

ABSTRACT

Household Religion in Rome:

An Examination of Domestic Ritual and its Role in Shaping the Roman Family

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In ancient Rome, each household maintained a vibrant religious practice led by the patriarch of the family. They worshipped various deities responsible for the safety and well-being of the household. These included Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, the Penates, protectors of the food supply, the Lares, guardians of the home and estate, and the genius, the guiding spirit of the family patriarch. In addition to daily and annual worship, Romans performed various rituals during significant transitional periods such as marriage and death that invoked the household deities. This thesis examines those rituals, their implications for the nature of the Roman family, and the ways that domestic cult dealt with changes to the family structure.

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HOUSEHOLD RELIGION IN ROME: AN EXAMINATION OF DOMESTIC RITUAL
AND ITS ROLE IN SHAPING THE ROMAN FAMILY

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DEDICATION

To my parents. Your unfailing support means everything, and none of this would have been possible without you.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, societies have used ritual to deal with changing circumstances and the unpredictability of the natural world. Ancient cultures, even more than we are today, were at the mercy of disease, natural disasters, and war. They understood the fragility of their lives and turned to ritual to cope with that fragility. Recent psychological research has shown that practicing rituals creates emotional stability, reduces feelings of uncertainty, induces feelings of regaining control, and alleviates grief.¹ Catherine Bell defines ritual as a “mechanism for integrating thoughts and actions.”² As the ritual is both acted out and contemplated, these two aspects reinforce one another and create the positive effects.

The rituals that the ancient Romans developed to cope with their lives allow us to understand what they struggled with and how they created meaning in that struggle. Specifically, rituals performed by the Roman family reveal how they preserved the stability of the family unit amidst death and other profound structural changes. This thesis describes and defines many of the rituals that the Roman family practiced both on a daily basis and at major life events, including the birth of a child, marriage, and death.

¹ Francesca Gino and Michael I. Norton, “Privacy Policy,” *Scientific American*, last modified May 14, 2013, accessed April 14, 2014, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-rituals-work/>.

² Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 20.

Furthermore, it aims to understand how the rituals influenced the relationships between family members and facilitated the transitions of members into and out of the family unit.

CHAPTER ONE

Ritual in the Roman Household

The Roman Household: An Overview

Before we can consider how religious rituals created a sense of identity and solidified bonds within the family, we need to understand what the Roman family was like. The Roman *familia* was a far more complicated social unit than its modern counterpart. It included a nuclear family, slaves, and any other dependents who fell under the authority of the household's *paterfamilias* (father of the family). The nuclear family might contain not only the biological children of the *paterfamilias* and his wife but also any children he had adopted. Slaves, including tutors, nurses and household servants, freedmen, and *alumni* (children of slaves and freedmen, or foster-children) were also members of the *familia* not necessarily related biologically to the nuclear family, and usually all members of a *familia* lived within one *domus* (household).¹ On the other hand, extended family members, such as aunts and uncles, rarely participated in the functioning of the *familia*.² While the size of the household varied according to its economic and social position, its most basic function remained the same.³ The Roman *familia* existed for the production of children who could inherit both property and the responsibility of

¹ J. Bodel, "Cicero's Minerva, *Penates*, and the Mother of the *Lares*: An Outline of Roman Domestic Religion," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, ed. J. Bodel and S. M. Olyan (Blackwell Publishing: Malden, 2008), 248.

² Jane F. Gardner and Thomas Wiedemann, *The Roman Household: A Sourcebook*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 3.

³ Beryl Rawson, "The Roman Family." in *The Family in Ancient Rome* ed. Beryl Rawson. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 7-8.

upholding the family name and reputation. It also served as a place for the education of children, as an emotional and economic support system, and, for family members, as a center of religious and personal identity.⁴

The *paterfamilias* was the centerpiece of the Roman *familia* and was responsible for its preservation. The power of the *paterfamilias* over his dependents and property was absolute. In legal terms, the *paterfamilias* was the “oldest surviving male ascendant” of his nuclear family.⁵ He controlled the finances of the household and arranged marriages for his daughters. Although adult children did not necessarily live with their fathers, his control of their financial resources put them squarely under his authority. In practice, however, most men probably granted some latitude to their sons.

As head of his family, it was the responsibility of the *paterfamilias* to uphold and safeguard his family’s legacy. As a result, one of his most important duties was to provide an heir. Provision of an heir was so important that wives who were infertile could be divorced in favor of other women.⁶ If a *paterfamilias* failed to produce a natural heir, he could turn to adoption. Ancient adoptions differed in one key aspect from the modern kind. As Elizabeth Rawson writes, “Most of the adoptive sons of whom we know were already adult at the time of adoptions; by then, chances of survival were greater and the adopting father could see what he was getting as a son and heir.”⁷ In spite of their relative

⁴ Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 30.

⁵ Rawson, “The Roman Family,” 7.

⁶ Aul. Gell. *NA* 4.3.2.

⁷ Rawson, “The Roman Family,” 12.

maturity, adopted sons passed legally into the power of their new *paterfamilias*, gaining all of the responsibilities and privileges of a biological child. For example, upon the death of his grandsons Gaius and Lucius, Augustus formally adopted his nephew, the already middle-aged Tiberius, as his heir. Tiberius lost all financial and political independence, but he inherited the role of emperor when Augustus died.

Although marriage served many cultural purposes, its most important function was the production of children. Marriages were arranged by the *paterfamilias* with input from other members of the older generation; the participants in the marriage had little if any say in the matter.⁸ Part of the reason for this might be the extremely young age at which Romans were first betrothed and wed. Many girls were betrothed in childhood and married between the ages of twelve and eighteen; a male might reach the age of nineteen before his first marriage.⁹ Another reason might be that affection generally did not play a part in the choice of a spouse, and marriages involving romantic attraction were generally regarded with suspicion.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Roman couples strived for *concordia* (harmony) in marriage,¹¹ and successful couples often boasted of years spent *sine ulla querela* (without any complaint) in their epitaphs (*CIL* 6.16753). According to Rawson, “Literary

⁸ Dixon, 63, see Cic. *Att.* 13.42.

⁹ Marriage was encouraged not only by the family, but also by the government. The laws of Augustus began punishing women at age 20 and men at age 25 for failure to marry. See Rawson, “The Roman Family,” 21-22.

¹⁰ Keith R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 127.

¹¹ Dixon, 70. Tacitus on his parents-in-law: “vixeruntque mira concordia, per mutuam caritatem et in vicem se anteponendo” (And they lived in marvelous harmony, through shared affection and by setting the other before themselves in repayment) *Agr.* 6.1.

expressions suggest that [this] is comparable with our own notion of a ‘happy marriage.’”

While they minimized any emphasis on sexual attraction, Romans stressed the importance of mutual love and companionship, revealing that their concept of an ideal marriage did not preclude an emotional connection.¹²

Upon marriage, a woman might be transferred legally to the authority of her new husband’s family, or she might retain membership within her own. In the early period of Roman history, a bride was more likely to come under the power, or *manus*, of her husband or his *paterfamilias*.¹³ According to the jurist Gaius, three types of marriage – *confarreatio*, *coemptio*, and *usus* – created marriage with *manus*.¹⁴ *Confarreatio* was a permanently binding religious ceremony available only to wealthy Romans because it required the presence of the *pontifex maximus* and the *flamen Dialis*.¹⁵ *Coemptio*, a legal proceeding that essentially functioned as a bride sale, was a less permanent and more common form of marriage. It remained popular even after *confarreatio* and *usus* declined in popularity. *Usus*, the least binding form of marriage, was conferred by the act of the two people living together for a full year. By the end of the republic, marriage *sine manu*, or marriages where wives did not enter into their husband’s *manus*, had become the

¹² Beryl Rawson. *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 107. See Musonius, 13a. 17-19.

¹³ Gell. *N.A.* 18.6.9; Gardner and Wiedemann, 11-14; Susan Treggiari, “Roman Marriage: *Iusti Coniuges* from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian.” (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 16-32.

¹⁴ Gai. *Inst.* 1.108-10.

¹⁵ Serv. *Georg.* 1.31.

standard.¹⁶ This meant that the wife's financial resources remained under the authority of her biological *paterfamilias*. This would have increased the woman's financial independence and the influence of her birth family upon her new household.¹⁷ Marriage without *manus* also had profound effects on a wife's relationship to household cult, since a wife marrying in this way did not become a member of her husband's religious community.

Children represented the future of Roman families. They would grow up to inherit not only property, but also the responsibility of maintaining family honor and the ancestor cult. The historical record for the role that parents played in their children's lives is scarce, but it does portray widely varying trends in parental involvement in the raising of children.¹⁸ Nevertheless, tombstones reveal the affection many parents had for children who experienced untimely deaths, and in his private journals Cicero described himself as "desperate" when he was separated from his wife and children.¹⁹ Clearly, forming an emotional attachment to one's nuclear family was the norm, and, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, religious rituals assisted with this process.

