sources for her story. From what has been recorded, she was charged for the *crimen incesti*, but pled her innocence. To prove herself, she prayed to Vesta to allow her to carry a sieve full of water from the Tiber to the Vestal temple without dripping anything on the ground.³⁴ She did so and was proven innocent, becoming a powerful symbol of virtue for over five hundred years. Tuccia will be the Vestal considered in my fourth chapter.

The Vestal Virgins played an important role in Rome, and because they symbolized so much for the city, how their crimes were imagined to affect Rome must be addressed. This thesis will delve further into the mysterious nature of these three virgins and how their "crimes" develop throughout Roman history and culture.

³³ L. *AUC* 1.11.6-9.

³⁴ Pliny *HN* 28.3; Valerius Maximus *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* 8.1.5.11.

CHAPTER TWO

Rhea Silvia: Mother of Rome

The First Vestal

Rhea's Background

The first virgin recorded for the cult of Vesta in Alba Longa is, as far as we know, Rhea Silvia, who is also called Ilia.¹ Rhea was the daughter of Numitor and was made a Vestal by her uncle, Amulius, in order to prevent her from bearing children. Perhaps the fullest historical account of Rhea belongs to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who gives her background, rape, and childbearing narratives.² The fact that we know so little about Rhea herself is largely due to the fame of her sons, Romulus and Remus. Because of their importance to the founding of Rome, her tale is often passed over or only briefly mentioned. Even so, this chapter will explore more deeply her role in the Roman imagination.

According to Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, Rhea Silvia's father is the ostracized ruler, Numitor, whose brother Amulius usurped the throne, despite their father's wishes and the hereditary bestowal of the reign (L. *AUC* 1.3). Amulius then proceeded to murder his nephews and to make Rhea Silvia a Vestal Virgin, lest the throne be taken back by

¹ Plu. *Num.* 10.1 cites Tarpeia as among the first four Vestals under Numa, but this presumably assumes the position of "Vestal" in the fullest sense, with all the rites of the cult. This may also be referring to a different Tarpeia. Rhea is the first we know of before the cult was as formalized as it came to be under Numa.

² D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.76.3-1.79.4.

Numitor's race in the future (1.3). Rhea, however, was raped by Mars, and became pregnant with twin boys, Romulus and Remus (1.4). Amulius, having uncovered her crime of impurity, the *crimen incesti* of Vestals, had the boys exposed and Rhea Silvia put into prison (1.4). The twins were rescued and grew up to found Rome (1.7). Their tale has been researched greatly, and the sources for their lives and deeds are prodigious.³ There are, however, discrepancies in the tale of Rhea that must be examined.

One such discrepancy is Rhea Silvia's parentage. The ancient sources differ on this point. Ennius, unlike Livy, says that the father of Rhea was not Numitor, but rather Aeneas.⁴ Because his work is fragmentary, it is difficult to discern whether Ennius wrote "daughter of Aeneas" to indicate the lineage as a whole or not. This is most likely not the case, judging by the comments of Servius, which reiterate Aeneas as the father of Rhea and the grandfather of Romulus and Remus.⁵ Ennius' view is the least common among ancient authors and modern scholars.⁶

Dionysius of Halicarnassus presents another perspective, saying that Romulus and Remus were the seventeenth in descent from Aeneas,⁷ which is in accordance with Livy, who lists seventeen of the twins' ancestors.⁸ In the *Aeneid*, Virgil designates a certain

³ For instance, see L. *AUC* 1.3-4 and D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.77-89.

⁴ Quintus Ennius *Fragmenta* 31.

⁵ *Ibid.* 32-48.

⁶ Catherine Connors, "Ennius, Ovid and Representations of Ilia," *Materiali e discussion per l'analisi dei testi classici*, no. 32 (1994): 101n6.

⁷ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.45.3.

⁸ L. *AUC* 1.3.

Aeneas as Rhea's father, most likely Silvius Aeneas or another descendant, and he also records that Romulus comes from the line of Assaracus, who is a great-grandfather of Aeneas.⁹ Based upon all of these accounts, Rhea Silvia is undoubtedly descended from Aeneas, but her exact parenthood is inconclusive.¹⁰ Numitor, however, claims paternity in the majority of sources, and therefore it is most likely that the Romans believed that he, not Aeneas, was Rhea's father. As to the mother of Rhea, she is never mentioned by name, but Dionysius makes a brief reference to her in his account when he records her assistance in protecting Rhea just after the incident of the rape.¹¹ This is all that we know of Rhea's parents.

This dispute about the origin of Rhea Silvia's parentage and lineage leads to a further examination of Aeneas' role in connection with Rome's founding, however, since his place in the ancestry can help explain Rhea's function as Vestal and mother, as well as her legacy to Rome. Aeneas came to Italy from Troy to found a new race, according to Jupiter's prophecy in the *Aeneid*.¹² Supposedly he brought with him to Lavinium the household gods (*penates*) from Troy,¹³ which perhaps provides a theory as to the origins

⁹ *V. Aen.* 6.777-778. See also *D.H. Ant. Rom.* 1.62.1-2.

¹⁰ According to a quotation of Agathyllus of Arcadia, a Greek poet, recorded in *D.H. Ant. Rom.* 1.72.1, Aeneas had offspring named Romulus. Agathyllus' phrasing implies that Aeneas's son was Romulus, but if this is the case then Rhea would be his wife. She therefore could be Aeneas's daughter, wife, or descendent. This confusion, however, withdraws from the most widely accepted mythology. Instead, because most of the sources view Rhea as the daughter of Numitor, it seems that this was the most popular version of her tale.

¹¹ *D.H. Ant. Rom.* 1.77.4.

¹² *V. Aen.* 1.257-296.

¹³ *Ibid.* 1.67, 1.378; *D.H. Ant. Rom.* 2.65.2 states this as well.

of Vesta's cult to Rome.¹⁴ Ennius' indication that Rhea Silvia was Aeneas's daughter logically flows into her role as the mother of the Roman race because through such a close hereditary association, the twins' roles continue the destiny of Aeneas. As a result, the myth of Romulus and Remus emphasizes the urban founding of their grandfather and why they were destined to do the same as he.

The controversy surrounding Rhea's life provides proof to us concerning the ambiguity of her myth to the Romans. She played such an essential part in the formulation of Rome, yet her tale is not precise or exact. This is important for our consideration because it tells us about the Roman mindset. The ancient Romans were not concerned with every fact of their history, but rather with the overarching narrative. Rhea's tale is contradictory and vague, but she still serves as a necessary element in the city's founding because without her the Roman race would have no idea from whom they came. The disputed nature of the myth offers the Romans a starting place from which their city growth and societal development can only improve. Because the details are blurred and the facts are mixed, the Roman race can begin to create an identity that is more definite. Rhea's myth is a point of departure, which opens doors for the nation's growth. Not only her heritage, but also other aspects of her story supplement this notion, and the rest of her myth must be examined.

¹⁴ See chapter one of this thesis for the origin of the cult of Vesta in Rome.

Rhea's Salvation

When considering Rhea Silvia's role as a Vestal, a curious factor in the series of events leading up to her forced virginity by Amulius is passed over, namely, the fact that Rhea's brother(s)¹⁵ were all killed, but she was not. The preservation of her life, at its surface, can be explained as necessary for the *fatum* "fate" of Rome and the fulfillment of the prophecy for Aeneas' race,¹⁶ and the Romans would not have questioned this.¹⁷ The detail of her survival, however, is quite important. Amulius could have easily murdered her alongside her brother(s), but he did not. This component of the story remains unaddressed by Livy, and he does not mention *fatum* until his record moves on to discuss Romulus and Remus:

Addit sceleri scelus: stirpem fratris virile interemit: fratris filiae Reae 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.
(AUC 1.3.11- 1.4.1)

Amulius added crime to crime: he killed the young stock of his brother. The daughter of his brother, Rhea Silvia, through a façade of honor, when he had chosen her as a Vestal, he deprived of the hope of offspring through perpetual virginity. But, in my opinion, the origin of so great a city and the beginning of the greatest empire second to the powers of the gods were destined by the fates.

¹⁵ The number of brothers Rhea had is unclear. According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Aegestus seems to be her only sibling, see *Ant. Rom.* 1.76.2; but according to Livy *virile stirpem* is ambiguous and does not specify the number of offspring to Numitor, see AUC 1.3.11.

¹⁶ V. *Aen.* 777-783.

¹⁷ Marcus Junianus Justinus, *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus* 43.5, translated by John Selby Watson (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853) speaks of *Fortuna* as the reason behind the boy's exposure, but makes no mention of the murder of Amulius' nephews. It can be inferred that *fortuna* likely played a role in the preservation of both Romulus and Remus' lives and Rhea's life.

Fatum is mentioned only after the murders, and only to justify the birth of the boys, not the salvation of Rhea.¹⁸ In a sense, however, the boys were the salvation of Rhea. Their fame, destined by the fates, elevated Rhea's myth into a necessary tale because without her they would not have existed to found Rome. But when it comes to her physical salvation, Amulius feigns "kindness" in making Rhea a Vestal, but his personal motives are actually the driving force of this decision. Perhaps Amulius preserved her life to counterbalance his overall cruelty, but this is not likely, because a sudden change of heart cannot explain why he still kills her brother(s). Her escape from death may not be explained by Livy, but further thoughts can be gleaned from Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

Dionysius also tells the tale of Amulius' usurpation and provides a more structured view of Amulius' decision to preserve Rhea:

τελευτῶν ἔρημον γένους τὸν οἶκον τοῦ Νεμέτορος ἐπεβούλευσε ποιῆσαι, τοῦ τε δίκην ὑποσχεῖν φόβῳ καὶ ἔρωτι μὴ παυσθῆναι ποτε τῆς ἀρχῆς. βουλευσάμενος δὲ ταῦτα ἐκ πολλοῦ πρῶτον μὲν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Νεμέτορος Αἴγεστον ἄρτι γενειάζοντα φυλάξας ἔνθα ἐκνηγέται, προλοχίσας τοῦ χωρίου τὸ ἀφανέστατον, ἐξελθόντα ἐπὶ θήραν ἀποκτείνει καὶ παρεσκεύασε λέγεσθαι μετὰ τὸ ἔργον ὡς ὑπὸ ληστῶν ἀναιρεθεῖν τὸ μειράκιον.... Νεμέτωρ δὲ ἤδει μὲν τὸ ἔργον, λογισμῶ δὲ κρείττονι τοῦ πάθους χρώμενος ἄγνοιαν ἐσκήπτετο εἰς ἀκινδυνότερον ἀναβαλέσθαι χρόνον τὴν ὀργὴν βουλευσάμενος. Ἀμόλιος δὲ τὰ τοῦ μειρακίου ὑπολαβὼν λεληθέναι δεύτερα τάδε ἐποίει: τὴν θυγατέρα τοῦ Νεμέτορος Ἰλίαν, ὡς δὲ τινες γράφουσι Ἐρέαν ὄνομα, Σιλουΐαν δ' ἐπὶ κλησιν, ἐν ἀκμῇ γάμου γενομένην ἰέριαν ἀποδείκνυσιν Ἐστίας, ὡς μὴ τάχιον εἰς ἀνδρὸς ἐλθοῦσα τέκη τιμωροῦς τῷ γένει. (*Ant. Rom.* 1.76.1-4)

Finally, he (i.e., Amulius) planned to make the house of Numitor bereft of offspring, both from fear of suffering punishment and from his desire never to be deposed from power. Having thought through these things for a long time, he first marked out where the son of Numitor, Aegestus, who was then just getting his beard, hunted, and having laid an ambush in the most hidden part of the place,

¹⁸ For a discussion on Livy's use of *fatum* and *fortuna*, see P.G. Walsh, "Livy and Stoicism," *The American Journal of Philology* 79, no. 4 (1958): 355-375.

he killed him as he was coming to the hunt, and he arranged for it to be said that the young man had been killed by robbers.... Numitor knew about the crime, but with his reasoning being greater than his suffering, he proclaimed his ignorance and was planning to hold back his anger to a less dangerous time. And Amulius, supposing that the matter of the boy was unknown, was making this second plan: he appointed Ilia, the daughter of Numitor, whom some call Rhea, whose surname is Silvia, who was ripe for marriage, as a priestess of Hestia (Vesta), lest, if she first married a man, she might bear avengers for her race.

Here it seems as though Amulius carefully planned the death of Rhea's brother Aegestus, before proceeding to make her a Vestal. It seems as if Amulius was less interested in viciously slaughtering his brother's children, and was more interested in pinning the blame of such occurrences on "robbers." Numitor, however, is not fooled by Amulius' pretenses. He suspects him and knows he is guilty of murder and greed. Perhaps Rhea is preserved so that her brother's death may seem to be more of an accident or a crime committed by others, not by Amulius. *Fatum* preserved the life of Rhea. Her investiture as a Vestal happens because of an uncle whose impulsive destruction of his nephew(s) passed over Rhea by fate.

Amulius and Rhea

According to Livy, Amulius subjected Rhea to the role of a virgin as "a façade of honor" (*speciem honoris*, AUC 1.3.11) to her societal and familial role. Really, however, her subjugation was for his personal preferences. He wanted to retain the throne for his own family line. The traditional role of a woman in the ancient world was to be

submissive to men and to bear children.¹⁹ The gender differentiation becomes accentuated in male and female dynamics, and in this part of the narrative, Amulius has treated Rhea as a means to gain a position of authority for himself, and she becomes nothing more than a pragmatic object. The gender relationship at this time was entirely male dominated, and this is emphasized through Amulius' forceful appointment of Rhea into a position of perpetual virginity.

This presents a predicament in the discussion. If we consider the mythical implications behind the narrative of Rhea Silvia, it is not logically cohesive that she serves as a virgin and yet is raped. The obvious question arises as to why the Romans would have such a controversial story serve as the founding myth of their nation. The answer is a complex one, but to state it as simply as possible: violence, especially violence against women, provides the foundation for future glory in Roman myth. The myth of Lucretia serves as a potent example. Sextus Tarquinius forced Lucretia, a virtuous wife, into adultery. She attempted to deny, but he threatened the honor of her family. As a result, Lucretia committed suicide so that women after her might see the proper punishment for unchastity.²⁰ Because of her role as a Vestal Virgin, Rhea's rape becomes all the more accentuated for subsequent history. Had Rhea Silvia been an ordinary girl instead of a Vestal, her crime would seem less heinous, but to have Rome founded upon a myth as contentious as hers indicates the character of the city. Since Rome came from her sons, her crime becomes her commemoration and increases her

¹⁹ Madeleine M. Henry and Sharon L. James, "Women, City, State: Theories, Ideologies, and Concepts in the Archaic and Classical Periods," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, eds. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 86.

²⁰ L. *AUC* 1.57-58.

significance to the later Roman world because rape in early Rome led to the overthrow of tyrants and is directly linked to revolution.²¹ There is more to the tale than this, however. As will be discussed in the third chapter on Tarpeia, Tarpeia's betrayal of the city of Rome is in and of itself harmful to the state and insulting to Vesta, but in the end it leads to the unification of two nations and the doubling of political power and territory. Rhea Silvia's myth is similar. Her rape taken on its own is undesirable, but it ultimately leads to the founding of a city, which becomes the metropolis of the ancient world. In fact, the main aspect of her tale is the rape, and it contributes to the controversy but yet leads to Romulus and Remus, the glory of both Rhea and Rome.

Father Mars and the Crimen Incesti

After her rape, Rhea Silvia blames the deed on Mars. Some report that Amulius was the author of the deed, and others give other perpetrators. Dionysius, for instance, says that a suitor may have committed the rape, or Amulius may have,²² and he is skeptical as to the possibility of it being a divine act.²³ Plutarch also states that Amulius could have been the culprit.²⁴ Why Mars could have been the malefactor was, for the Romans, due to fate. Livy conjectures that Rhea blames Mars in order to make the nature

²¹ Henry and James, "Women, City, State," 89.

²² D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.77.1.

²³ *Ibid.* 1.77.2.

²⁴ Plut. *Rom.* 4.2.

of the deed less heinous.²⁵ With Mars as the father of Rome, the precedent is set for a nation ruled perpetually by conflict. Rome was to be divine, and its founders were to rise from a divinity. In reality, however, Rhea could have blamed the deed on her uncle, if it were in fact him, and perhaps use his criminality to reinstate her father as ruler, but it would likely not have worked since Amulius's murderous and tyrannical behavior in the past did not preserve or renew Numitor's leadership. By attributing the rape to an unseen divinity, Rhea not only creates a divine paternity for her twins, but also places herself in a better light. Her pregnancy is from above, and her sexual encounter is heavenly. Despite the rapist, however, Rhea is no less guilty of the *crimen incesti*.

As a Vestal, Rhea would have presumably performed the necessary rituals and requirements of the cult, but there was one law that was not maintained: the law of chastity. Ennius recounts a dream that Rhea had, prophesying her rape and pregnancy.²⁶ According to *Fragmenta* 1.32-48 preserved in Cicero's *De Divinatione*, Rhea Silvia dreams that a *homo pulcher* comes upon her beside the Tiber and overtakes her:

Et cita cum tremulis anus attulit artubus lumen,
talia tum memorat lacrimans, exterrita somno:
"Eurydica prognata, pater quam noster amavit,
vires vitaeque corpus meum nunc deserit omne.
Nam me visus homo pulcher per amoena salicta
et ripas raptare locosque novos. Ita sola
postilla, germana soror, errare videbar
tardaque vestigare et quaerere te, neque posse
corde capessere: semita nulla pedem stabilitat.
Exim compellere pater me voce videtur

²⁵ L. *AUC* 1.4.2.

²⁶ For a discussion on the potential reinvention of this dream by Ennius from Homer's Tyro narrative, see Connors, "Ennius, Ovid and Representations of Ilia," 102-105. Also, for a discussion on the tragic nature of the dream, see Nita Krevans, "Ilia's Dream: Ennius, Virgil, and the Mythology of Seduction," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 95 (1993): 260-265.

his verbis: ‘O gnata, tibi sunt ante gerendae
aerumnae, post ex fluvio fortuna resistet. ’
Haec ecfatus pater, germana, repente recessit
nec sese dedit in conspectum corde cupitus,
quamquam multa manus ad caeli caerula templa
tendebam lacrumans et blanda voce vocabam.
Vix aegro cum corde meo me somnus reliquit.” (*Enn. apud. Cic. Div. 1.20.40-41*)

And when the old woman has brought forth a light quickly with
trembling limbs, then the girl, having awoken from her sleep in terror,
tearfully remembers such things: “O offspring of Eurydice, whom our
father loved, strength and life now desert my whole body. For a
beautiful man seemed to drag me away through pleasant willow groves
and along riverbanks and through new places. And so afterwards, dear
sister, I seemed to wander alone, and slowly to search for and seek you,
but I was unable to seize you, as much as I longed to: no path supported
my foot. Then our father seemed to address me with his voice in these
words: ‘O daughter, first there are toils that must be borne by you,
afterwards your fortune will rise from the river.’ Having proclaimed this,
sister, our father suddenly withdrew, nor, much longed for, did he come
into my sight again, although many times I raised my hands to the deep
blue regions of the sky, and weeping called with a pleading voice. And
sleep has scarcely left me with my heart sick.”

Her father, unnamed, but presumably Aeneas in this case, since the record is of Ennius,
tells Rhea that fortune will rise from the river. The twins are her fortune, since they are
rescued by Faustulus along the banks of the Tiber. Preceding Romulus and Remus is
Rhea’s rape, one of the *aerumnae* to which her father refers.²⁷ As a Vestal, she will face
the loss of her chastity. The punishment for such a crime was, in Rhea’s case, prison.²⁸
This dream is very prophetic, much like Aeneas and the birth of Romulus and Remus.
Prophecy follows prophecy and fulfillment of prophecy follows fulfillment of prophecy.
Rhea, through her dream, has been given a prophecy, which, unbeknownst to her, will

²⁷ Nita Krevans, “Ilia’s Dream,” 258.

²⁸ See discussion below with regards to various records of her punishment.

actually come true. She uses no precautionary measures to prevent the occurrence of the events in her dream. In this case, she becomes the fulfillment of the prophecy, although she was unaware. Rhea's rape satisfies the words of what was foretold, and based on her dream, the blame of her fault is placed not on any intentional breaking of chastity, but on the impulsive passion of a *homo pulcher*, who is later identified as Mars.²⁹

Rhea's troubles are foretold, and she is afraid. Her pregnancy was not chosen, as it would be with a Vestal who intentionally violated the vow. Instead, she is raped. Nevertheless, her virginity is broken. In chapter one I explained that the Vestals were often accused of the *crimen incesti* when Romans believed that the *pax deorum* had been disrupted (i.e., after a major defeat or other disaster). In the case of Rhea, however, nothing detrimental had happened in Rome that needed explanation or someone to blame, besides Amulius' dethronement of Numitor. This situation, however, did not bring about her blame, since Amulius did not accuse Rhea, but found out about the crime after she was already pregnant.³⁰ Also, Rhea went into seclusion during her pregnancy, on the suggestion of her mother,³¹ not attending the rituals of Vesta any longer. In separating herself from the cult rites, she decreases the guilt of disavowal because she has no way of defiling the sacred services if she does not participate. Amulius suspected something

²⁹ Identified as such by Justinus *Epitome of the Philippic History* 43.3, V. *Aen.* 6.757, and L. *AUC.* 1.4.

³⁰ As Takács, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons*, 80 notes how Vestals faced accusations when problems arose. In Rhea's case, no accusation happened, but rather a discovery of her pregnancy, see D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.78.1-2. As Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins*, 63 states, "the fate of the potential child is never mentioned; presumably because it was not thought possible that the woman's transgression could be hidden long enough for her to bear a child. Nevertheless, Romulus' mother was a Vestal Virgin."

³¹ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.77.4.

because she was gone from the ceremonies so long.³² Her crime was exposed just before she gave birth, then the punishment came about. She was not blamed because the *pax deorum* was disrupted, but because she was continuing the line of Numitor and she had actually, not figuratively, broken the vow.³³

In producing offspring for Numitor's family, Rhea helps create not just a new Roman identity, but Roman identity itself. Without this rape, a necessary tale for early Rome, Amulius' race would have ruled, and all of subsequent history would have been different. The Roman nation and race is absolutely grounded Rhea's myth because, according to Ancient Roman thought, Rome's existence depended on her sons.

Breaking Boundaries

Not only societal boundaries, but also physical boundaries were breached in the narrative of Rhea. Her rape is representative of the breaking of both metaphorical and physical boundaries. In Livy, this penetration of fortifications is a theme that occurs both literally in edifices and figuratively in rape. In the case of Rhea, her rape, the first of many in Rome's early history, symbolizes not merely a Vestal's *crimen incesti* but rather a foretelling of the penetration of the boundaries of Rome. The attack by Mars in particular foreshadows the continuous combative nature of Rome throughout her history. Rome was raped into existence by the god of War.³⁴ In his article on Livy, David

³² D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.78.1.

³³ "Figuratively" in the sense of being blamed with no grounds, simply to explain troubles in Rome, as in the case of other Vestals.

³⁴ Henry and James, "Woman, City, State," 89.

Konstan mentions the theme of boundary penetration throughout the first book of the *Ab Urbe Condita*.³⁵ He discusses the attack of the Sabines, the crossing of the wall by Remus, and fraternal and familial “boundaries” crossed that contribute to the early history of the city’s founding.

Another aspect of infiltration that Konstan does not explicitly address, however, is that of sexual penetration.³⁶ Rape is a recurrent event in Livy’s account, beginning with Rhea and moving on to the Sabines³⁷ and Lucretia,³⁸ as well as others. These sexual violations represent the crossing of chastity’s boundaries and the forced entry into or against the “opponent.”³⁹ The fact that the god of war rapes Rhea is not insignificant; the fact that she was raped at all is not insignificant. Mars, not coincidentally, is the one who breaches the walls of the mother of Rome. This foreshadows the whole character that will come to define the Roman state.⁴⁰ The early history of Rome following Rhea Silvia’s story is a nearly endless record of repetitive boundary penetrations. As I will

³⁵ David Konstan, “Narrative and Ideology in Livy: Book 1,” *Classical Antiquity* 5, no. 2 (October 1986): 198-215.

³⁶ Sandra R. Joshel, “The Body Female and the Body Politic: Livy’s Lucretia and Verginia,” in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. Amy Richlin, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 121. Joshel addresses the notion of woman as boundary and that through penetration, she becomes a turning point in the narrative of Rome.

³⁷ L. *AUC* 1.9. In this thesis, “rape,” when referring to the Sabine attack, is not the modern sense or connotation of the word, but rather an abduction. In this instance, the point is forceful abduction, either sexually or through seizure. In Rhea’s case, the rape is sexual.

³⁸ L. *AUC* 1.59.

³⁹ Parker, “Why Were the Vestals Virgins?,” 568.

⁴⁰ For a concise timeline showing the number of wars that took place in Rome from its founding to the Battle of Actium, see Harriet I. Flower, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 365-366.

discuss in further detail in chapter three, the Sabine army marches against Rome after the rape of the Sabine women. Both of these instances are forms of boundary breach. The men of Rome seize the Sabine women, breaking the boundary of foreign relations, and Titus Tatius and his men literally enter the gates of Rome. In the case of Rhea Silvia, her “boundaries” have been broken into and her chastity seized by force, and soon she will have twins that will themselves face the infiltration of individual boundaries and will also endure a fraternal war, emphasizing their paternal pedigree.⁴¹ Her tale is the first of many that indicates boundary breach, and is archetypal for subsequent history.