While all Roman children enjoyed some type of education, the training of upper class children lasted into their late adolescence.²⁰ Initially, most families employed wet nurses, who often stayed on to take care of the child several years after they were

¹⁶ Gardner and Wiedemann, 17.

¹⁷ Dixon, 75.

¹⁸ Rawson, "The Roman Family," 30-31.

¹⁹ Bradley, 139 and 177. See also *CIL* 6.7578 and Cic. *Letters to Friends* 6.3.

²⁰ Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*, 16 and 20.

weaned. Young children then attended primary school accompanied by *paedagogi*, school attendants or tutors. These tutors were often well-educated and held responsible for the child's moral and intellectual development.²¹ Later on wealthy youths would be educated by *grammatici* (literature teachers).²² The younger generation in the lower classes, however, would be expected to enter into apprenticeships in their early teens.²³ Children were educated through their parents, relatives and friends of the family in what was appropriate social behavior.²⁴ Fathers educated their sons on matters of morality and *pietas* in their adolescence, and sources tell us that they generally enforced an atmosphere of strict discipline and respect.²⁵ Furthermore, children learned about religious rituals by observing their parents and siblings perform household rites.²⁶ The transmission of religious knowledge was an important part of the education of a young child.

Upon coming of age, both male and female children underwent a religious ceremony to celebrate their entrance into the adult world. A ceremony in which a boy went to the Forum and donned the *toga virilis*, the garment of a man, signified the beginning of his adult life. For girls, the first marriage signified this step.²⁷ This change in

²¹ Rawson, "The Roman Family," 38.

²² Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*, 16 and 20.

²³ Bradley, 107-108, see especially Table 5.1.

²⁴ Dixon, 26.

²⁵ Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*, 114.

²⁶ Francesca Prescendi, "Children and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge" in *Children, Memory and Family: Identity in Roman Culture* ed. V. Dasen and T. Spath (2010): 73-94.

²⁷ Dixon, 101.

status brought many new social and religious roles along with it, and for this reason, we shall consider the wedding ceremony in greater detail in chapter three.

Although the other members of the typical Roman household were not biologically related to the family that they served, they fulfilled important roles both occupationally and emotionally. Besides childcare, slaves could be expected to take care of the house, estate, and even the finances of the *familia*. The nuclear family and their dependents often lived in a fully integrated manner; many slaves slept at the feet of their masters and lived and worked in close quarters with them and other domestics, forming a tight-knit community.²⁸ Inevitably, children remained close to the nurses and servants whom they had known since birth. Upper class children might be raised in close proximity with *alumni* (foster children, or children of household slaves or freedmen); *alumni* could also be expected to form attachments with their foster parents and sometimes inherit upon their deaths.²⁹ *Vernae* were a distinct group of slaves who were born in the houses of their masters. They might enjoy a special relationship with the nuclear family and special privileges, and their birth added to the economic value of the household.³⁰

Dependents and the families that they served enjoyed closer relationships than simply owner-to-slave. Historians have observed that relations between slaves and *paterfamilias* resemble a paternal relationship. The *paterfamilias* gave permission for his

²⁸ Bradley, 91.

²⁹ Beryl Rawson. "Children in the Roman *Familia*." Trans. Array *The Family in Ancient Rome*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 173-74.

³⁰ Rawson, "Children in the Roman *Familia*," 186.

household staff to enter into marriages, and, like sons, slaves could not legally own property.³¹ Freed slaves, called freedman, might enjoy patronage from their previous household and even continue to live there after receiving their freedom.

In conclusion, a Roman *familia* consisted of a *paterfamilias*, his spouse, his children, and a number of dependents with various socio-economic positions living in a *domus* (household). Proximity, affection, and “a common collective interest”³² tied these people together into one cohesive unit, despite drastic disparity in their legal and financial circumstances.

Roman Household Ritual

Romans performed rituals in their homes habitually to honor household deities and to mark important transitions in their lives. They performed these rituals to assure the survival of the family and to ensure that its traditions would be passed on to subsequent generations. Religious ritual also helped to solidify bonds of affection between members of the family and worked to reinforce a sense of community within the household.

Roman domestic religion revolved around worshiping deities or groups of deities believed to be responsible for the well-being of the household. These deities, or *numina*, include the Penates and Vesta, the Lares, and the *genius* of the *paterfamilias*.³³ Some of the *numina* were worshiped in the public sector with religious festivals and temples, but

³¹ Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce and Children*, 145.

³² Bodel, 248.

³³ D.G. Orr, “Roman Domestic Religion: The Evidence of the Household Shrines” in *ANRW* 2.16.2: 1557-91 (1978): 1559.

inside the home, religion had less structure and more variation in observance.³⁴ Ancient sources cannot reveal how consistently families performed the religious rituals. Likewise, the origin of the household gods and their relationships to one another often remain unclear. Even so, while much is not yet understood about Roman domestic cult, there is much that we do know.

Physically, household worship centered around the hearth, which was the home of Vesta,³⁵ and a small shrine called a *lararium* after the Lares. Three types of *lararia* dominate in the archaeological record, although others existed as well. The first, a niche type, was a small rectangular or semicircular nook in the wall.³⁶ Typically these niches were located at an easily accessible level, which indicates that the members of the family interacted with them on a regular basis. They show a great variety in style and shape. Figure 1 shows a semicircular niche-style *lararium* from the House of Menander in Pompeii. Inside the shrine are four small busts, which may represent ancestors or other household deities.

³⁴ Daniel P. Harmon, “The Family Festivals of Rome” in *ANRW* 2.16.2: 1592-1603 (1978): 1592. Deities other than the ones listed may have made their way into the family worship as well.

³⁵ *Ov. Fast.* 6.291-310.

³⁶ Orr, 1576-77.



Figure 1 *Lararium* from the House of Menander in Pompeii (Photo by Meghan DiLuzio)



Figure 2 *Aedicula* from the House of Menander in Pompeii (photo by Meghan DiLuzio)

An *aedicula*, or a miniature temple, was the most elaborate kind of *lararium* and rested on a small platform called a *podium*. The *aedicula* in figure 2 comes from the *atrium* of the House of Menander. It is likely that the niche *lararium* in the House of Menander, which is less elaborate than the *aedicula*, was used by slaves for worship.

Wall paintings featuring the Lares accompanied by an altar constitute the third major type of *lararium*. Figure 3, for instance, from the House of the Vettii in Pompeii, shows the two Lares flanking the figure of the *genius*. The Lares wear short tunics and hold drinking cups, perhaps a symbol of the prosperity they promise to bring to the household. All three types of *lararia* contained some depiction of the deities, be it a painting or small figurine, and places for offering sacrifices, like the altar featured in figure 1.³⁸



Figure 3 *Lararium* from the House of the Vettii in Pompeii (photo by Patricio Lorente)

³⁸ Orr, 1576-77.

Worship developed around several different types of Lares, but only two of them relate to household affairs. The *Lares familiares* watched over the *paterfamilias* and his household.³⁹ Their worship included offerings of food, wine, and blood and occurred daily, with special ministrations, such as wreaths of flowers, given on certain holidays.⁴⁰ Tibullus describes their sacrifices here:

Hic placatus erat, seu quis libaverat uvam,
Seu dederat sanctae spicea sarta comae,
Atque aliquis voti compos liba ipse ferebat
Postque comes purum filia parva favum. (1.10.20-24)

He (the Lares) was placated, if someone offered the first grapes or placed the garland of wheat-ears on his sacred head: and whoever gained his wish brought the honey-cakes himself, his little daughter behind, with the pure comb.⁴¹

The *Lares compitales*, alternatively, guarded the fields and the crossroads at the property lines of the *domus*. The *Compitalia*, a major festival, honored the *Lares compitales* each winter.⁴² One theory holds that the Lares originated as protectors of the fields who gradually expanded into the sphere of the *domus*.⁴³ Regardless of their origin, both the Lares and the Penates became associated so strongly with the household that either word could be used as a synonym for the *domus*.⁴⁴

³⁹ Celia E Schulz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 124; Pl. *Aul.* 1-5.

⁴⁰ Orr, 1567; Pl. *Trin.* 39; *Aul.* 385-386; Hor. *Car.* 4.5.33-36; *Sat.* 2.5.12-14.

⁴¹ Translation by A. S. Kline © 2001.

⁴² Cic. *Pis.* 4.8-9; Fest. 108 and 213; Mac. 1.2.27.

⁴³ Orr, 1564.

⁴⁴ Schulz, 123.

The Penates and Vesta shared a close relationship, and Vesta is sometimes included in their ranks.⁴⁵ The youthful Penates protected the *penus* (storeroom containing food) of the household and, by extension, the food supply.⁴⁶ Some evidence suggests that Castor and Pollux were the Penates.⁴⁷ According to tradition, statues of the Penates brought to Italy by Aeneas resided in the temple of Vesta, the hearth goddess, illustrating their ancient connection to one another.⁴⁸ Families worshiped both the Penates and the living presence of Vesta (*vivam...flammam*, Ov. *Fast.* 6.291) around the hearth. According to Cato, the housewife decorated the hearth with garlands for special occasions and prayed to the household deities:⁴⁹

Kalendis, Idibus, Nonis, festus dies cum erit, coronam in focum indat, per eosdemque dies lari familiari pro copia supplicet (*Agr.* 143.2).