Rhea as Fire and Water

The breaking of boundaries is only one metaphor in her tale. Another arises in the symbolism of the hearth fire.⁴² As stated in the first chapter of this thesis, the flame represents the chastity of the virgins. As long as it remains lit, their virginity has been kept pure. If the flame is extinguished in any way except at the renewal festival on March 1, then one of the virgin’s is suspected for the *crimen incesti*. The symbolism of the flame existed before its physical placement in the *aedes* in Rome.⁴³ The flame represents the inviolability of Rome, and the virginity of the maidens.⁴⁴ Thus, Rhea

⁴¹ L. AUC 1.7; Alison Keith, *Engendering Rome: Women in Latin Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44.

⁴² The flame was supposedly introduced at Rome by Romulus according to Plut. *Rom.* 22.1, but for the most part it is assumed that the fire was always a cultic element of the Vestals, even before Rome.

⁴³ Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins*, 106.

⁴⁴ Publius Ovidius Naso *Fasti* 6, esp. 6.291.

Silvia embodies the flame that would be kindled some fifty years later in Rome. When Amulius made her a Vestal and consigned her to perpetual virginity,⁴⁵ this event signaled the lighting of her “flame.” When Rhea has been raped, caught, and has given birth, she dies in the river (either was thrown into the river and drowned, or Tiber took her to be his bride).⁴⁶ In drowning, her flame was symbolically extinguished. Her chastity was snuffed out, and her disappearance into the streams of the Tiber metaphorically conveys this. The extinguishing of her flame does not reflect unsteady times in Rome, however. Instead, the extinguishing of her chastity kindles a new flame, a new hearth: Rome itself.⁴⁷

Rhea Silvia and the two other Vestals that will be discussed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis all have several points of similarity in their stories. The first point in common is water. In the case of Rhea Silvia, she is fetching water at the time the rape occurs. Micaela Janan discusses water imagery for Tarpeia in Propertius 4,⁴⁸ but some aspects of this element correspond to its existence in Rhea Silvia’s narrative. Janan first details the relationship between water and femininity. Water is a liquid, fluid and weak. Men, on the other hand are compared to solids, strong, not easily breakable, and immutable. In the case of Vestal Virgins, the element of water represents their feminine

⁴⁵ L. *AUC* 1.3.11.

⁴⁶ See discussion below concerning the punishment and death of Rhea Silvia.

⁴⁷ Vesta as the goddess of the hearth holds the fire, but unlike other goddesses, Vesta never becomes a mother. Rhea, as a Vestal, becomes a mother, and in giving birth to her half-divine sons, she (as fire) is the hearth of Rome in the sense that she carries Rome in her womb. Jean-Joseph Goux, “Vesta, or the Place of Being,” *Representations*, no. 1 (February 1983): 97.

⁴⁸ Micaela Janan, “‘Beyond Good and Evil’: Tarpeia and Philosophy in the Feminine,” *The Classical World* 92, no. 5 (May-June 1999): 429-443.

nature, and with that the obvious characteristic of chastity. For Varro, water serves the same function as something feminine. He discusses procreation in general:

Igitur causa nascendi duplex: ignis et aqua. Ideo ea nuptiis in limine adhibentur, quod coniungitur hic, et mas ignis, quod ibi semen, aqua femina, quod fetus ab eius humore, et horum vincionis vis Venus. (*De Lingua Latina* 5.61)

Therefore the cause of birth is twofold: fire and water. For this reason these are employed at the threshold during marriage ceremonies, because this is a place where joining occurs, and the fire is the male, because semen is there, the water is the female, because the fetus comes from her moisture, and Venus is the force of their bond.

The fire element as it pertains to men is relevant to her story because Mars represents the fire due to his virile nature as the god of War.⁴⁹ Fire, when merged with water, according to Varro, is the cause for procreation, and we see this in the myth. When “fire” and “water” come together, chastity is doused. The fetuses that come from Rhea come from her fluid, from her femininity and encroachment of her chastity.⁵⁰

Rhea's Punishment and Death

Concerning the punishment and death of Rhea Silvia, both prison and drowning have been mentioned. The sources differ on this aspect of Rhea's tale. Livy, on the one

⁴⁹ Mars' masculinity is inferred here based on the notion that men, not women are explicitly associated with warfare. See Cristianna Franco, “Women in Homer,” in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, eds. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 58 for the direct correlation between men and war. This discusses the relationship in in Greece in particular, but the notion can be transferred to the Roman society as well.

⁵⁰ There is also prevalent in the cult of Vesta, the phallic image in the hearth fire, reflecting the masculinity of fire in direct relation with the cult. Mary Beard, “The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980): 19. Takács, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons*, 84-85.

hand, states that Rhea was incarcerated,⁵¹ but he never states for how long, by whom, or what happened to her after her time in prison. According to Ennius, on the other hand, she is thrown into the Tiber by Amulius, and even “marries” the Tiber.⁵² Dionysius, as if to avoid taking the side of any author, no doubt to keep his work unbiased, relays both accounts, stating that there are multiple versions. He records that some say she was put into prison, others say she was killed immediately.⁵³ Unlike Ennius or Livy, however, Dionysius curiously hints at the possibility of her being freed after the death of Amulius.⁵⁴ According to the three accounts, Rhea either died immediately, in prison, or from natural causes.

Plutarch gives another account, which brings in another character not found in the other sources: Antho, Amulius’ daughter. Plutarch claims Antho intervened and saved her cousin, putting Rhea into confinement until the birth of her children.⁵⁵ This is the only account that mentions Antho. Amulius saved Rhea from death by making her a Vestal, and Antho saved her by placing her in confinement.

Ennius relays Rhea’s “marriage” to the Tiber River.⁵⁶ This concept, unique to Ennius, gives a more positive ending to the tale of Rhea. She supposedly “died,” but in

⁵¹ L. *AUC* 1.4.

⁵² Enn. *Frag.* 55-56.

⁵³ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.79.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Plut. *Rom.* 3.3.

⁵⁶ Enn. *Frag.* 55-56. See also Ov. *Amores* 3.4, for his account of her marriage to the Anio prior to Ennius’ and others’ records of her marriage to the Tiber.

this death she joined the god Tiber in his watery realm as his wife. Horace recounts the how the Tiber avenged Ilia by flooding the banks and toppling the temple of Vesta.⁵⁷ The Tiber's love for Rhea appears in both authors, and when Rhea marries the Tiber, she becomes the water source of the Roman world. In *Engendering Rome*, Alison Keith mentions that in merging with the river Rome gains a "maternal landscape."⁵⁸ Thus, as the source of water for the Roman people, she essentially nurses Rome.⁵⁹ Her sons, too, are breastfed by her in drinking of her, and on her banks, Rome is born and "fed."

Rhea's union with the Tiber relates to her union with Mars. Both are gods of force. The Tiber, a river, acts as a boundary of Rome. He is the limit of the city, the force, which holds it back. He is also a god who can kill by the force of his waters, as in Rhea's death. Discussed earlier was the concept of boundaries broken. The Tiber was the boundary of Rome, and in becoming joined with the mother of Rome he "broke her boundaries" sexually, as Mars had done, but not through rape. The boundary of the future city lay with the mother of Rome, literally and metaphorically. As Holt Parker notes, "[a Vestal's] life and powers were circumscribed by the walls of the city."⁶⁰ If this is the case, then it is as if Rhea, as the boundary of Rome, creates the boundary for the future generations of Rome.

In their union, if the account of Ennius is to be believed, the boundary of Rome,

⁵⁷ Quintus Horatius Flaccus *Carmina* 1.2.13-20.

⁵⁸ Keith, *Engendering Rome*, 46.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Parker, "Why Were the Vestals Virgins?," 571.

the Tiber, joins with Rhea, who was broken sexually to create the boundaries of Rome. As the wife of Tiber, she now upholds the literal limit of Rome and is a goddess of the river out of which her sons would found the greatest nation in the ancient world. Like Lucretia in Livy's history,⁶¹ Rhea becomes an exemplary model for women, especially if her voluntary union with the river is considered.⁶² She becomes the "boundary" for Roman women, and this aspect of her myth is a necessary facet for determining Roman ideals. Rhea serves as a warning for Rome as well as a symbol. She warns against crossing boundaries by herself becoming one, yet she also symbolizes how from the banks of impurity a glorious nation will arise.

Rhea as Vessel

One aspect of the life of Rhea that concerns the stories of Tarpeia and Tuccia in the subsequent chapters is the motif of a vessel. In each of these stories, the women all serve as vessels, or relate to literal vessels. In the case of Rhea Silvia, she herself was a vessel. In carrying her twin boys she became the receptacle of Rome, the container that would bring about the future nation. Women's sexuality in general is seen as a vessel, and when Rhea's sexuality was breached, the container essentially had "holes," like Tuccia's sieve (chapter 4), or fell, spilling its contents, like the jar of Tarpeia (chapter 3).⁶³ Each of these women was figuratively a vessel of water, in the sense of femininity

⁶¹ L. *AUC* 1.57-59.

⁶² *Ov. Am.* 3.6.77-78; Connors, "Ennius, Ovid and Representations of Ilia," 110-111.

⁶³ *Prop. El.* 4.4.22-23.

and chastity, and either spilled their jars or, as with Tuccia, sealed their vessels.⁶⁴

Although the Rhea narrative does not explicitly mention a jar, Dionysius states the fact that she is fetching water from the grove of Mars when she is raped.⁶⁵ In order to fetch water, one needs a container, and as she drew the water she is likely to have dropped and potentially broken it when Mars came upon her.⁶⁶ Thus, she, like Tarpeia, spilled her jar's contents.⁶⁷ From Rhea, Tarpeia, and Tuccia, however, comes a positive aftermath. Rhea's fallen jar leads to Rome's founding, Tarpeia's spilled contents ultimately changed Roman identity and politics, and Tuccia's sieve proves her innocence and idealizes Roman and feminine virtue.

Conclusion

The life of Rhea Silvia is very ambiguous. The ancient records differ on numerous notions from her parentage, to the perpetrator of her rape, to her punishment and criminality. Most Roman sources see her as the daughter of Numitor who was forcibly made a victim of perpetual virginity. *Fatum*, however, saved her from such virginity, and she was raped by a *homo pulcher*, Mars. Her sons, having survived their failed murder by Amulius, grew up to found Rome, and Rhea became the mother of

⁶⁴ Janan, "Beyond Good and Evil," 435.

⁶⁵ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.77.1.

⁶⁶ Compare this interpretation to Ov. *Fast.* 3.9-22, in which Rhea Silvia is sleeping at the time of the seduction.

⁶⁷ This is clearly inference, but makes sense in the context of the narrative. See Giulia Sissa, *Greek Virginity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), esp. 146-157, for the significance, use, and symbolism of jars.

Rome. She was punished by Amulius, most likely being thrown in prison, and later drowned in the Tiber River. Her crime was not her fault, but an act of rape, and her breaking of the vow of chastity did not reflect the detriment of the state, but the soon-to-be founding of the city of Rome.

Rhea was the fire of Rome's hearth, maintaining and upholding the virtue not only of Vesta, but also of what would be the Roman nation. In drowning or marrying the Tiber, her flame was put out, signaling the end of her virginity, and from its banks, Rome would rise.

Rhea formed the boundary of Rome; she not only gave birth to the Roman nation, but also physically surrounded the city when she became the wife of the Tiber. She held Rome in her womb and then held Rome in her stream, nourishing the nation. She set the precedent for Vestals to follow her, emphasizing for them the sexual boundary that came about through her tale, which, when crossed, led to their deaths.

Lastly, Rhea served as a vessel. She literally carried Rome in her womb. When she came to the grove of Mars she carried a physical vessel to hold the water, but in her rape, she dropped her jar and her chastity spilled and possibly even shattered. Her vessel no longer held water for Vesta and instead she was transformed into the vessel—in Varro's notion of the fetus (*Ling.* 5.61)—for Rome.

CHAPTER THREE

Tarpeia the Traitor

The Second Vestal

Tarpeia, the daughter of Spurius Tarpeius, a distinguished citizen and commander of the Roman citadel, is the second Vestal on whom this thesis will focus.¹ She reportedly lived during the reign of Romulus and her story thus falls between the years 753 and 717 BC.² She betrayed Rome into the hands of Titus Tatius, the leader of the Sabine army, and as punishment, was crushed by the soldiers' shields. This chapter explores her tale, its relationship to her role as a Vestal, and how the Romans imagined that good came out of her betrayal of the city.

The sources for the myth of Tarpeia vary significantly in terms of detail, but Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, and Sextus Propertius give the most thorough accounts. Dionysius, Livy and a few more minor authors³ generally agree with one another on the basic facts, but Propertius, a poet, records a narrative that provides another version of the Tarpeia myth.⁴ Unlike the majority of the ancient historians, the fourth elegy of Propertius tells of Tarpeia the Vestal Virgin who, infatuated by the Sabine leader, Titus Tatius, betrays Rome in order to be with him, but is nonetheless killed by

¹ L. *AUC* 1.11.6, D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.38.2.