On the Kalends, Ides, and Nones, and whenever a holy day comes, she must hang a garland over the hearth, and on those days pray to the household gods as the opportunity offers.

The flame on the hearth symbolized the life of the household and, unsurprisingly, it played a vital role in domestic religion.

The third household deity that received regular worship was the *genius*. Celia Schultz calls the *genius* the “procreative life-force” of the *paterfamilias*.⁵⁵ A kind of

⁴⁵ Orr, 1560.

⁴⁶ Orr, 1562; *Dig.* 33.9.3.

⁴⁷ Orr, 1562.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1560.

⁴⁹ Orr, 1560; Ov. *Fast.* 6.291.

⁵⁵ Schulz, 124.

guiding spirit, the *genius* watched over the household and preserved the family *nomen*.⁵⁶ Upon the death of the *paterfamilias*, the family *genius* passed on to the next oldest direct male descendant. The *genius* received worship chiefly on the *paterfamilias*' birthday and the day of his marriage, and it might receive sacrifices that included animals, wine, or grains.⁵⁷ *Genii* appear often on *lararia* along with snakes, an ancient symbol of fertility. (Fig. 3). The female counterpart of the *genius* was the *juno*. We do not completely understand the role of the *juno* in household ritual, but we do know that it also received worship on its human counterpart's birthday.⁵⁸ The *juno* of the wife of the *paterfamilias* appears in the *lararium* of the House of Julius Polybius at Pompeii (Fig. 4). In this picture, she is the one offering sacrifices at the altar; this image confirms that the wife had an important role in household cult.

⁵⁶ Orr, 1570.

⁵⁷ *CIL* 5.860, 861; Tibullus 2.2.1.

⁵⁸ Orr, 1570.

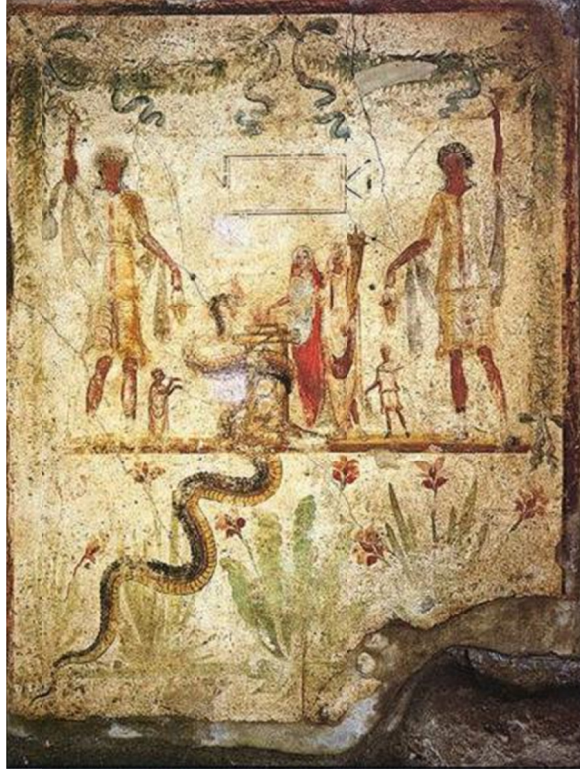


Figure 4 *Lararium* from the House of Julius Polybius in Pompeii (photo by Jackie Dunn)

Every family member played a role in the domestic cult. Cato the Elder elucidates the role of the *paterfamilias* in a treatise explaining to a foreman how to perform his master's duties in his absence, suggesting that *paterfamilias* needed to oversee the proper observance of religious holidays. "The feast day," he writes, "must be observed" (*feriae servantur*, Cat. Agr. 5.1). The *paterfamilias* was also accountable for daily acts of worship.⁶⁰ The women of the household, on the other hand, were responsible for maintaining adequate supplies for the sacrifice, grinding the grain for sacrifice, and educating the children in religious matters.⁶¹ As the caretaker of the family, the wife

⁶⁰ Schulz, 127.

⁶¹ Schulz, 127-29; Cato Agr. 143.3; Plin. Nat. 18.107.

provided the material substances required for worship and prayed that the gods would continue to bless her household. Her ritual obligations reflect her role within the family. Furthermore, household worship helped to articulate the relationship between husband and wife: Cato, for instance, reminds the housewife to remember that “the master attends to the devotions for the whole household” (*dominum pro tota familia rem divinam facere*, *Agr.* 143). The wife had an important ritual role, but the *paterfamilias* was the religious head of the household, just as he was the most important authority on other issues of significance to the family.

Additionally, some rites required the participation of both children and adults. Young girls, for instance, could be employed to look after the hearth.⁶³ Ovid also describes an entire family worshipping the gods together at the festival in honor of Terminus, the god of boundaries:

ara fit: huc ignem curto fert rustica testo
sumptum de tepidis ipsa colona focus.
ligna senex minuit concisaque construit arte,
et solida ramos figere pugnat humo;
tum sicco primas inritat cortice flammās;
stat puer et manibus lata canistra tenet.
inde ubi ter fruges medios immisit in ignes,
porrigit incisos filia parva favos.
vina tenent alii: libantur singula flammis;
spectant, et linguis candida turba favet (*Fast.* 2.645-54).

An altar is set up. To it a rustic woman herself carries on a broken potsherd a flame taken from the warm hearth. The old man splits the firewood, arranges the broken pieces skillfully, and struggles to fix the branches in the solid ground. Then he kindles the first flames with dry bark. The boy stands and holds the wide basket in his hands. Then, when he has thrown grain into the fire three times, the

⁶³ Orr, 1561.

little daughter offers cut honeycombs. Others hold the wine; individual libations are poured for the flames; they watch, and the white-clad crowd keeps silent.⁶⁴

In this scene, each member of the family has a job to perform. The housewife brings the flame, the father lights the flame that will burn the sacrifice, and the young children bring the offerings themselves. Finally, there is even evidence that slaves worshipped alongside their masters. The “others” in Ovid’s passage, who wear white and watch silently, are undoubtedly slaves. The *lararium* from the House of Sutoria Primigenia also depicts the *genius* and *juno* alongside their children and slaves (Fig. 5).



Figure 5 *Lararium* from the House of Sutoria Primigenia in Pompeii (photo by Jackie Dunn)

Domestic cult drew the whole family into common activity. Worship of the household deities and domestic ritual was an outward expression of the unity, cooperation, and common interest of the family. For this reason, all members of the family participated in household cult. Ritual practice also helped to define the members of the family in relation to one another. The *paterfamilias* was the head of his household

⁶⁴ Translation courtesy of Schulz 2006.

cult, but each individual had a role to play. As Romans navigated major life transitions, domestic cult assisted in defining and solidifying the status of family members and connecting them all together. In the coming chapters, I shall examine the rituals surrounding three such transitions: birth, marriage, and death.

CHAPTER TWO

The *Dies Lustricus*

Roman families performed a ritual known as the *dies lustricus* (roughly, “day of purification”) when an infant reached eight or nine days old. This ceremony purified the child through sacrifice and rituals. Furthermore, it marked the day when the child received status as a person, membership in the family through the bestowing of a name, and Roman citizenship through registration with the government. On the *dies lustricus*, the family formally accepted the infant and ushered it into their community.

The *dies lustricus* was related to the larger practice in Roman culture of lustration (*lustratio*), the performance of a cleansing ceremony on a place or group of people.¹ Lustrations purified their subjects in order to ward off evil spirits. They included a circular procession, which created a barrier against evil, torches, and music or chanting, and concluded with the reading of entrails of the animal sacrifice. An excellent example of this is the *suovetaurilia*,² an animal sacrifice specific to the purification of fields. In this passage from Cato’s *De Re Rustica*, the author describes the circular path of the procession, the sacrifice, and the reading of the entrails:

Ianum Iovemque vino praefamino, sic dicito, “Mars pater, te precor quaesoque uti sies volens propitius mihi domo familiaeque nostrae, quoius re ergo agrum terram

¹ For a discussion of lustrations at Rome, see Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth. “Lustration” in *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford and New York: 1996).

² Cato *Agr.* 141; also see Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth. “Suovetaurilia” in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. (Oxford and New York: 1996).

fundumque meum suovitaurlia circumagi iussi, uti tu morbos visos invisosque, viduertatem vastitudinemque, calamitates intemperiasque prohibessis defendas averruncesque; utique tu fruges, frumenta, vineta virgultaque grandire beneque evenire siris, pastores pecuaque salva servassis duisque bonam salutem valetudinemque mihi domo familiaeque nostrae; harumce rerum ergo, fundi terrae agrique mei lustrandi lustrique faciendi ergo, sicuti dixi, macte hisce suovitaurlibus lactentibus inmolandis esto; Mars pater, eiusdem rei ergo macte hisce suovitaurlibus lactentibus esto.” Item cultro facito struem et fertum uti adsiet, inde obmoveto. Ubi porcum inmolabis, agnum vitulumque, sic oportet: "Eiusque rei ergo macte suovitaurlibus inmolandis esto.” Nominare vetat Martem neque agnum vitulumque. Si minus in omnis litabit, sic verba concipito: “Mars pater, siquid tibi in illisce suovitaurlibus lactentibus neque satisfactum est, te hisce suovitaurlibus piaculo.” Si in uno duobusve dubitabit, sic verba concipito: “Mars pater, quod tibi illoc porco neque satisfactum est, te hoc porco piaculo” (*Agr.* 141.2-4).

Make a prayer with wine to Janus and Jupiter, and say: “Father Mars, I pray and beseech thee that thou be gracious and merciful to me, my house, and my household; to which intent I have bidden this suovetaurlia to be led around my land, my ground, my farm; that thou keep away, ward off, and remove sickness, seen and unseen, barrenness and destruction, ruin and unseasonable influence; and that thou permit my harvests, my grain, my vineyards, and my plantations to flourish and to come to good issue, preserve in health my shepherds and my flocks, and give good health and strength to me, my house, and my household. To this intent, to the intent of purifying my farm, my land, my ground, and of making an expiation, as I have said, deign to accept the offering of these suckling victims; Father Mars, to the same intent deign to accept the offering of these suckling offering.” Also heap the cakes with the knife and see that the oblation cake be hard by, then present the victims. When you offer up the pig, the lamb, and the calf, use this formula: “To this intent deign to accept the offering of these victims.” If favourable omens are not obtained in response to all, speak thus: “Father Mars, if aught hath not pleased thee in the offering of those sucklings, I make atonement with these victims.” If there is doubt about one or two, use these words: “Father Mars, inasmuch as thou wast not pleased by the offering of that pig, I make atonement with this pig.”³

In addition to fields, the written sources record lustrations of cities,⁴ armies,⁵ and the Roman people following a census.⁶ The ceremony not only preserved purity within the

³ Translation courtesy of LacusCurtius.com.

⁴ The lustration of Rome was called the *Amburbium*. See Simon, and Anthony Spawforth. "Amburbium" in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. (Oxford and New York: 1996).

circle, but also “denoted a new beginning”⁷ for the participants. Many of the elements and symbols of the lustration are found in the *dies lustricus*, with the ideas of purity and a new beginning being the clearest connections.

Several rituals took place immediately following the birth of a child and in the days between the birth and the *dies lustricus*. At the time of the birth, the family hung garlands around the door and lit an altar, as we see in this poem by Statius:

...cumque tibi vagiret tertius infans,
protinus ingenti non venit nuntia cursu
littera, quae festos cumulare altaribus ignes
et redimire chelyn postesque ornare iuberet
Albanoque cadum sordentem promere fumo
et cantu signare diem? (*Silv.* 4.8.35-40)

When this third child gave cry, why did no letter come swiftly
to bring me word, telling me to heap hot coals on the altar fire,
garland my lyre, and adorn my doorposts bring out a jar dark with
Alban smoke, and mark the day with chalk?⁸

Decorations or modifications to the doorframe often signified to the community that an important event was happening in a household. Both the marriage ceremony and death rituals shared this feature with the *dies lustricus*.

Soon after the birth, the father performed a ritual lifting up (*tollere*) of the child from the ground, indicating a willingness to raise the child and recognize that it was his

⁵ Livy, 40.6.

⁶ *Lustrum condere* was the ceremonial cleansing after the Roman census, See Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth. "Lustration" in *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford and New York: 1996).

⁷ Hornblower and Spawforth, "Lustration."

⁸ Translated by A. S. Kline © 2012.

own.⁹ This acknowledgment of the child by its father secured its place in Roman society as belonging to its father's family. At this point, the child had the potential to become a member of the family, but would not become a full member until it had survived nine days and its *dies lustricus* ceremony was completed. The contact with the earth was said to imbue growth and life into the child, but it also put the child at risk from evil spirits residing in the earth.¹⁰

On the day of the birth, a ritual couch and meal called a *lectisternium* were placed in the *atrium* of the house for Pilumnus and Picumnus, the "*infantium dei*" (gods of the infants).¹¹ The Romans believed that the days between birth and the *dies lustricus* were filled with danger for the child and its mother because it was not yet pure. On the night before the purification ceremony, three men kept vigil over the house armed with an axe, pestle and broom. Both the *lectisternium* and the vigil were associated with keeping Silvanus, a wild woodland spirit, at bay.¹²

The timing of the *dies lustricus* ceremony differed between the genders, for reasons that are not entirely clear to modern scholars. For boys, the *dies lustricus* occurred on the ninth day after birth.¹³ A girl's *dies lustricus*, on the other hand, took

⁹ Daniel P. Harmon, "The Family Festivals of Rome" in *ANRW* 2.16.2: 1592-1603(1978): 1596; Suet. *Nero* 6.1.

¹⁰ Harmon, 1596-97.

¹¹ Rawson, Beryl. *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 13.

¹² Rawson, 14.

¹³ Macrobius *Sat.* 1.16.36- *Est autem dies lustricus, quo infantes lustrantur et nomen accipiunt: sed is maribus nonus, octavus est feminis.* (However this is the day of purification, by which the babies are purified and receive a name: but the ninth for males,

place on her eighth day, according to Macrobius. Plutarch, a Greek historian, suggests in the *Roman Questions* that females are purified earlier because they mature more quickly than males, or that mathematically odd numbers suit males and even numbers suit females. He also implies that the Romans waited until after the seventh day because the umbilical cord must fall off completely. He compares a child with an umbilical cord still attached to a plant, showing both the connection of newborns to earth and the belief in their lack of humanity before the purification and naming ceremony.¹⁴ Aside from the ritual significance of the numbers, families may have been reluctant to celebrate the birth of a newborn due to the high infant mortality rate in the ancient world. This probably contributed to the practice of recognizing the full humanity only of eight or nine day old infants. Waiting to ensure the child's survival served a protective purpose both emotionally and financially.

The *dies lustricus* marked the official entrance of the child into personhood, the community of the family, and Roman society. On the day of the ceremony, friends and family gathered to celebrate with the new parents.¹⁵ Sacrifices were offered for purification, and by these the child was cleansed of any evil or pollution it might have picked up during the birthing process or the first few days of life.¹⁶ They also read bird

the eighth is for females.) The mourning period for the death of a family member also lasted nine days after the burial and involved cleansing. The rituals marking the entrance and exit of a person into the family mirror each other in several ways, an idea that will be discussed more fully in chapter four.

¹⁴ Plut. *Roman Questions* 102.

¹⁵ Rawson, 14-15.

¹⁶ Harmon, 1597.

signs to determine the future of the child. Similar to the more public *lustratio*, the *dies lustricus* included animal sacrifice, the interpretation of animal signs, a ritualistic means of warding off evil, and the establishment of a new beginning. Religious rituals represented a way to maintain control or bargain with nature in a time when natural forces could devastate human communities on a massive scale. In the same way that communities dealt with fear and uncertainty by purifying themselves to cast out evil and pacify the gods, so families invoked divine help to purify their own during a particularly fragile and danger-filled time. The *dies lustricus* reveals the Roman family's fight for the health and safety of its own children.

After the reading of the omens, the child received a name.¹⁷ Rawson calls the naming “enormously important for conferring identity on the child.” The bestowing of a name marked the recognition of the child as a person and a family member; also, the child was usually registered on this day with the state, giving it Roman citizenship. In addition to receiving identity as a member of a family and as a citizen of Rome, the child was introduced to its future social circle. Many of the people in attendance would form the support system of the child and its family for years to come.¹⁸ Nearly every important association and relationship the child would have began on that day. For a boy, the family into which he entered became his closest community for the remainder of his life. He entered under the authority of his *paterfamilias* and would learn to worship his family's *numina* and to uphold the family name. He might become the *paterfamilias* of that family

¹⁷ Rawson, 14-15. For naming precedent, see Suetonius *Nero* 6.2.

¹⁸ Rawson, 14-15.

one day. A girl would do the same until she transitioned into her husband's family at marriage.

At the *dies lustricus*, the child received a *bullā*, an apotropaic amulet that was worn around the neck until adulthood so that no further cleansing ceremonies would be necessary (Fig. 6). The *bullā*, which was often gold for wealthy children, was the most important of the several charms that were given to the child after it was born.¹⁹ Males traded the *bullā* for the *toga virilis* (toga of manhood) at their coming-of-age ceremonies marking their entrance into adulthood, and females probably made the transition at their first marriage.²⁰ These protective measures demonstrate the value of the children to the family unit. Children represented the future bearers of the family name and property.