² B.O. Foster, trans., *Livy: History of Rome Books 1-2*, (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1919), 43.

³ Simylus in *Supplementum Hellenisticum*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones and Peter Parsons, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1983), 724.1, 5; Var. *Ling.* 5.7.41; L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus also records the tale of Tarpeia in his annals, but these are lost or fragmentary and thus will only be referenced via other author's mention of them.

⁴ Prop. *El.* 4.4.

him for her betrayal. The historians' accounts do not mention Tarpeia as a Vestal, nor do they say that she loved Tatius. Instead, they record that she would only allow the band of men to enter Rome, provided they gave her "what they had on their left arms."⁵ Obeying, albeit twisting her words, they hurl their shields on her, crushing her to death, and then they infiltrate the Roman citadel and attack the city. Although they do attack Rome and a battle ensues, a truce is eventually formed and the Sabine nation merges with Rome, increasing territory, population, and political power. Whether the narrative is more of a love story or a tale of bribery and greed, Tarpeia's myth nonetheless remains an influential turning point for the Roman nation because it ultimately leads to Roman prosperity.

One aspect of Tarpeia's myth that must be addressed first is her status as a Vestal Virgin. Propertius and Varro, two contemporary authors, both record Tarpeia as a Vestal, but neither Dionysius, Plutarch, nor Livy explicitly suggest this.⁶ There are several details that lend credence to the accounts of Propertius and Varro. The first is the chronology of her tale, which falls directly after the rape of the Sabine women.⁷ Romulus ordered the seizure of the Sabine women at a festival because Rome had a shortage of women and he wished to increase the population of Rome.⁸ Tarpeia, the

⁵ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.38.4; L. *AUC* 1.11.8; Plut. *Rom.* 17.2.

⁶ In the Loeb edition of Livy's history, there is a note that the mention of Tarpeia fetching water is a reference to the cult of Vesta, but the text itself does not explicitly state her role as a Vestal. Harry Rutledge agrees that these two are the only authors who mention Tarpeia as a Vestal, "Propertius' 'Tarpeia': The Poem Itself," *The Classical Journal* 60 (1964): 69.

⁷ L. *AUC* 1.9 gives the account of the Sabine rape, followed by Tarpeia's narrative in 1.11.

⁸ Plut. *Rom.* 14.2; Takács, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons*, 7.

daughter of a Roman, would have lived during this *raptio* and, if Rome really had no women (or very few marriageable women), her role as a Vestal would explain why she was not counted as an eligible wife for a Roman man.⁹

A second reason for believing that the Romans saw Tarpeia as a Vestal is her sexual status. Dionysius mentions the maidenhood of Tarpeia, indicating virginity, and Livy likewise relays her maidenhood. Of course maidenhood is not evidence enough to constitute her role as a Vestal, but Livy also mentions that she was on her way to fetch water outside of the walls when she saw the Sabine army, and that the water was for sacred rites.¹⁰ The spring from which she was fetching water is not mentioned, but if it was outside of the city, it is likely that it was the spring of Camenae, from which Vestals drew water.¹¹ The sacred rites referred to in Livy further indicate her Vestal role since the spring of Camenae provided the water the virgins used in various ceremonial sanctions for the cult.

A third reason for her likely role as a Vestal is her parentage. Both historians reference her father as an upstanding man, one of the requirements needed for young girls to become Vestals.¹² Although this is a minor detail and not only applicable to Vestals, it nonetheless contributes to the conclusion that Tarpeia was very likely imagined to be a

⁹ J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History and Habits*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 25. Henry and James mention this very question in “Women, City, State,” 90.

¹⁰ L. *AUC* 1.11.6; D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.38.3.

¹¹ Plut. *Num.* 13.2; Sextus Pompeius Festus *De Verborum Significatu* 152L; Takács, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons*, 30 discusses the spring.

¹² D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.38.2; L. *AUC* 1.11.6. Plutarch also mentions her father as a commander, *Rom.* 17.2.

Vestal Virgin. Although there seems to be some discrepancy concerning her Vestal role, this chapter will consider Tarpeia as a Vestal Virgin, in compliance with Propertius and Varro.

Her importance as a Vestal undergirds the fact that discrepancies exist at all. I will elaborate upon this throughout the chapter, but Tarpeia's role as a Vestal emphasizes her betrayal of Rome. As an ordinary maiden, Tarpeia's crime would have most likely still had the same outcome. Roman mythology designates her as a Vestal, however, since only Vestals hold the kind of power significant enough to explain how Rome was breached. In other words, Vestals were not ordinary women; they were unique in the city and represented the city's wellbeing. If a Vestal trades the city for something else, protection no longer stands. In this tale, however, the holiness of the traitor solidifies the power of Rome and its ability not only to recover, but to come back with an even stronger political force and national fervor as well.

Her Crime: Various Motives

Due to some variances in historical accounts concerning the details of Tarpeia's betrayal, it is necessary to discuss more of her myth. One such factor is her motivation for disowning Rome. Livy presents his readers with three different motivations behind Tarpeia's treachery. The first places the blame upon the Sabines, and Tatius in particular. Livy maintains that Tarpeia was not greedy, but rather that she was bribed:¹³

¹³ The distinction between greed and bribery is a fine one, but I point it out in order to show the amount of detail in Livy's account.

Huius filiam virginem auro corrumpit Tatius ut armatos in arcem accipiat; aquam forte ea tum sacris extra moenia petitem ierat. Accepti obrutam armis necavere, seu ut vi capta potius arx videretur, seu prodendi exempli causa, ne quid usquam fidum proditori esset. (L. *AUC* 1.11.6-8)

Tatius bribed his (i.e., Spurius Tarpeius') virgin daughter with gold to receive the armed men into the citadel; by chance she had gone outside the walls at that time to seek water for the sacred rites. Having been admitted the men killed her, buried by their shields, either so that the citadel might seem to have been captured instead by force, or in order to institute this occasion as an example, lest anyone anywhere keep faith with a traitor.

In this instance, it appears as if the betrayal of Rome was not her fault, but was the result of Tatius' bribery. Of course, she received the *armatos in arcem*, but the motivation came from temptation.

Contrasting this viewpoint with another, Livy gives a second version of the betrayal, this time presenting it not as a result of bribery, but of greed. This he refers to as a *fabula*:

Additur fabula, quod vulgo Sabini aureas armillas magni ponderis brachio laevo gemmatosque magna specie anulos habuerint, pepigisse eam quod in sinistris manibus haberent; eo scuta illi pro aureis donis congesta. (L. *AUC* 1.11.8-9)

A tale is added that because the Sabines usually had golden bracelets of great weight on their left arms and rings jeweled with great splendor, she had demanded that which they had on their left arms; for this reason they piled up their shields on her in place of the gifts of gold.

Unlike the previous passage, this one blames the avarice of Tarpeia as the determining factor in her death. Because she was greedy, she became a traitor and the men piled their shields on her and then resumed their capture of the city.

Livy gives a third account, merging the two previous ones. He has her directly demanding the shields:

Sunt qui eam ex pacto tradendi quod in sinistris manibus esset directo arma petisse dicant, et fraude visam agere, sua ipsam peremptam mercede.
(L. *AUC* 1.11.9)

There are those who say that in striking a bargain for what was on their left arms she had asked them for their arms directly, and since she seemed to act deceitfully, she was herself killed by her own arrangement.

Here Tarpeia is blamed once again, but this time she requests the shields (*arma*) and not the gold. Dionysius of Halicarnassus gives this account as well, claiming she asked for their shields so that, un-armed, they might be taken as prisoners.¹⁴

These three different approaches question the incentive behind Tarpeia's perfidy, but each version ends in the death of the Vestal Virgin, ultimately setting the precedent for the punishment of traitors.¹⁵ There is a fourth motivation, however, presented in Propertius' *Elegies*. The elegy will be discussed below, but in the scene of Tarpeia's betrayal, Propertius has Tarpeia suggest that she will hand Rome over to the Sabines only if Tatius will marry her.¹⁶ These versions have one similarity: they all lead to the betrayal of Rome. Tarpeia's greed, either for gold, shields, or Tatius, ends with her death and Rome in the hands of the Sabines. The symbolic nature of Tarpeia's betrayal lies in her embodiment in the wellbeing of the city. To betray the city is to betray Vesta, her chastity, and even herself. She hands herself over to death, and as a Vestal her treachery is of the worst kind since it was intentional and she disregarded the severity of its consequences.

¹⁴ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.39.1.

¹⁵ The etiological function of Tarpeia's tale will be discussed in more detail below.

¹⁶ Prop. *El.* 4.4.94-96.

Propertius' Fourth Elegy

Because Propertius' poem (4.4) is an important point of departure in the myth of Tarpeia, it is necessary to expound on the poem itself before moving on to discuss the more general aspects of Tarpeia's story.

Propertius begins and ends his poem by stating its etiological purpose, namely, to describe how Rome was betrayed and to show how the Tarpeian hill received its name (2, 104). He starts with topographical imagery, laying out ancient Rome, which had hills rather than walls and a spring rather than buildings (3-11). He proceeds with the tale of Tattius encamping across from this spring and Tarpeia seeing him from a distance as she draws water, admiring "the appearance of the king and his royal arms" (*regis facie et regalibus armis*, 4.4.21). She drops the urn she carries and continues to return frequently to the grove to look at him (22-32). She laments the fact that she loves Tattius, knowing full well that she betrays both Rome and Vesta in this love, and she recalls mythological tales of females betraying ones dear to their heart (33-63). Venus fills a dream Tarpeia has with furies that ignite her lustful passion further, and consequently she decides to make a bargain with Tattius (64-89).¹⁷ She gives him an offer of marriage in return for which she will open the citadel gates for them. Tattius agrees to her proposal, but upon entering, he and his men throw their shields on her, giving her the punishment they deem necessary for her betrayal of Rome and Vesta and the first death for traitors of this sort (90-104).

¹⁷ See Tara S. Welch, *Elegiac Cityscapes*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005): 66-67 for a discussion on the reading of "Vesta" rather than "Venus."

Several details stand out in the poem that pertain to the discussion of Tarpeia's role as a Vestal. In her first entrance, Tarpeia has arrived at the spring to draw water for Vestal rites. Her loyalty to the cult is apparent, and her motive for coming to the spring is innocent. She espies Tattius and is attracted to him. She drops her urn. This is the first sign that she will betray Vesta because the contents would have spilled and the jar may have broken. The typical vessels used by the Vestals to fetch water were Roman amphorae with pointed bases (Fig. 1). When Tarpeia drops the jar, it would have inevitably spilled the water.



Figure 1 Roman Amphora, date unknown.¹⁸

As discussed in chapter two, the water is representative of the virgin's chastity. Although no physical sexual encounter has occurred, Tarpeia's lustful desire for Tattius causes her

¹⁸ Image Source: "Ceramics and Glass: Roman Storage Vessels (Amphorae)," Museum of London, accessed April 25, 2014, http://archive.museumoflondon.org.uk/ceramics/pages/largerimage.asp?obj_id=28378%20&img_id=55202.

to lose sight of Vesta and become engrossed in love for Tattius. As a result, she returns to the grove not for Vesta, but to see her lover.

As her motivation for drawing water changes, Tarpeia realizes that in loving Tattius she betrays Vesta and the Roman hearth (35-36). In fact, she knows that she shamed Vesta (*pudenda*) with her deed (36). This detail makes her betrayal all the worse since she was intentionally disloyal to Rome and Vesta and did nothing to prevent her crime. Her treachery was deliberate and Rome was handed over according to a preconceived plan, which emphasizes the severity of the breach and simultaneously how strong Rome becomes once the truce between the nations is formed.

She then goes so far as to desire a marriage with Tattius, forbidden in the cult and an obvious sign that Rome is in danger.¹⁹ Her cares for the cult and the hearth are expunged by an insatiable desire for the enemy leader.

Propertius' Neoteric approach to poetry, which employs the so-called "subjective lover," allows for an interesting examination into the role of Tarpeia as a woman.²⁰ Propertius elevates Tarpeia's status in his poem by giving Tarpeia a voice, and blurring the lines between distinct femininity and masculinity.²¹ She represents femininity (largely through watery images), but as the poem progresses the feminine role seems to be the defining factor in bringing the two nations together (as the watery images penetrate

¹⁹ Prop. *El.* 4.4.59.

²⁰ Tara S. Welch, "Whose Reading of what Propertius?" in *Propertius*, eds. Ellen Greene and Tara S. Welch (Oxford, 2012), 11.

²¹ Janan, "'Beyond Good and Evil,'" 410.

the poem's other scenes).²² Like the rape of the Sabine women, the "marriage" Tarpeia has in mind is intended to provide unity to the warring sides (4.4.59-62). The unification of nations is typically a man's responsibility, and is here appropriated to maidenly Tarpeia.