¹⁹ Ibid, 14.

²⁰ Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 101.



Figure 6 Depiction of Nero as a child wearing a bulla²¹

Several deities besides the *infantium dei* were involved in the *dies lustricus* and pre-*dies lustricus* rituals. Juno Lucina, or Juno who brings children into the light, presided over the birth scene and watched over the cradle of the newborn.²² According to Macrobius, Nundina was the goddess of the *dies lustricus*.²³ Other sources, however,

²¹ Photo courtesy of P. Liverani.

²² Rawson, 13.

credit patronage of the *dies lustricus* to Mater Matuta²⁴ or Carmenta.²⁵ Tertullian records that families also invoked the Fata Scribunda, the goddesses which write out destiny, as they named the child, so that the child might be written into existence.²⁶

Families celebrated the anniversary of births each year by “thanksgiving offerings, the sacrifices of cakes and burning of incense, and [...] the conferral of gifts upon the person celebrating the natal day.”²⁷ One assumes that these gifts and rituals, being very similar to the ones of the *dies lustricus*, would hearken back to this ceremony as a reminder of the individual’s place in their religious, civil, and familial community. The celebrations placed value on each member of the family, emphasizing their unique personhood and individuality, and renewed the relationships which began at the *dies lustricus*.

The *dies lustricus* resembles in some ways other purification rituals, or *lustrationes*, in Roman culture. All of these rituals invoke deities to purify a person or thing. The ceremony took place nine days after the birth of boys and eight days after the birth of girls, following several other domestic rituals that also safeguarded the infant. At

²³ *Sat.* 1.16.36: *Est etiam Nundina Romanorum dea a nono die nascentium nuncupata, qui lustricus dicitur.* (Also Nundina was called the goddess of the Roman births for the ninth day, by whom the purification was spoken).

²⁴ The goddess of the dawn. See Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth, "Mater Matuta" in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. (Oxford and New York: 1996).

²⁵ A goddess or nymph of prophecy, sometimes associated with childbirth, see Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth, "Carmentis or Carmenta" in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. (Oxford and New York: 1996); Rawson, 14.

²⁶ S. Bremer and J. H. Waszink, "Fata Scribunda" in *Mnemosyne*. 13.4 (1947): 254-270. 6 Dec. 2013. 248.

²⁷ Harmon, 1597; *Ov. Trist.* 3.13.13-15; *Plin. N.H.* 18.84, *Mar.* 10.24.

the *dies lustricus*, the infant was cleansed through sacrifice and given a Roman name which signified his or her personhood and membership in the family. The infant gained acceptance as a member of a community, both familial and societal. Amulets worn from that point to protect the children reflect the continuing fear of contamination and the value placed on children in households. Each year they celebrated the anniversary of the birth date using rituals similar to those of the *dies lustricus*, a reminder of their acceptance in their family and community.

CHAPTER THREE

The Roman Wedding

The Roman wedding featured rituals that connected a bride symbolically to the past, present and future of her new family. It also emphasized visually and theatrically the virtue of the bride, which was vital for publicly securing the legitimacy of children produced by the marriage. A typical wedding consisted of legal proceedings, a reading of the auspices and a feast at the bride's residence, the ceremonial leading of the bride to the groom's house, and rites and feasting at the groom's house.

As Susan Treggiari notes in *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the time of Cicero to the time of Ulpian*, it would be a mistake to assume that all weddings included every ritual element, just as modern weddings often leave out a few of the many traditions available to brides and grooms today.¹ Furthermore, our knowledge of Roman wedding ritual is heavily skewed towards the elite. Nevertheless, all the rituals of the Roman wedding had historical and religious significance, and the practices of the lower social orders often simulated, albeit to a lesser degree, those of the elite, while still retaining their meaning. I will thus discuss many of the wedding traditions in this chapter as they apply to the Roman people as a whole.

¹ Susan Treggiari. "Roman Marriage: *Iusti Coniuges* from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian." (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 161.

At the House of the Bride

The wedding day began at the bride's familial home. Her mother and other female assistants helped her to dress for the occasion while offering advice and good wishes. In this poem by Apuleius, the bride-to-be's mother gives her "honeyed kisses" and offers worried prayers for children:

Tunc me gremio suo mater infelix tolerans mundo nuptiali decenter ornabat
mellitissaviis crebriter ingestis iam spem futuram liberorum votis anxie
propagabat (Apul. *Met.* 4.26).

Then my unhappy mother, suffering, was furnishing me properly in her bosom with a dress for marriage and with poured out honeyed kisses, and frequently now she increases her future hope for children with nervous prayers.

The wedding of her daughter was clearly a bittersweet occasion for the mother in this passage, who is described as suffering, even as she offers prayers for the future. We may see, therefore, that the wedding ritual allowed mother and daughter to emphasize and commemorate their close relationship, even at the moment when it was about to change dramatically.

The bride's attendants set her hair into a style called the *sex crines*, which had six sections or braids and resembled the hairstyle of the Vestal Virgins.³ A spear called a *hasta caelibaris* secured the coiffure. The *flammeum*, a distinct reddish-yellow veil also worn by the wife of the *flamen Dialis* (the priest of Jupiter), covered the bride's head, and she wore matching *socci lutei* on her feet. A white tunic, a crown of flowers, and jewelry completed the traditional outfit. The veil and white garments emphasized the bride's modesty and purity, both important characteristics of the ideal bride. Her association with

³ Fest. 454L.

the Vestals and the *flaminica Dialis*, who was not allowed to divorce her husband,⁴ also spoke to her character and promise of fidelity. The ritual costume associated with the wedding, therefore, highlighted the bride's status as a chaste daughter and served as a pledge of her integrity as she made the transition into her new family.

The wedding party convened at the bride's home. First, the families offered sacrifices and sought signs and omens about the future of the marriage. Numerous gods with ties to marriage might have been invoked during this ceremony, including, but not limited to, Jupiter, Juno, Venus, Diana, and Peitho.⁵ The signs took the form of bird-watching and, in later centuries, examining the entrails of the sacrifice.⁶ The family selected an *auspex* or a group of *auspices* from among their friends, and this person or group delivered the omen to the bride.⁷ After this, the wedding feast transpired, and the dotal contract, called the *tabulae nuptiales*, the *tabulae dotaless* or just the *tabulae*, was read in front of the guests and legally witnessed by close friends. The dotal contract contained "a statement of the content of the dowry and agreements about what would happen to the dowry at the end of the marriage."⁸

⁴ Fest. 82L.

⁵ Plut. *Roman Questions* 2.

⁶ Vell. *Pat.* 2.79.2; Statius *Silv.* 1.2.229-30: *Vixdum emissa dies, et iam socialia praesto omina, iam festa fervet domus utraque pompa* (With the day barely passed, and the omens of the union at hand, now the house glows at either merry procession). See also Treggiari, 164.

⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 11.27.1.

⁸ Treggiari, 165. According to Treggiari, the dowry was used to support the wife, or *uxor*, in the *sine manu* marriages which became prevalent. For details of the fate of the dowry at the end of a marriage, see Jane Gardner's *Family and Familia in Roman Law and Life* p.85-92 or *Women in Roman Law and Society* p. 95, 105.

Notably, the rituals of the *dies lustricus* also included sacrifices, the reading of *auspices*, and official legal documentation. Since both ceremonies marked the entrance of a new individual into a family, the similarities are not surprising. Although not every wife entered legally into the authority (*manus*) of her husband's family, ritual parallels exist between the introduction of a child and the introduction of a wife into a family.⁹ The gods were consulted and the new member was purposely integrated into the family by means of familiar ritual practices. Unlike those of the newborn child, of course, these rituals would have had a significant impact on the bride, who was fully aware of the transition she was making.

The dotal contracts also often explicitly stated that the marriage was concluded “for the purpose of producing children” (*liberorum quaerundorum gratia*).¹⁰ The Latin word for marriage, *matrimonium*, and its etymological link to *mater*, meaning “mother,” also suggests that the chief end of marriage was the production of children. Families participated in the institution of marriage in order to generate offspring. Thus a woman entering into *matrimonium* joined her husband's family for the express purpose of continuing his line. A bride was valued for her ability to produce children and for her chastity, which ensured that the children truly belonged to the groom's family.

The wedding feast at the bride's house would also have been the proper time for the *iunctio dextrarum*, or the ritual joining of the right hands. In the *Carmina Minora* of

⁹ For a discussion of *manus* marriage and marriage *sine manu*, see chapter one.

¹⁰ Beryl Rawson, "The Roman Family" in *The Family in Ancient Rome* ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 9.

Claudian, Venus herself joins the hands of the couple, though Juno often performs this function in Latin literature:

tum dextram complexa viri dextramque puellae/ tradit et his ultro sancit conubia dictis/ 'Vivite concordēs et nostrum discite munus' (25.137-39)

Then (Venus), having grasped the hand of the man and the hand of the girl hands them over and sanctifies their marriage with these words: "Live united and learn our function."