Propertius creates a Romeo and Juliet-esque tale of two nations crossing boundaries for love. Of course, Tattius does not love Tarpeia as she loves him, but agrees to her bribe in order to enter the city.²³ When he succumbs, her chastity metaphorically breaks. A Vestal, whose greatest duty is to maintain her chastity, yields to a lascivious desire for the Sabine captain, and when he agrees to her longing, he essentially agrees to assist in breaking her vow to Vesta.

One point of irony in this elegy is in Tattius' accusation of Tarpeia as a traitor.²⁴ He has the men crush her because she has betrayed Rome, but he has just betrayed her in his false agreement. Both lovers become traitors, but only one dies. Also, the fact that Tattius finds disgrace in Tarpeia's betrayal, when it allowed him to access Rome's citadel, is a curious factor in the story. If through her treachery he gained his attack, why would he feel the need to punish her? This brings up the notion of etiology again.

Propertius' poem and the historians' story of Tarpeia are all etiological in some way. Propertius provides a locational etiology, showing how the Tarpeian hill received its name, and all of the historical accounts of Tarpeia are etiological in revealing how

²² Janan, "Beyond Good and Evil," 414-416.

²³ Prop. *El.* 4.4.97.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 97-98.

traitors came to be punished on the Tarpeian hill. Tatius' punishment of Tarpeia was the first form of the death penalty for traitors, and subsequently led to traitors being thrown from the Tarpeian hill for their actions.²⁵ The ancient historians do not address how later traitors came to be thrown rather than crushed, but a likely connection between Tarpeia's punishment and subsequent punishment lies with the shields. The Sabines hurled their shields on Tarpeia, and when traitors came to be thrown, they reflect the action that led to the death of Rome's first traitress. In the traditional punishment for the *crimen incesti*, Vestals were buried alive. There is perhaps a connection between Tarpeia and live burial as well, although no evidence explicitly exists.

Tarpeia the Vessel

Mentioned above was Tarpeia's relation to the vessel she carries. When she goes to the spring to draw water, she has with her an urn.²⁶ As with Rhea Silvia, the jar signifies her maidenhood and the condition of Rome. She is pure and undefiled, as is Rome, when the jar is intact and used for the proper purpose of rites for Vesta's cult. When she sees Tatius, however, Tarpeia's forgetful hands (*oblita manus*, 22) let the jar fall to the ground (*excidit*, 22). Because of the shape of the jar (Fig. 1), the contents inevitably spill. This is symbolic of the severity of Tarpeia's misdeed. A Vestal must

²⁵ See Alison Keith, *Propertius: Poet of Love and Leisure*, (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2008), 83 and Greene and Welch, 11-12 for a discussion of the relation of etiology with a Callimachean style. For a somewhat comical and hypothetical examination of how this etiological tale arose, see Henry and James, 90.

²⁶ Propertius says the jar was pressing (*urgebat*) Tarpeia's head, a reference to the "heavy burdens of chastity," Paul Allen Miller, ed., *Latin Erotic Elegy: An Anthology and Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 217.

maintain her chastity entirely, even to the point that she must not lust after a man. In her sudden passion for Tatius, she is forgetful not just of her hands, but also of her vow.²⁷

There is more than a physical vessel involved in Tarpeia's myth, however. Just as Rhea Silvia was a vessel that carried the founders of Rome, Tarpeia is a vessel that carries the fate of Rome. Sandra Joshel's article "The Body Female and the Body Politic: Livy's Lucretia and Verginia," elaborates on how women's roles serve as a transition between historical events, and this very idea arises in the concept of the vessel as well.²⁸ Tarpeia "contains" the destiny of Rome in her explicit choice of gold or the city. Perhaps this metaphor seems forced, but when considering Propertius' direct mention of her jar falling, it becomes clearer that Tarpeia's choice leads to the "downfall" of Rome, not just her chastity.

Watery Language in Propertius

The relation of femininity and liquidity is prevalent not only with Rhea Silvia, but also with Tarpeia. As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, water represents a very feminine nature, its liquidity and fluidity contrasting with the solidity of manliness. Propertius takes his poem and inserts water references to reflect the feminine nature of the maiden Tarpeia merging with the masculinity of Tatius, the soldier. Why is the concern for water important? With water, Tarpeia breaks her chastity and douses the

²⁷ Gregory Hutchinson, ed., *Propertius: Elegies Book IV* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 123.

²⁸ Joshel, "The Body Female and the Body Politic, 121. See below for an elaborated discussion of Joshel's article.

perpetual fire.²⁹ The water in this poem is a sign of the betrayal of Rome. Tarpeia has tainted Rome, which she not only upholds as a virgin, but also represents as a Vestal. She even notes that her tears have put out the Vestal fire.³⁰

Propertius provides the best example of the watery nature of Tarpeia's tale. Throughout his elegy he uses words that relate to or signify water-related imagery. Harry Rutledge notes that this water imagery deliberately contrasts the maintenance of the perpetual flame of the Vestals and that even the references of Scylla and Ariadne are concerned with water.³¹ The purpose of all this water imagery goes further than simply drawing out the feminine versus masculine elements of Tarpeia's tale; rather, the water imagery intensifies the forthcoming fate of Rome, namely, to be overtaken by the Sabines.³² The symbolic nature of the fire as the continuity of the Roman state need not be repeated here, but should be recalled. In opening the gates for the Sabines, Tarpeia essentially opens the dam that releases the flood of Tatius and his men, which extinguishes the safety of Rome. Immediately after they enter, the flame Tarpeia embodies is extinguished in death.³³

²⁹ Prop. *El.* 4.4.16-23, 56.

³⁰ Ibid. 45-46.

³¹ Scylla and Ariadne, Prop. *El.* 4.4.39-42; Rutledge, "Propertius' 'Tarpeia'," 70.

³² Consult D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.39ff. or a detailed treatment of the history subsequent to their attack of the citadel. In summary, the Sabines and Romans war with one another then create a truce that merges their two nations. So "fate" refers to the attack of the citadel specifically.

³³ The number of references in this poem is numerous and as a result, only one outstanding occurrence will be examined here. For more detailed and specific instances in the language of Propertius concerning water-related words, see Rutledge, "Propertius' 'Tarpeia'," 70 and Janan, "Beyond Good and Evil," 414-416.

One particularly striking image is that of the spring.³⁴ In returning to the spring, Tarpeia continually returns to Tattius. Rutledge points out that this “spring represents Tattius to Tarpeia and she herself becomes one with the spring” and “it is in the water that Tarpeia and Tattius blend together in harmony that the unhappy girl ardently fancies.”³⁵ Water is used to demonstrate the future unity of the Romans and Sabines as well. This small metaphor of Tarpeia and Tattius merging into the spring foreshadows the post-war truce that occurs between the Sabine and Roman nations.³⁶

Fiery Images in Propertius

The imagery of fire also appears in Propertius’ poem. The first example occurs in 4.4.31, which is the opening line of Tarpeia’s monologue. She sees the “torches of the army” (*ignes castrorum*) of Tattius, and desires to be a “captive to [his] hearth” (*captiva ad vestros Penates*). In other words, she no longer wants to be a “captive” of Vesta’s flame, but longs to belong to Tattius.

The second reference (45-46) combines fire and water. Tarpeia speaks of the fire of Vesta’s hearth extinguished by her tears:

Pallados extinctos si quis mirabitur ignes,
ignoscat: lacrimis spargitur ara meis.

If anyone will wonder at the extinguished flames of Pallas,
let him pardon (me): the altar is sprinkled by my tears.

³⁴ Prop. *El.* 4.4.15-22.

³⁵ Rutledge, “Propertius’ ‘Tarpeia,’” 71.

³⁶ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.46.

This is both literal and metaphorical, but fire and water also come together in these lines. Tarpeia's tears (her betrayal) bring the dousing of the Vestal flame (the entrance of the Sabines).

The third and final reference to fire draws on the fiery passion Tarpeia develops for Tatius. Venus, the "guardian unhappy" (*tutela infelix*, 69) at the destruction of Troy, "nourishes the blame" in Tarpeia and "settles many fiery passions into her bones" (*culpam alit et plures condit in ossa faces*, 70).³⁷ This fiery image compares the destruction of Troy (literally, "*Troiae favillae*," Trojan ashes) to the *favillae* to which Tarpeia will be reduced. Venus, still unhappy at the destruction of her city, now brings about a love in Tarpeia that will lead to her destruction.

Boundaries

The question of boundaries appears in the myth of Tarpeia, just as with Rhea Silvia. A first point of discussion is the fact that Tarpeia opens the city to Tatius. She has breached the boundaries of Rome, and as a Vestal, this is symbolic of breaking her vow of chastity. Joshel presents a very potent discussion concerning the idea of women as boundaries. Her article focuses on the role of women in Livy's history, particularly Lucretia and Verginia, but she discusses Tarpeia's role as well. She draws on the notion of boundary as something purely feminine:

Livy's account of early Rome creates Woman and her chastity as space, making her a catalyst for male action. She embodies the space of the home, a boundary,

³⁷ See note 17 above.

and a buffer zone. She is also a blank space—a void, for Livy effectively eliminates her voice, facilitating the perpetuation of male stories about men.³⁸

In doing this, Livy further emphasizes Tatius' invasion as a specifically male story, since Tarpeia, as a boundary, has been overtaken. When Tarpeia opens her city's gates, she metaphorically invites her own boundary to be crossed since she, as a Vestal, upholds Rome and its parameters; as a result, she loses the city and her chastity in one stride.

In discussing Natalie Kampen's 1986 article, "Reliefs of the Basilica Aemilia: A Redating," Sandra Joshel writes, "Tarpeia crosses the boundary of the city and appropriate behavior; the Sabines make themselves a boundary between warring men and observe appropriate behavior."³⁹ Three boundaries have been breached, those of Tarpeia's body, of Rome, and of "appropriate behavior." What Joshel proposes is an important consideration in the early history of Rome. Women were nothing but objects in many of these myths, and Livy uses their tales as examples of how boundaries of morality and Roman expansion were crossed simultaneously. In her discussion of Lucretia, Joshel points out the fact that the men tried to be the dominating characters, especially in Sextus Tarquinius' forceful rape. In the case of Tarpeia, she is the victim used by Tatius for entrance into the city, and in the end her "[body] literally become[s] building material—the stuff of physical and political topography. Women who are supposed to have lived are transformed into places and spaces."⁴⁰ Livy uses the females

³⁸ Joshel, "The Body Female and the Body Politic, 121. Propertius interestingly gives Tarpeia a voice, unlike Livy, creating a long lamentation that reveals her shame and internal thoughts concerning the matter.

³⁹ Joshel, "The Body Female and the Body Politic," 121.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

in his narrative as mere objects, with no more significance than an etiological explanation for topographical space.

Joshel goes on to note, however, that Lucretia is the character who, in the end, wields the sword.⁴¹ In other words, women also serve as the transition point in the history, the “change of scenes,” so to speak. In the case of Lucretia and Verginia, as Joshel points out, their tales end with their deaths, and after they die the story moves on.⁴² Likewise with Tarpeia, her death comes as an explanation for how Rome was invaded. Janan points out the fact that “Tarpeia makes possible Rome as Propertius and his contemporaries know it” and that “Tarpeia’s action is both abhorred and utterly necessary.”⁴³ A young maiden becomes a traitoress, a boundary point that stands between a safe Rome and a Rome that has been attacked. Although Tarpeia was not raped, her myth is still used much like Lucretia and Verginia’s, namely, “for the sake of preserving the virtue of the body female and the body politic.”⁴⁴

An early version of her tale, according to Piso Frugi, as recorded by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, portrays Tarpeia as a heroine rather than a traitoress.⁴⁵ Piso claims that a monument was set up in her honor and that an annual festival was held in her memory, and, as Dionysius comments, “there would be nothing of the sort for her, if she died

⁴¹ Joshel, “The Body Female and the Body Politic,” 124.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 415.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁵ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.40.3.

handing over her fatherland to the enemy” (οὐδενὸς εἰκὸς αὐτήν, εἰ προδιδούσα τὴν πατρίδα τοῖς πολεμίοις ἀπέθανεν, 2.40.3).⁴⁶ He does not disregard the notion that she is a traitor, but merely points out that she could have also been a hero. This dual interpretation of Tarpeia as both traitor and heroine arises in the discussion of boundaries because it was necessary for Tarpeia to open the gates, for the outcome of the Sabine attack on the history of Rome, indeed “Rome’s integrity as a polity...depends on the city’s infiltration.”⁴⁷ Therefore Tarpeia is both heroine and villain, just as the contrasting historical accounts of Livy, Dionysius, and Piso suggest. In *Latin Erotic Elegy*, Paul Allen Miller presents Tarpeia as ambiguous to the Roman interpretation of her because she served the binary role of “the un-Roman, the un-manly, the un-chaste virgin who made Roman *virtus* and *pudor* possible” and “stands for the contradictions that lay at the heart of Roman identity.”⁴⁸ In a sense, Tarpeia is the boundary of the old Rome and new Rome and the boundary necessarily breached in order to create the nation’s identity.