This passage illustrates the function of the *iunctio dextrarum* in uniting the couple physically, emotionally, and in their complementary household duties. Romans clearly placed value on couples living and working together. An example of the continuation of this value is in the complementary duties of husbands and wives in household ritual, which were discussed in chapter one. Significantly, Venus, the goddess of sexual love, is the one that joins their hands, an allusion to the sexual intimacy of marriage and the bond that it creates.

Although found infrequently in literature, the *iunctio dextrarum* is portrayed often in Roman art and sculpture.¹¹ The relief in figure 7, featured on a sarcophagus, shows the *iunctio dextrarum* of the couple among the wedding guests. The *pronuba*, the matron of honor, stands behind the couple and supervises this important moment in the wedding ritual. The fact that this couple decided to depict the *iunctio dextrarum* on their sarcophagus, which was likely produced many years later, suggests that this ritual gesture was an effective way of communicating the conclusion of the marriage and its lasting impact on those involved.

¹¹ Karen K. Hersch, *The Roman Wedding: Ritual and Meaning in Antiquity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 199-200.



Figure 7 A Roman sacrifice showing the *iunctio dextrarum* (Photo by Ann Raia, vroma.org)

The Domum Deductio

According to our Roman sources, the bride then travelled from her own home to the house of the groom in the *domum deductio* (leading home) procession. After the wedding party prodded her, the bride would initially refuse to leave the *domus* of her parents. She may have feigned tears or clung to her parents, as does the bride in these lines from Catullus' *Carmen* 62, in which a girl is torn from her mother by Hesperus, the evening star:

qui natam possis complexu avellere matris,/ complexu matris retinentem avellere natam,/ et iuveni ardenti castam donare puellam (21-23).

You, who are able to snatch the daughter from the embrace of her mother, to snatch the resisting daughter from the embrace of her mother, and to present the unsullied girl to the burning youth.

Regardless of whether or not these emotions were genuine, they displayed her modesty and virginity to the onlookers in the party and to the surrounding crowds. Once she joined the procession, wedding torches and attendants accompanied her to the groom's house

amidst bawdy jokes¹³ and the tossing of walnuts.¹⁴ The *domum deductio* often drew large crowds, and this communal portion of the wedding served as testimony to the wedding's occurrence. The bride, by showing the desired virtues both in her attire and her conduct, protected the legacy of her union and her future children in the eyes of the public.¹⁵

In some ways, the *domum deductio* was meant to echo the legendary Rape of the Sabine Women. Several sources describe the bride being removed from her home with pretended force,¹⁶ like the victims in the story from Rome's mythic past. During the *domum deductio*, the cry "Talassio!" followed the bride, also calling back to the original Rape.¹⁷ Like the Sabine women, the narrative of the wedding procession features the new bride being taken by force from her home and submitting to the authority of her new husband and his family. In return, she receives protection and offspring. Some Romans considered this the only ritual necessary to constitute a legal union, possibly because the kidnapping served as a wedding for the Sabine women as well.¹⁸

Ironically, it seems that the groom usually did not accompany the procession to his home, as the story of the Sabine women might suggest. Instead, he left the feast and arrived earlier so that he would be present to receive his bride at the threshold of his *domus*. Still, a man's responsibility in marriage was often referred to as *uxorem ducere*

¹³ Cat. 61.120.

¹⁴ Virg. *Ecl.* 8.30.

¹⁵ Hersch, 141, 144-45.

¹⁶ Cat. 61.3-4; Fest. 364.

¹⁷ Fest. 351.60-65; Livy 1.9.11. See Hersch, 148-150 for a discussion of the meaning of "Talassio."

¹⁸ Hersch, 141-44.

(“leading a wife”) in literature. As we learn from Paulus, a man could lead a woman in marriage without even being there (*vir absens uxorem ducere potest*, S. 2.19.8), just as he did not actually lead her on the *domum deductio*. This suggests the aggressive role of the male and the passive role of the female, as a sort of victim or object, in the marriage as a whole, even beyond the *domum deductio*. Without the man present, the woman does not resist, but still submissively gives in to her fate. On the other hand, the woman was required to attend the marriage ceremony. Paulus says that “an absent woman is not able to marry” (*femina absens nubere non potest*, S. 2.19.8). This shows that the marriage rituals were primarily significant for the bride, the one making the biggest transition and entering into a new household.

The general posture of both the wedding ceremony and the marriage, hearkening back to the founding, emphasized the severe roots of Roman culture and the violent means by which families were propagated. Women left their homes and families to begin a new life in their new husband’s household.

Another important element of the *domum deductio* was the *taeda*, the wedding torch. In the literature, we find *taedae* connected metonymically to the wedding ceremony. For example, when Aeneas denies being married to Dido in *Aeneid* 4, he says that he “did not ever extend torches in marriage” (*nec coniugis umquam praetendi taedas*, 4.338-39). Historians have documented the use of *taedae* at numerous points during the marital proceedings, including accompanying the bride on the *domum deductio*, being carried by the groom, and appearing at his home for the ceremonial rituals.²¹ Its most

²¹ Hersch, 165, 170.

important position was on the *domum deductio*, where it signaled to the masses that a wedding was occurring.

Fire itself evokes the idea of the hearth, the centerpiece of the home, where sacrifices were given to Vesta and the other household gods; similarly, the Vestal Virgins kept constant watch over the flame in Vesta's temple to safeguard the well-being of Rome. The hearth had strong ties to the health of the family, and was constantly tended as a part of the household rituals designed to maintain the family's well-being. The bride carried fire from her own hearth to the hearth of her new family, suggesting the mingling of her own life and health with his family's. Her fate was now permanently united with theirs, and they shared a life source. Or, perhaps this gesture displayed her own ability to tend the hearth of her new household, which seems likely given the deliberate connections we have already seen between the bride and the Vestal Virgins.²²

At the House of the Groom

Upon her arrival at the groom's house, the bride anointed his threshold with animal fat and hung up woolen bands, or *vittae*.²³ The woolen bands testified to the home-making skills of the bride; the meaning of the animal fat is less clear. At times the fat came from a wolf, which is linked not only to the founding of Rome, but also to fidelity, according to Servius.²⁴ Pliny, on the other hand, credits the wolf with apotropaic

²² Ibid, 175.

²³ Donat. ad Ter. *Hec.* 1.2.60; Plut. *Roman Questions* 31.

²⁴ Serv. *Aen.* 4.458.

powers and cites this property as the reason for its use on the threshold.²⁵ The bride also may have used the fat of a pig, which was often associated with fertility, and Varro compares the sacrifice of the pig at the wedding to the giving of the virgin girl in marriage.²⁶ By adorning the entrance to her new home with these items, the bride expresses good will and respect for her new family and her desire for the success of the union in producing offspring.

Escorts then helped to lift the bride over the threshold of her new home.²⁷ The importance of the threshold comes partly from its importance to Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, who valued chastity highly. A young bride would not wish to begin her married life by stepping on the threshold and offending Vesta, or, even worse, calling her own chastity into question.²⁸ The threshold was also significant because crossing it marked the entrance of the bride into a new family and a new stage of life. Passing over the threshold was one of several important milestones which sealed the bride as a married woman. The act of carrying her over the threshold may also have extended the motif of bride-stealing and marriage by force.²⁹

²⁵ Plin *H.N.* 28.142; 28.135.

²⁶ Varr. *R.R.* 2.4.10: “*prisci quoque Latini, etiam Graeci in Italia idem factitasse videntur. Nam et nostrae mulieres, maxime nutrices, naturam qua feminae sunt in virginibus appellant porcum, et Graecae choeron, significantes esse dignum insigne nuptiarum*” (The ancient Latins, too, as well as the Greeks living in Italy, seem to have had the same custom; for our women, and especially nurses, call that part which in girls is the mark of their sex porcus, as Greek women call it choeros, meaning thereby that it is a distinctive part mature enough for marriage.) Translation by LacusCurtius.com.

²⁷ Plut. *Roman Questions* 29.

²⁸ Hersch, 181.

²⁹ Ibid, 182.

The escorting party, which accompanied the bride from her home on the *domum deductio* and through the threshold, consisted of women and children who “reinforced the bride’s carefully guarded virginity” until the time she was given to her husband.³⁰ An older woman called a *pronuba* assisted the bride on her wedding day and may have carried marriage torches and played a role in some of the wedding rituals like the *iunctio dextrarum* (Fig. 7). Described as a *univira* (a woman who had been married only once) by Tertullian, the *pronuba* was a model of mature womanhood and femininity for the young bride.³¹ In the *Aeneid*, Juno acts as the *pronuba* and orchestrates the famous cave scene for Dido and Aeneas,³² but it remains unclear whether the *pronuba* played an equally indispensable role in reality. *Camilli*, or child attendants, also accompanied the bride and may have carried torches or vessels for her. Varro describes them as those who “bear the *cumerum*.”³³ Children with both parents living (*patrimi et matrimi*) may have been the same as the *camilli* or another group of attendants that accompanied the bride.³⁴ The innocence of the children highlights why they might be included in the escorting

³⁰ Ibid, 159.