The Political Implications of Tarpeia

Tarpeia’s myth also directly ties in with the political relations between the Sabines and Romans during and after the time of Tatius’ attack. To begin, Dionysius of Halicarnassus provides a portion of the governmental history before the Sabines

⁴⁶ See Zofia Gansiniec, “Tarpeia: The Making of a Myth,” *Acta Societis Archaeologicae Polonorum* 1 (1949): 14.

⁴⁷ Joshel, “The Body Female and the Body Politic,” 416.

⁴⁸ Miller, *Latin Erotic Elegy*, 216.

entered.⁴⁹ Under Romulus' rule, Rome had grown bigger and bigger through the conquering of cities and the unification with other towns, but the Sabine nation was angry that Rome was rising and that they had not stopped its growth early on.⁵⁰ Here the first tension between Romulus and Tatius began. The Sabines decided to attack Rome, appointing Titus Tatius as the general.⁵¹ Romulus, prepared for controversy and an assault, built up walls.⁵² The Sabines, making ready their attack, first sent an ambassador to demand back the women that had been seized by the Romans. Romulus refused, but offered them anything else they desired, if it meant they would not enter Rome, but they turned him down.⁵³ The Sabines enter by Tarpeia's aid, and there is a battle. In the end, however, the truce forms and Romulus and Tatius rule simultaneously, and their joined peoples were called Quirites.⁵⁴ The two men served together for five years until the death of Tatius.⁵⁵

Under a dual rule, Rome grew, not only in numbers by merging with the Sabines, but also in territory and in political strength (until Tatius' death). All of these

⁴⁹ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.35-36. As a historian, Dionysius recorded what he researched and what had passed down through oral tradition. Romulus is a mythical figure, and it is necessary to keep this distinction at the forefront of the discussion. For this section, I will treat it historically for conciseness.

⁵⁰ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.36.3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.* 2.37.1. These were most likely the very walls Tarpeia opened, and thus also the literal as well as symbolic boundaries of Roman safety.

⁵³ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.37.4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 2.46.1-2.

⁵⁵ See D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.51-52 concerning the death of Tatius and the account of Varro in particular, which says he died of stoning. This is somewhat ironic in light of Tarpeia's death. She was "stoned" with shields. Thus, the hand that killed her received a similar punishment as his death penalty.

occurrences were made possible because of Tarpeia's misdeed. It is not necessary to speculate on the outcome had she not permitted entrance to the Sabine band, but it cannot be denied that through this action, Tarpeia led Rome to an unexpected authority, and incredible expansion, which contributed to its greatness as a political power and a prevailing nation.

Artistic Representation of Tarpeia

Tarpeia appears in several artistic forms, throughout Rome's history. Coins ranging from 89 BC to 4 BC depict Tarpeia in two ways (Figs. 2-3):



Figure 2
Denarius from 89 BC.
Created under
L. Titurius Sabinus.
Obverse: Titus Tatius,
Reverse: Tarpeia.⁵⁶



Figure 3
Denarius from 19-4 BC.
Created under Augustus.
Obverse: Augustus,
Reverse: Tarpeia.⁵⁷

In figure 2, two soldiers are shown about to crush a frantic-looking Tarpeia whose hands are up and whose hair is standing on end. In figure 3, Tarpeia stands amidst a mound of

⁵⁶ Image Source: "Mantis: Roman Collection," American Numismatic Society online, RRC 334/2b. 1976.99915: S.699, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://numismatics.org/collection/1976.999.15>.

⁵⁷ Image Source: "Mantis: Roman Collection," American Numismatic Society online, RIC I (second edition) Augustus 299: BMC.29, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://numismatics.org/collection/1937.158.379>.

shields, again with her hands up. The denarius from 89 BC was minted under L. Titurius Sabinus but depicts the head of King Tadius. This is most likely due to the Sabine heritage of Sabinus.⁵⁸ Tadius, the first Sabine king in Rome, is appropriately portrayed opposite the woman who allowed his reign to occur in the first place, and Sabinus places the face of Tadius on the coin because Tadius was his ancestor. Jane DeRose Evans comments on Sabinus' motive for depicting Tarpeia so many years later, arguing that it is meant to serve as a reminder for the Social War happening in 89 and "that just as the earlier traitor to Rome had been severely punished, so would modern-day traitors."⁵⁹ The remembrance of Tarpeia's treachery on this coin is meant to be a moral reminder for the Romans, not the praise of a heroine. The coin serves the same purpose as the association of the Tarpeian Rock with the traitoress.

A second rather famous artistic depiction of Tarpeia is found on the Basilica Aemilia frieze (Fig. 4).



Figure 4 Basilica Aemilia Frieze, Tarpeia's Punishment, 179 BC.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Jane DeRose Evans, *The Art of Persuasion: Political Propaganda from Aeneas to Brutus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 125.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Image Source: "C414 Roman Art and Archaeology Augustan Relief Sculpture: Basilica Aemilia: Historical frieze frg, Tarpeia's Punishment," Augurel, accessed March 20, 2014,

Kampen discusses the imagery on this frieze as specifically related to Augustan political reform.⁶¹ She points out that Augustus chose the scenes of Tarpeia's myth and the rape of the Sabines as political propaganda. He had Tarpeia's punishment shown because "it reflects the period's broader social preoccupations with the assertion of conservative domestic values" and "women's proper roles and behaviours were fundamental to those conservative values—roles and behaviours which located women firmly and eternally in the context of the family and thereby controlled not only their sexuality but the conduct of their men as well."⁶² With the Lex Julia having been established to regulate marriages in Rome, these two scenes served Augustus well in reminding his people of proper conduct. This is also an explanation for her appearance on the second coin shown above. Augustus' face on the obverse and Tarpeia on the reverse undoubtedly reflects the same notion addressed by Kampen.⁶³

These few representations of Tarpeia signify not only the importance of her myth to the Roman people, but also the importance of Vestals in general. Without the Vestals there would be no guardian of Roman safety or protection of the hearth. By portraying Vestals in artwork, viewers are reminded of the virgins' roles in society and the importance of maintaining their boundaries. Depicting a mythical or historical event

<https://resources.oncourse.iu.edu/access/content/user/leach/www/c414/augurel.html>.

The date of the frieze is disputed, see Fred C. Albertson, "The Basilica Aemilia Frieze: Religion and Politics in Late Republican Rome," *Latomus* 49 (1990): 801-802.

⁶¹ Natalie Kampen, "Reliefs of the Basilica Aemilia: A Redating," *Klio* 73 (1991): 448-458.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 458.

⁶³ Albertson discusses the frieze in a different way, arguing that the scenes chosen each relate to a religious festival. In the case of Tarpeia, it was *Matronalia*. See Albertson, "The Basilica Aemilia Frieze," 808.

through visual stimuli seeks to emphasize the tradition and community in the Roman society. The people recognize these images as those of Tarpeia and would have immediately known her tale because it served as such an integral part of Roman history.

Conclusion

The myth of Tarpeia, despite its contrasting poetic and historical features, provides a national, etiological, political, and practical explanation for historical events in Rome. Propertius provides a love narrative between a Roman Vestal Virgin and a Sabine army captain. Through his elegy Propertius shows Tarpeia's conscious betrayal of the city, but gives her motivation as her love for Tatius, whereas Livy makes her greedy for gold. Regardless of her true impetus, she did not desire what was most important to a Vestal, which was to uphold chastity (loyalty).

Tarpeia's jar falls at the spring, according to Propertius, and every security for the Roman state spills with its contents. She became a traitoress to both Rome and Vesta. Fire and water abound in the Tarpeian elegy, serving as images that reflect her betrayal. Her tears and spilled water doused the perpetual flame. She also let her personal longings obstruct her duty, and she broke the boundaries of both Vestal religious behavior and concern for the safety of her country. She left the walls of Rome, both physically, according to Livy, and metaphorically in opening the citadel, but although she became a traitoress, she nonetheless became the cause for the development of Rome's new identity. She merged Rome and the Sabines through her treacherous act and received a fatal punishment. The discussion on boundaries in Sandra R. Joshel's article makes it clear to

see that Tarpeia was a transition point in the story of Rome's identity, much like Lucretia and Verginia in Livy's history.

The artwork of Tarpeia and her appearance during the Principate of Augustus led to political implications concerning the domestic life at Rome and the role of women in society, and her role during the politics of her time period was one that provided Rome with dual authority, expansion, and population growth.

Tarpeia's tale is, as Piso purports, one of both a heroine and miscreant. On the one hand she created a new Rome by making the citadel accessible, and therefore ultimately benefited Rome's identity, but on the other hand she betrayed her vow to the goddess she served and her identity as a Roman citizen, and she handed her nation over to the enemy, all for gold, or love. As Dionysius would say, "let each judge as he wishes" (κρινέτω τις ὡς βούλεται, 2.40.3) concerning Tarpeia's role as heroic or villainous.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Paradigm of Chastity

Tuccia the Vestal

The Vestal Tuccia lived, according to Pliny the Elder, in 519 BC.¹ Unlike Rhea or Tarpeia, Tuccia's parentage is unknown, and none of the historians give her personal background. Instead, her narrative consists merely of a miraculous deed. All that we know of Tuccia is that she was accused of the *crimen incesti* and put on trial. She took up a sieve and prayed to Vesta that she might carry from the Tiber to the Temple of Vesta the holey vessel filled with water.² The goddess granted her request and Tuccia did not spill a single drop, proving her innocence through her miraculous transportation of water. Although her story is very brief, her legacy is not. This Vestal, of the three examined in this thesis, had the greatest long-term influence on Western culture, especially in terms of the virtues she symbolized. Her significance extends not just through Roman history, but also through the Renaissance and into the 20th century.

Carrying Water in a Sieve: The Myth of Tuccia

Dionysius of Halicarnassus provides the most robust account of the legend of Tuccia. In his *Antiquitates Romanae*, Dionysius explains that an unnamed man falsely accused Tuccia of unchastity:

¹ Pliny *HN* 28.3.10.

² V. Max. *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* 8.1.5.

κατηγορήσαι τινά φασιν ἀδίκως μιᾶς τῶν παρθένων τῶν ἱερῶν Τυκκίας ὄνομα, ἀφανισμόν μὲν πυρὸς οὐκ ἔχοντα προφέρειν, ἄλλας δὲ τινὰς ἐξ εἰκότων τεκμηρίων καὶ μαρτυριῶν ἀποδείξεις φέροντα οὐκ ἀληθεῖς: κελευσθεῖσαν δ' ἀπολογεῖσθαι τὴν παρθένον τοῦτο μόνον εἰπεῖν, ὅτι τοῖς ἔργοις ἀπολύσεται τὰς διαβολάς. (2.69.1)

They say someone unjustly blamed one of the holy virgins, whose name was Tuccia, and not being able to bring forth as evidence the extinction of the fire, he offered false statements based on tenable proofs and testimonies. And they called the maiden to give her testimony and she said only this, that she would release herself from the slander by her deeds.

Although Dionysius specifies that the eternal flame had not gone out, a bad omen that was considered a sure sign that one of the Vestals had broken her vow of chastity, the man provided other false accusations that appeared true in order to prove Tuccia's guilt.³ We do not know the reason why this man singled out Tuccia for his deceitful prosecution, but it is clear that his lies gained some traction with the *pontifices*, who called for the Vestal to defend herself.

When on trial, the Vestals were evidently allowed to speak for themselves. Even so, the myth of Tuccia underscores their vulnerable position. A Vestal who broke her vow of chastity placed the entire Roman state in danger because (according to the Romans) there was a close connection between Vestal virginity and the inviolability of the state. For this reason, an unchaste Vestal was buried alive as punishment, and a new virgin was chosen in her place. Innocent Vestals accused of the *crimen incesti*, however, faced an almost impossible task. The ancient sources never mention a physical examination of suspected priestesses, which suggests that the women were forced to rely upon their testimony and their reputation, which could easily be called into question by

³ See my discussion in chapter one.

fabricated rumors. Tuccia, however, takes decisive action by asking Vesta to prove her chastity for her. Praying to Vesta, she asks to be allowed to carry water from the Tiber to the Forum in a sieve.⁴

According to Hans-Friedrich Mueller, Tuccia's prayer created a kind of legal contract between the Vestal and the goddess.⁵ This is typical of Roman prayer language. Valerius Maximus notes that Tarpeia began with an address to Vesta and then presented the reason that her request should be granted: "if I approached your sacred rites always pure of hand" (*si sacris tuis castas semper admovi manus*), and concluded with the request itself: "allow that I draw water from the Tiber with this sieve and carry it to your temple" (*effice ut hoc hauriam e Tiberi aquam et in aedem tuam perferam, Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* 8.5.1). Because Tuccia knew that she had pure hands, she felt secure in her request and Vesta simply needed to fulfill her end of the bargain.⁶ As Mueller writes, "only a pure heart could have rendered Tuccia so bold ... this anecdote thus brings together in the midst of crisis a god, the state, an individual, and a miracle."⁷ Tuccia prayed for divine intervention, not relying on herself, but allowing Vesta to prove her innocence.