³¹ Tertull. *Cast* 13.1.6: “*ut et uirginibus legitime nubentibus uniuira pronuba adhibeatur*” (that a matron with one husband is given to marrying virgins due to the law). See also Festus 282L; Serv. *Aen* 4.166.

³² Virg. *Aen* 4.166-68.

³³ Varro *L.L.* 7.34.4: “*itaque dicitur nuptiis camillus qui cum[m]erum fert*” (thus the youth is mentioned in the ceremony, who bears the *cumerum*). According to Varro, the *cumerum* was a vessel used in a secret marriage rite called the *camilla*. See also Fest. 43L.

³⁴ Hersch, 159.

party. The bride's attendants spoke to both her past as a child and her future as a wife and bearer of children, while protecting her reputation during the wedding day festivities.

Once the bride entered the *domus* of the groom, several rituals sometimes took place, although their order and regularity are difficult to determine. The first ritual I would like to discuss, because sources often mention it first, is the presence of fire and water. Several authors suggest that after crossing the threshold, the groom offered the bride fire in the form of a torch and a bowl of water.³⁵ Others include the presentation of fire and water in the ceremony, but do not specify what role it is playing.³⁶ The presence of both elements, however, is fairly well established. Susan Treggiari writes that these elements were shared (*aquae et ignis communicatio*) because they are “essential to human life, most obviously cooking and washing. [They have] deep roots in the Roman idea of home.”³⁷ As the groom offered the bride fire and water, he would be inviting her into the life blood of his family. This invitation ushered her symbolically into his domestic life and family. As his wife, she would become intimately involved in the inner workings of his household in the coming days. Alternately, Plutarch suggested that the fire and water represented the masculine and feminine, respectively, and that the dynamic nature of the flame and the responsive nature of the water embodied the roles the couple would play, as the husband led his wife and she reacted to him. He also explored the idea of purification through these elements, a theme which often surfaces during transitional

³⁵ Varro *L.L.* 5.61.

³⁶ These include Ovid and Virgil, see Hersch, 183.

³⁷ Treggiari, 168.

rituals.³⁸ All of these ideas likely present some part of the truth, but what is undeniable is that the *ignis et aquae communicatio* played a highly significant role in the wedding. By the time of the second century C.E., the groom's reception of the bride with fire and water marked the official beginning of their marriage.³⁹

At approximately the same stage in the proceedings as the sharing of fire and water, the bride might have spoken the phrase "*Ubi tu Gaius ego Gaia*" (Where you are Gaius, I am Gaia), at least during a *coemptio* wedding. The only full transcript of this phrase comes from Plutarch, but several other writers mention it and use "Gaia" to refer to a bride.⁴⁰ Plutarch equates this phrase with the idea of a master and a mistress and an eternal sharing of domestic space, once again emphasizing the permanency and fidelity of marriage. Valerius Maximus wrote that "Gaia" is a reference to Gaia Caecilia, an excellent wool-worker who was married to Tarquinius Priscus.⁴¹ If so, the name "Gaia" is likely a reference to the domestic role the wife would play in her new household.

The new bride immediately began to integrate herself into the household cult of her new family. On the night of the wedding, she gave a coin sacrifice to the *Lares Familiares* of her new family.⁴² These were the household deities that guarded the *familia*; sacrifices to these gods ensured the health and safety of the household. By

³⁸ Plut. *Roman Questions* 1.

³⁹ Hersch, 185.

⁴⁰ Plut. *Roman Questions* 30; Cic. *Mur.* 27.

⁴¹ Val. Max. 10.7; Hersch, 187.

⁴² Varro *De vita populi Romani*, 1.25.

sacrificing to them, the bride placed herself under their safe-keeping and joined her new family's religious community.

While the guests were enjoying a celebratory feast, the bride and groom reclined on the *lectus genialis*, a lavishly ornamented couch, often in purples and gold, in the *atrium* of the house. This couch symbolized the marriage bed.⁴³ Festus says that the *lectus* was decorated in honor of the *genius* of the *paterfamilias*, the guiding spirit of the family that was passed down from generation to generation, father to son.⁴⁴ Servius believed instead that the couch was named for the production of children (as in *genus*, or descent or stock).⁴⁵ Either way, the *lectus* symbolized the past and the future of the family, and the bride's position on the *lectus* with her husband depicted the role she would play in the propagation of the family.

By the end of the *nuptia*, or wedding ceremony, the man and woman were already considered husband and wife. The consummation of the marriage did not take place on the *lectus genialis*, in spite of its role in the ritual, but instead in the groom's darkened room upstairs.⁴⁶ The next day the bridegroom held a "dinner and a drinking party" at his home called a *repotia*; at this event the bride joined her family in sacrificing to the household gods for the first time, "exercising her authority in her husband's household."⁴⁷ If the marriage had been *cum manu*, then she took on the title

⁴³ Cat. 64.47-50; Juv. 10.334-35.

⁴⁴ Festus 83L.

⁴⁵ Serv. *Aen.* 6.603.

⁴⁶ Plut. *Roman Questions*, 65.

⁴⁷ Treggiari, 169; Macr. *Sat.* 1.15.22.

materfamilias, or mother of the family.⁴⁸ In a *sine manu* marriage, the wife had the title *uxor*. At this point, the new wife was fully integrated into her new family.

Before marriage *cum manu* fell out of style, both *confarreatio* and *coemptio* might be celebrated with a ceremony resembling the one described in this chapter. However, a *confarreatio*, a type of marriage generally reserved for the upper classes, included a few extra elements in its wedding ceremony that distinguished it from the *coemptio*.⁴⁹ A sacrifice of a *farreum*, a type of cake made out of *far*, was made at the wedding feast. *Far*, a type of wheat, lends its name to *confarreatio*. Also, Servius tell us that two specific officials, the *pontifex maximus* and the *flamen Dialis*, always presided over the sacrifice.⁵⁰ The *flamen Dialis* himself was united to his wife, the *flaminica Dialis*, through *confarreatio*, from which divorce was never allowed.

Conclusions

As modern readers, we can identify several trends taking place within the various rituals of the Roman wedding. The first is the emphasis placed on marriage for the purpose of child-bearing, in conjunction with the preservation and demonstration of the bride's virtue, without which she possesses no value for bearing legitimate children and thus no value at all. A faithful virgin bride ensures the happy continuation of the family for years to come. Second is the rape narrative in which the man acts as the aggressor in the marriage relationship. This tradition ties into the founding of Rome itself. Third,

⁴⁸ Cic. *Topica* 14.

⁴⁹ Treggiari, 22-23.

⁵⁰ Serv. *Geo.* 1.31.

various efforts are made by the bride to placate and honor the household which she is entering and its patron deities. The various sacrifices and offerings made by the bride at the wedding serve to ceremonially graft her into the religious life of the household. Finally, the theme of uniting the couple and joining their lives together appears multiple times, suggesting that the fate of a man and his wife are interconnected and a successful marriage will be a joint venture of cooperation and fellowship. Although the Romans rarely connected the idea of romantic love to a successful marriage, they recognized the importance of marital harmony and friendship, and they laid the groundwork for this harmony in their wedding ceremony.

CHAPTER FOUR

Funeral Rites and Burial

The *funus*, which consisted of all the rituals and events commemorating a death in the community, often spanned a period of over two weeks and included both public and private ceremonies. The typical sequence of events included a lying-in-state, a funeral procession, the burial itself, a cleansing period, and a final feast. Various rituals during this time prepared the deceased for the transition into the next life, honored his accomplishments during his life, began to associate him with the *di parentes*, or ancestor gods, cleansed the home and family from the defilement of the corpse, and created space for the family and community to mourn the loss. In this chapter, I shall analyze the *funus* and consider how the various rituals created a new relationship between the deceased and the other members of his household.

Death and Collocatio

When the time of death drew close, family members gathered around the deathbed and waited until the end. At the appropriate time, the relatives called out the name of the deceased repeatedly (*conclamatio*),¹ a gesture to confirm that death had actually taken place, and the eyes of the deceased were closed (*oculos premere*).² In the first of several acts that mirror the birth rituals, the family placed the deceased on the bare

¹ Lucan 2.21-3; Virg. *Aen.* 6.218.

² Virg. *Aen.* 9.486; Luc. 3.740; Plin. *Nat.* 11.150.

earth (*depositio*),³ revealing the inherent symmetry the Romans found in the entrance and exit from human life. Some sources actually tell us that the *depositio* occurred just before the death of the individual.⁴ Whereas at the *dies lustricus* the infant was raised up from the ground by its father, in the *depositio*, the dying family member was placed back on the ground for the final time. Dieterich argues that this practice echoed an earlier belief that human souls come from and return to “Mother Earth.”⁵ It is certainly significant that members of the family performed rituals that symbolize the transition into and out of the community of living family members. Through the rituals of the *dies lustricus* and the *depositio*, the family plays the role of transporting the individual either into or out of earthly existence. Furthermore, these important ritual practices helped the family to process the changes that the household was undergoing.