⁴ D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.69.2; V. Max. *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* 8.1.5.

⁵ Hans-Friedrich Mueller, *Roman Religion in Valerius Maximus*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 52.

⁶ *Ibid.*; Gordon Laing's article, "Roman Prayer and Its Relation to Ethics," *Classical Philology* 6 (1911): 184, considers *castas* not as something ethical, but as something ceremonial, a notion with which I disagree since she uses that term to prove her innocence in a matter of ethics that integrate themselves with the cult rites. It is not, however, merely ceremonial.

⁷ Mueller, *Roman Religion*, 52.

The prayer of Tuccia provides an interesting contrast with the dreams of Rhea Silvia and Tarpeia, which both involve prophecy and communication with the divine. In the case of Rhea, her dream foretells her rape, while in the dream of Tarpeia, Venus incites the Vestal's passion for Tattius, leading her to betray the city. Tuccia, however, communicates directly with the divine through prayer.⁸ There is an interesting point to be drawn from this, namely, that dreams are connected with guilt, and prayer with innocence. In the case of Tarpeia, Vesta haunts the maiden's dream.⁹ With Tuccia, however, Vesta grants the virgin's request. By forsaking her loyalty, Tarpeia causes Vesta to come upon her in anger, but in remaining devout, Tuccia is able to approach Vesta with humility. On the one hand the goddess is in control, on the other the Vestal Virgin. She is the agent, and her belief in the power of prayer becomes the determining factor in proving her innocence. Tuccia's story, therefore, suggests that Romans in the late Republic and early Principate believed that Vestals could take an active role in communicating with the gods on behalf of their own reputations, and by extension, on behalf of the state.

Vesta allowed Tuccia to walk from the Tiber to the temple without spilling a drop of water, a task that would otherwise have been impossible due to the nature of the sieve. Tuccia's sieve can be equated with a modern sifter or a strainer. It was likely a circular container that had a wide opening and holes covering its base, as imagined by

⁸ Consider also the prayer of Aemilia preceding Tuccia in D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 2.68.4.

⁹ Prop. *El.* 4.4.67-70.

Bartolomeo Neroni in a painting from the mid 16th century (Fig. 5). It may have been similar to ancient Greek sieves (Fig. 6).



Figure 5 Bartolomeo Neroni, *Tuccia (Chastity)*, mid 16th century.¹⁰



Figure 6 Ancient Greek Sieve, date unknown.¹¹

¹⁰ Image source: “Tuccia (Chastity),” Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O125590/tuccia-chastity-tempera-painting-neroni-bartolomeo/>.

¹¹ Image source: “Ancient Greeks: Prime Numbers and Number Theory,” Hellenica, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Primes.htm>.

Dionysius finds Tuccia's tale fascinating, especially in comparison to the legend of Aemilia, whose story the historian has just recounted. Aemilia was a Vestal blamed for the mysterious extinction of the eternal flame. After praying to Vesta, she threw part of her garment onto the cold ashes of the hearth in order to reignite the flame (2.68.3-5). Tuccia's story, in the historian's opinion, "is still more amazing than this and seems more like myth" (ἔτι δὲ τούτου θαυμασιώτερόν ἐστι καὶ μύθῳ μᾶλλον ἔοικὸς, 2.69.1). The basis for his opinion no doubt lies in the twofold impossibility of Tuccia's task. Not only must she fill the perforated sieve, but she must also carry it from the Tiber to the temple in the Forum Romanum, a distance of approximately half of a mile to a mile. This may not seem extremely far, but when carrying a flat and open container full of water, the task of not losing a single drop becomes all the more infeasible. Hence the reason Dionysius finds her tale to be "more like myth."

The sieve was not an unknown device in the cult of Vesta. Upon the renewal of the fire annually on March 1, the Vestals would carry the new fire to the temple hearth in a bronze sieve.¹² The sieve would have maintained the lit flame because it allowed oxygen to enter through the base. Tuccia's use of a ritual object reiterates her devotion to the goddess she serves because not only does she prove her innocence, but she also utilizes a vessel common to the cult, still participating in cult methods and confirming her status as a Vestal. Had she not been able to prove her innocence, the use of the sieve would have been insulting to the cult, an abuse of sacred tools and, in a sense, a re-

¹² John W. Stamper, *The Architecture of Roman Temples: The Republic to the Middle Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35.

tainting of her disavowal. Tuccia's innocence is proven not only through her deed, but also with the mechanism utilized in her deed.

In her important article "Carrying Water in a Sieve: Class and the Body in Roman Women's Religion," Amy Richlin writes about the symbolic significance of Tuccia's deed. She sees the story of Tuccia as paradigmatic for all women, who "are permeable yet must be impermeable, they must carry water in a sieve."¹³ This is particularly true for Vestals, whose impermeability is connected to the continued wellbeing of the Roman state. Richlin further contrasts the "holy woman," who "values the bearing and nurturing of children and reinforces boundaries," with the monstrous female, who "kills (and sometimes eats) children, feeds people poison, and breaks boundaries."¹⁴ Tuccia proved her status as a "holy woman" by her miraculous feat: she proved the complete inviolability of her own virginal body as well as its conceptual link to the boundaries of the city when she carried water in a sieve.¹⁵

The metaphor of Tuccia as an impermeable sieve is a fruitful one. Like all women, the Vestals were imagined as "sieves." Just as water typically slips through the holes in a sieve, women are vulnerable to penetration by men. It is a woman's duty to protect the boundaries of her body, allowing access only to her husband. Unlike most women, however, Vestals never married. They were expected to remain impervious

¹³ Amy Richlin, "Carrying Water in a Sieve: Class and the Body in Roman Women's Religion," in *Women and Goddess Traditions in Antiquity and Today*, edited by Karen L. King, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 357.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 331.

¹⁵ This is discussed in more detail below, but what is meant here is that the boundary of Rome, the Tiber, is reinforced when Tuccia draws from the river and walks to the temple. There is a connection made between the boundary of Rome and the service to Vesta.

throughout their period of service. In the Roman imagination, if a Vestal loses her virginity, if, in the metaphor applied to Rhea Silvia and Tarpeia, her water jar spills and possibly breaks, or her sieve becomes permeable, she places the entire state in danger. Although accused of losing her virginity, Tuccia proves her chastity by turning her sieve into an impervious vessel. Unlike Rhea Silvia and Tarpeia, whose overturned jars represent the violation of their personal boundaries, Tarpeia's sieve retains its water. We see, therefore, that femininity and liquidity are once again conjoined in this third narrative, as in the two previous myths. The water represents the chastity of Tuccia, and because it did not pour out of the sieve, it is a sign that her chastity remains intact.

Tuccia maintains her own boundaries and preserves the boundaries of the city. Having established in the second chapter that the Tiber serves as a boundary around Rome, it would seem that when Tuccia draws water from it, the story emphasizes the river's liminal nature. Rhea, who married the Tiber, and Tarpeia, who let the Sabines enter the Roman gate, are both connected with the boundaries of Rome. In the case of Tuccia, when she draws from the river, she reemphasizes her chastity and defines the solidity of the Roman boundary in relation to her duty as a Vestal. In other words, she walks from the Tiber to the temple with a portion of the boundary in her hands, as if to say that the relationship between Rome and Vesta is bound, sealed by her innocence and devotion to chastity.

Plato, Polygnotus, and the Danaids

In Plato's dialogue the *Gorgias*, the licentious soul is compared to a leaky vessel.¹⁶ The reason Plato makes this comparison, through the mouth of Socrates, is because this part of the soul is never satisfied. Apparently, Plato attributed the unfulfilling task of filling a leaky vessel with impious souls.¹⁷ This metaphor stands out in relation to Tuccia because it shows that her soul was anything but insatiate or irreverent. If the greedy soul is that of the leaky vessel, then the contented soul is an unbroken vessel. Tuccia merges an accused impiety with a proven innocence, transforming what is by nature a holed vessel into a whole vessel. She is not only satisfied in the integrity of her chastity, but the miraculous nature of her deed also confirms her virtuous character.

As Guilia Sissa points out, there existed in Delphi at the time of Plato a painting by Polygnotus of Thasos, which depicted women carrying broken jars.¹⁸ Discussed by Pausanias in his *Description of Greece*, this scene represents "the uninitiated" women in cult of Eleusinian mysteries.¹⁹ If this is taken at face value, then broken jars (or leaky vessels) signify that the women are not actually part of the cult. This can be extended further to view spilled jars as representative of losing the privileges of the cult as well, as

¹⁶ Plato *Gorgias* 493.

¹⁷ Campbell Bonner, "A Study of the Danaid Myth," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 13 (1902), 137.

¹⁸ Guilia Sissa, *Greek Virginitly*, 143.

¹⁹ Pausanias *Description of Greece* 10.31.9; Sissa, *Greek Virginitly*, 143.

with Tarpeia. Tuccia, who holds a leaky vessel, actually defies this imagery by proving that a seemingly porous vessel is, in her hands, a whole one. She was initiated into the cult of Vesta and remains faithful to Vesta through this act. The role of her life was to be a servant to the goddess, and her miraculous deed confirmed her devotion and undergirded her virtuous character.

In a similar way, the myth of the Danaids relates to Tuccia's myth.²⁰ Danaus had fifty daughters whom he gave in marriage to the sons of Aegyptus. To each of his daughters he gave a dagger with which they might kill their husbands. Hypermnestra alone spared the life of her spouse, Lynceus. The forty-nine who committed this heinous crime were condemned to fill a sieve with water from the river Styx for eternity.²¹ Hypermnestra was placed in prison for not adhering to the wishes of her father, although she alone was virtuous.²² Horace praises Hypermnestra's courage in his *Carmina* by recounting her noble character and its praise through the ages.²³ The guilty sisters, on the other hand, face a punishment of futility. They must eternally perform a task that never satisfies and can never be completed, but Tuccia in one attempt accomplishes the very same task because she was not guilty. Her morality contrasts with that of the women, and so her task is made easy. Hypermnestra, who "spared Lynceus because he guarded her maidenhood" (Λυγκέα διέσωσε παρθένον αὐτήν φυλάξαντα, Apollodorus *Library of*

²⁰ For a detailed analysis on the varying sources and accounts of the myth of the Danaids, refer to Bonner, "A Study of the Danaid Myth," 129-173.

²¹ Hyginus *Fabulae* 168.

²² Ov. *Heroides* XIV.

²³ Hor. *Carm.* 3.11.35-36.

Greek Texts 2.1.5), may have been thrown in prison for disobeying her father, but she was not consigned to the never-ending task of filling and refilling a sieve. Tuccia, whose maidenhood was also guarded, similarly avoids a leaky vessel and instead reverses nature's standard through prayer and proof. Her moral character aligns with that of Hypermnestra, and as a result she receives the task of the sieve as a gift rather than a punishment.

The myth of the Danaids may not be a perfect parallel since Hypermnestra was punished, but because authors like Horace respond to her virtue, the connection is nonetheless interesting. Tuccia embodies the virtue of Hypermnestra and the reversal of the punishment of the other forty-nine Danaids by carrying successfully a sieve full of water, without dripping any of the vessel's contents.

Plato, the Polygnotus painting, and the myth of the Danaids all share in the story of Tuccia in relation to the soul, her role in Vesta's rites, and the reversal of eternal punishments. The symbolism of Tuccia thus extends to more than mere womanly virtue, and reaches to the value of her soul, the devotion of her service, and the morality of her character.

The Afterlife of Tuccia's Sieve

The sieve came to symbolize womanly virtue, specifically chastity. The literary allusions and imagery extended from the time of St. Augustine to the periods of Petrarch and Queen Elizabeth I. Augustine, in *De Civitate Dei*, written in the early fifth century

AD, uses Tuccia's story as an example for the greatness of God. He uses her miracle to emphasize that God is even more powerful than the gods (or goddesses) (22.11):

If we pass now to their miracles which they oppose to our martyrs as wrought by their gods, shall not even these be found to make for us, and help out our argument? For if any of the miracles of their gods are great, certainly that is a great one which Varro mentions of a vestal virgin, who, when she was endangered by a false accusation of unchastity, filled a sieve with water from the Tiber, and carried it to her judges without any part of it leaking. Who kept the weight of water in the sieve? Who prevented any drop from falling from it through so many open holes? They will answer, Some god or some demon. If a god, is he greater than the God who made the world? If a demon, is he mightier than an angel who serves the God by whom the world was made? If, then, a lesser god, angel, or demon could so sustain the weight of this liquid element that the water might seem to have changed its nature, shall not Almighty God, who Himself created all the elements, be able to eliminate from the earthly body its heaviness, so that the quickened body shall dwell in whatever element the quickening spirit pleases?²⁴

For Augustine, Tuccia's story is more than a symbol of chastity; rather, it shows the power of the divine, which for Augustine is God, but for the Romans, Vesta. The nature of the sieve is undeniably transformed for Augustine into something miraculous that serves as an aid to his argument because it is an example of the work of a higher power in the ways (and heaviness) of the world.

Petrarch's *Triumph of Chastity*, written around 1350, also references Tuccia's narrative as an example of a woman who defeated love. His poem speaks of the battle between Love and Laura, the woman he loves. Love tries to conquer Laura, but in the end, like Lucretia, Virginia, and Tuccia, Chastity triumphs and Love is defeated. Tuccia triumphed with chastity because of her miraculous sieve, as Petrarch writes (194-198):

²⁴ Rev. Marcus Dods, trans., "Augustin: City of God," in *A Select Library the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, edited by Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1871, rep. 1999), 493.

Another troop the vestal virgin led,
Who bore along from Tyber's oozy bed
His liquid treasure in a sieve, to show
The falsehood of her base calumnious foe
By wondrous proof.²⁵

This “wondrous proof” was what led to her innocence and the triumph of chastity, which was not only something personal for Tuccia, but also something necessary for Roman affairs. By proving her virtue, Tuccia became a symbol of Roman preservation and restoration.

Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) had a series of portraits painted that depicted her holding a sieve in her left hand. She commissioned these ‘Sieve’ Portraits in order to mark her reign as one of virtue.



Figure 7 George Gower, ‘Sieve’ portrait, 1579.²⁶

²⁵ Hugh Boyd, trans., “The Triumph of Chastity,” in *The Sonnets, Triumphs, and Other Poems of Petrarch*, edited by Thomas Campbell, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1879), 370.

²⁶ Image source: “Christie’s Jubilee Line Exhibition 30 May To 1 June,” Sartorial Life, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://sartoriallife.com/art-artists/christies-jubilee-line-exhibition-30-may-to-1-june/>.

In writing on Elizabeth's rule, John Lyly uses Tuccia as an example of the virtue of virginity, and Roy Strong gives Lyly's opinion that the queen's virginity is "a necessary aspect of her achievement in governing the body politic, bringing peace, plenty, good government and the maintenance of God's Word" and "the mystique of chastity as an attribute essential to the success of her rule."²⁷ Much like the chastity of the Vestals, the condition of the country depended upon the virtue of Elizabeth.²⁸ In portraying herself as chaste, Elizabeth accentuates her vow to protect the state, as part of her duty as queen. As Strong writes, "fulfillment of prophecies of Empire is, however, interlocked with the maintenance of the Queen's maiden state. They are inseparable."²⁹ Tuccia created this ideal of virtue through her deed, and the queen adapted the symbolism of Tuccia into her reign in order to emphasize the virtue of her leadership.

The symbol of the sieve appears in paintings stretching from the 15th century to the late 19th century³⁰ and in literature that extends as far back as the ancients and reaches to Shakespeare and beyond.³¹ During this 400-year period, Tuccia's virtuousness and character continued to be a fascinating subject. Her tale became an aid in proving God's

²⁷ Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*, (German Democratic Republic: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 97.

²⁸ Susan Snyder, "Naming Names in 'All's Well that Ends Well'," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43 (1992): 277.

²⁹ Strong, *Gloriana*, 107.

³⁰ One of the oldest examples is a painting by Andrea Mantegna, which was painted circa 1495-1506. One of the latest examples is Louis Hector Leroux's 1874 painting. Paintings or other art forms depicting Tuccia would have existed before and after these dates as well, but this was the earliest painting I found in my research.

³¹ Shakespeare writes, "Yet in this captious and intenable sieve I still pour in the waters of my love and lack not to lose still," suggests a reference to Tuccia's myth. William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, edited by Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 39.

power and a symbol of virtue and security, and Augustine, Petrarch, and the portraiture of Queen Elizabeth I use Tuccia as a paradigmatic figure that emphasizes the power of virtue and innocence.³²

Juvenal's Sixth Satire and Livy's Perochiae

To contrast the more positive views nearly all authors or artists take in reference to Tuccia, Juvenal considers her to be a rather licentious woman in his sixth satire, which is famous for insulting women. He begins the satire with the opinion that chastity is gone, and then scolds Postumus, his addressee, for desiring marriage before moving on to list a promiscuous group of people, including Bathyllus, Leda, Tuccia, and Apula.³³ The irony is, however, that Tuccia is chaste and does not belong in this list. Bathyllus was an erotic dancer, Leda (a swan seduced by Zeus³⁴) here incites sexual cries, and Apula arouses sexual frenzy. Tuccia is the only chaste and virtuous person, but because Juvenal sees chastity as gone, even the most chaste woman is transformed and insulted. Juvenal, when describing Tuccia, uses an interesting phrase, "Tuccia did not have command of her bladder" (*Tuccia uesicae non imperat*, 6.64). This is another way of saying she has no control over her body and is licentious and loose, but it is also interesting that Juvenal uses the image of a leaky "vessel" to make his point. The uncontrollable bladder

³² Another interesting example that emphasizes Tuccia's symbolic virtue is a painting entitled, *Portrait of a Lady* by Michael Dahl, 1659-1743. In this painting, Dahl has portrayed an ordinary woman holding a sieve. Notice the title does not reference Tuccia, but merely a general lady. Based on this, Dahl must have thought that the definition of being a lady entailed chastity equal to that of Tuccia.

³³ Juvenal *Satires* 6.1-86.

³⁴ *Ov. Her.* 17.51.

parallels broken chastity, but because he is the only author who discredits her virtue, the value of her character is maintained and she has everything but a loose bladder.

Livy does not discredit Tuccia's chastity, like Juvenal, but he curiously includes in his *Periochae* that she was condemned for the *crimen incesti* (*Tuccia, virgo Vestalis, incesti damnata est*, 20.5). Why he writes this when every other record seems to give her miraculous deed is baffling, but must at least be pointed out. The variance on the tale, especially from a historical author, could indicate a few things. There may have possibly been a different Vestal Tuccia who did break her vow and receive the due punishment, or there could have been a minor textual difference on her name (i.e., Tuscia rather than Tuccia), or it may have simply been a mistake on the part of Livy. Regardless of how it came to be in the *Periochae*, the most well-known and credibly recorded tale of Tuccia is that of her sieve and the fact that she was not condemned, but spared.

Conclusion

The Vestal Virgin Tuccia has the smallest narrative of the Vestals examined in this thesis, but her impact is perhaps the most profound. Falsely accused, Tuccia prays to her goddess for a miracle so that she might prove her innocence. Vesta, acknowledging the purity of her handmaid, grants the request, allowing Tuccia to transfer water miraculously from the Tiber to the temple in a sieve. Tuccia's tale not only represents restored safety for the Romans, but also the virtue of chastity for women in general.

Tuccia became an icon of such chastity to the extent that Augustine used her to emphasize the greatness of God, Petrarch used her to embody the triumph of chastity, and

Queen Elizabeth I commissioned portraits of herself that depict her holding a sieve, affirming her reign as politically stable because of her strong character, morality, and leadership. As a result of such allusions and imagery, Tuccia remained an iconic, didactic, and paradigmatic figure for over five centuries.

The sieve of Tuccia represents chastity, but it also becomes a metaphor for sacred or monstrous womanhood. Its permeable nature is defied in Tuccia's task, and its role is reversed, emphasizing her devotion to Vesta. The sieve also brings together fire and water because one of its traditional uses was to carry fire, but it then functioned as a bearer of liquid as well.

Tuccia re-establishes Rome's boundary when she unites the Tiber and the temple, reinforcing the relationship between Vesta and Rome. Rather than crossing boundaries or breaking boundaries, Tuccia merges the devotion she has for both her goddess and her city. She binds the divide that unknowingly appeared when the hearth fire went out, and she upholds Rome's integrity as well as her own.

Plato, Polygnotus, and the myth of the Danaids each create parallels between the concept of a leaky vessel and either the soul or the character. Tuccia does not have an impious or thoughtless soul, which Plato compares to the leaky vessel, and she proves this through her impossible task. Polygnotus associates leaky containers with the uninitiated in a cult, but Tuccia's piety and service to Vesta refute this notion, revealing that not only is she initiated, but even turns a leaky vessel into a whole one. The Danaids, forever condemned to an insatiable sieve, contrast Tuccia's morality. Their murderous act ultimately led to their punishment, but her chastity saved her life and in a

single try she fills the sieve and retains the water, equating herself to the virtuous sister, Hypermnestra.

In all of these instances and through all of the sources, Tuccia undeniably stands as a symbol of chastity, womanly virtue, moral goodness, and religious devotion, regardless of Juvenal's thoughts or the mysterious pronouncement of condemnation in Livy's *Periochae*. Her myth lives not simply in ancient records or academic scholarship, but in paintings, literature, and repetitive metaphor.

CONCLUSION

The cult of Vesta is shrouded in mystery. Its origination, whether Hellenistic or Alban, is not clearly defined, but its existence in Rome thrived throughout all of Roman history. This thesis has examined the cult, discussing the characteristics of the Vestal order and the regulations and duties of the virgins. Three mythical virgins from Roman history participated in this cult, and their stories, symbolism, and significance have been elaborated upon. Each maiden served Vesta but faced the charge of unchastity and betrayal. Rhea Silvia, Tarpeia, and Tuccia's tales are crucial to Roman mythology because of their repercussions. Blame is placed upon Rhea since her chastity was broken through rape and pregnancy. Tarpeia consciously betrays the city of Rome for the love of golden bracelets (or Titus Tatius) and is buried alive by the soldiers' shields, setting the precedent for subsequent traitors' punishments and perhaps even Vestal interment. Falsely accused, Tuccia takes up a sieve of water, prays for salvation, and accomplishes an infeasible task of successfully transferring water in a leaky vessel. Despite the accusations and punishments these women face, their tales are necessary for Rome.

Rhea Silvia's role as a Vestal emphasizes the severity of her unchastity, and because of her sacred nature, the foundation of the Roman nation has an even greater glory. Tarpeia's undoubtedly deserved guilt provides a powerful transition point in Roman history. She knowingly betrayed Vesta, her vow of chastity, and her city, with no intention of preventing the Sabine entrance, yet in her status as a holy maiden she allowed the Roman people to form a new identity as a nation unified with the Sabines. She allowed Rome to grow immensely in a way no ordinary woman could because her

symbolic nature as an embodiment of Roman safety made Roman recovery more potent. Tuccia's unceasing devotion to her goddess lay at the root of her salvation, and through prayer and confidence in her innocence, she fulfilled the impossible. Her myth reveals to us that she is a symbol of virtue and a sign that the Vestals played a crucial role in the inviolability of Rome.

These three narratives have unique parallels that bind them together. The first point of comparison is with water. Rhea Silvia, fetching water at the Martian grove, is raped and her chastity is broken. Her feminine nature, represented through the liquidity of water, is penetrated and the womanly fluids of her womb are filled with twin boys. Tarpeia, who goes to the spring to gather water for Vesta's sacred rites, drops her jar, releasing its watery contents. The water cannot be contained in her tale because of her deliberate betrayal. She disavows Vesta and her promise of virginity. Tuccia, on the other hand, protects the water, and does not spill one single drop. Her chastity is not only upheld, but also firmly guarded; her loyalty is profound.

A second symbolic link among these Vestals is the jar or vessel they carry. In the case of Rhea and Tarpeia, the jars are dropped. Symbolic of their vow and duty as a Vestal, the water is no longer pure once it has been spilled. Tuccia, whose sieve is by nature leaky, defies gravity and miraculously seals a vessel, which was never meant to carry water.

Boundaries form the third bond between the Vestals examined. In each tale a boundary is breached or upheld and is symbolic of sexual penetration and the safety of Rome. Rhea Silvia's physical penetration foreshadows the repetitive boundary breaches

that come to define the combative nature of the Roman nation, but also serves as a necessary precedent to her marriage with the Tiber. In this union, she forms the boundary of Rome and becomes the nutritive source for the people. From her unchaste banks Rome rises and its glory as well. In forming the Roman perimeter, Rhea Silvia reminds the future generations whence they came, and how much greater their glory can grow. Tarpeia allows the infiltration of the Sabine army, opening the gates of the Roman citadel. This breach at first leads to battle, but culminates in a truce that doubles the size, territory, and reign of the nation. Tarpeia's naiveté and gilded avarice cause a boundary to be penetrated and Rome to be put in peril. Tuccia, on the other hand, seals the boundary between the Tiber and the temple of Vesta by carrying water from one to the other. She reinforces her loyalty and the safety of the Roman state in binding the two places.

All of these symbolic items and duties along with the care of the fire and other Vestal services come together in the notion of the Vestal Virgins' embodiment of Rome. Every duty, every element, and every action of their cult surrounds the fact that they exemplify and uphold the Roman nation. As a result, when a Vestal betrays Vesta, the effects for the Roman people are devastating and the crime seems even more heinous. Myths also formulated so much of Rome's identity that in having a Vestal Virgin as a key component in a myth, we can see just how important and essential the role of Vestals was in the nation's identity. They led the people to long for greatness, to long for a time when something grand and glorious would rise from tainted banks.

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