Upon the death of a family member, the funeral rites began immediately. The body of the deceased was washed, anointed, and dressed to prepare for the showing of the body during the *collocatio* (lying-in-state).⁶ At this point, verbal lamentations by the nearest relatives, and especially by the women, had probably begun. These would continue intermittently until the cremation or inhumation following the funeral procession.⁷

³ Ov. *Pont.* 2.2.45.

⁴ Ov. *Trist.* 3.3.40; Serv. *Aen.* 12.395.

⁵ Dieterich, 1925.6-35.

⁶ For the washing and anointing, see Serv. *Aen.* 6.218-19; Apul. *Flor.* 19, *Met.* 8.14. For the clothing, see Livy 5.41.2, 34.7.2-3.

⁷ J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971), 44.

While the arrangements were made for the rest of the *funus*, the body of the deceased laid in a dignified state while members of the community came to pay their respects. Male roman citizens wore the *toga*, and citizens who had earned honorary wreaths now wore them.⁸ According to Cicero, “that ornament (the wreath) is an expression of praise for the dead to achieve, because the flower crown, by courage, and to he who blossoms, and to his forefather without deceit the law orders it be given” (*illa iam significatio est laudis ornamenta ad mortuos pertinere, quod coronam virtute partam et ei, qui peperisset, et eius parenti sine fraude esse lex impositam iubet, De Leg. 2.60*). Thus began the honoring of the dead and the acknowledgment of their earthly attributes, which would continue throughout the events of the *funus*.

The *collocatio* allowed family and members of the community to gather in the house to pay their respects to the dead person. Figure 8, a relief of a *collocatio* from the tomb of the Haterii, presents the most complete image that we have of this event. The relief depicts the *collocatio* of a noble woman who is laid out in the *atrium* of her house. She has been dressed elaborately and wears jewelry and a flower wreath on her head. Both torches and candelabra light the scene, and garlands of fruit and flowers hang conspicuously above the couch, possibly symbolizing richness and blessings in the afterlife.⁹ The mourners featured in the bottom center beat their breasts, and the three women at the head of couch feature disheveled hair and are kneeling in grief. Hired mourners, shown in the relief, were common among upper class family funerals.

⁸ Juv. 3.171-2.

⁹ Toynbee, 44.

According to the written sources, the *collocatio* also featured incense burning, and branches of cypress above the door informed the community that the house was in mourning.¹⁰ This period might last as long as seven days for some members of the upper class, as arrangements for the funeral procession and burial were made,¹¹ while members of lower classes might be buried within a few days.¹² In each case, the period of mourning within the house was highly ritualized and served to ease the transition of the deceased from his or her role as a living member of the household into the community of ancestors.

¹⁰ Incense: Fest. 17L. Cypress: Serv. *Aen.* 6.216.

¹¹ Serv. *Aen.* 6.218: “*servabantur cadaver septem diebus*” (the dead body was watched over for seven days).

¹² Cic. *Clu.* 9.27.



Figure 8 Relief from the Tomb of the Haterii (image source: shafe.co.uk)

The Funeral Procession

The *pompa funebris*, or funeral procession, escorted the body of the deceased from the *domus* to the burial site outside the *pomerium*, the sacred boundary of the city. Roman statesmen and other people of importance received a eulogy in the Forum before their procession accompanied their corpse to the gravesite. Featuring music and entertainment, the public portion of the *funus* was a celebration of the life and achievements of the deceased.

After the lying-in-state, the corpse was carried on a couch by close male relatives or friends.¹³ The body always departed the house feet-first, an inversion of the normal headfirst birth. As Pliny writes, “it is part of nature’s ceremonial that humans are born head-first; it is human custom that they are carried out of the house by the feet” (*ritus naturae capite hominem gigni, mos est pedibus efferi, H.N. 7.46*).¹⁴ This ritualized removal of the body suggests a sort of reversal of circumstances and a returning to an original location, just as the ceremony of the *dies lustricus* was reversed in the *depositio*.

The funeral *pompa* typically included family, neighbors, friends, professional mourners, dancers, and musicians, and more townspeople probably joined as the sizable party made its way through town.¹⁵ Also, actors wearing *imagines*, life-like ancestor masks, impersonated the ancestors of the deceased and accompanied the *pompa*. In a famous passage from the *Histories*, the Greek author Polybius describes this spectacle:

When any other person of the same family dies, they (i.e., the *imagines*) are carried also in the funeral procession, with a body added to the bust, that the representation may be just, even with regard to size. They are dressed likewise in the habits that belong to the ranks that they severally filled when they were alive. If they were consuls or praetors, in a gown bordered with purple: if censors, in a purple robe: and if they triumphed, or obtained any similar honor, in a vest embroidered with gold. Thus appareled, they are drawn along in chariots preceded by the rods and axes, and other ensigns of their former dignity. And when they arrive at the forum, they are all seated upon chairs of ivory; and there exhibit the noblest objects that can be offered to youthful mind, warmed with the love of virtue and of glory. For who can behold without emotion the forms of so many illustrious men, thus living, as it were, and breathing together in his presence? (*Hist. 6.53*).

¹³ Persius 3.105-6.

¹⁴ Translation by Corbeill 2004.

¹⁵ Harriet I. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 92.

Sources often use some form of the word *ducere* (“lead”) to describe the action of the group of *imagines* in the procession.¹⁶ This is appropriate both because the ancestors came before their descendant in life and because each one preceded the deceased in making this final journey. Furthermore, this passage reveals that the ancestors remained part of the community of the household. Their masks were stored in special cupboards in the *atrium* of the house where family members could interact with them on a daily basis.¹⁷ Figure 9, for example, may even depict a man holding the images of his ancestors. During the funeral of one of their descendants, actors wore the *imagines* so that it seemed as if the ancestors themselves joined the living family members in commemorating the recently deceased. Through the ritual of the funeral *pompa*, the entire community of the family, both living and dead, were brought together.

Upon arriving in the Forum, the bearers placed the corpse on the Rostra, a large speaking platform, and the *laudatio* (eulogy) was delivered, usually by the son of the deceased.¹⁸ The *laudatio* enumerated the accomplishments of the deceased in the presence of his family, the Roman public, and, symbolically, in the presence of his ancestors. According to Polybius, the body was usually “placed conspicuous in an upright posture” (*Hist.* 6.53), so that he appeared to have joined the community of ancestors as a participant in his own funeral. The most elaborate funerals might include a banquet provided by the family of the deceased¹⁹ and gladiatorial games in the following days,

¹⁶ Hor. *Epod.* 8.11-12; Cic. *De. Or.* 2.225.

¹⁷ Pol. *Hist.* 6.53.

¹⁸ Cic. *Mil.* 13.33.

¹⁹ Flower, 92.

showing that the death of important citizens was acknowledged and mourned by the entire city of Rome.



Figure 9 Portrait statue of a man with images of his ancestors (photo by N.N. Britova)

Cremation and Burial

Subsequent to the *pompa funebris*, the remains or ashes of the deceased were interred outside the *pomerium*. The burial or cremation of the corpse was a more private affair than either the *collocatio* or the *pompa funebris*, and often only family members

were in attendance.²⁰ Several rituals were performed at the gravesite that prepared the deceased to enter the next life and began the purification process for the living family members.

Early legislation required that all bodies be deposited outside the boundary of Rome, but sometimes exceptions were made for significant persons.²¹ This practice was both hygienic and reflected the fear that dead bodies were ritually unclean. For those destined for cremation, the burning of the body took place either at the site where the ashes would be buried or at a *bustum*, a place reserved specifically for this process.²² The body was placed on the pyre, or *rogus*, along with various gifts and some of the deceased's possessions. Pliny writes about the practice of "opening the eyes on the pyre" (*oculos in rogo patefacere*, *H.N.* 6.150) before the burning of the corpse. Corbeill theorizes that this custom developed to help the dead person see their way in their rebirth.²³ The idea of rebirth into an afterlife was prevalent in Roman society and suggests that the possessions were burned to accompany the individual into the next life.²⁴ Also, a small piece of the corpse was cut off (*os resectum*) to be buried at a later

²⁰ Flower, 93.

²¹ Legislation: Cic. *De Leg.* 2.23, 58. Exceptions to the rule include the emperor Trajan (Toynbee, 48 and 291).

²² Toynbee, 49.

²³ Anthony Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 98.

²⁴ Romans did not agree about the exact location or nature of the afterlife. One common belief held that souls went to a place under the ground within Mother Earth. Views of the afterlife were generally positive, and many also believed that the quality of the afterlife depended on a person's morality and achievements. See Toynbee, 33-39, for details.

time.²⁵ After the cremation, family members collected the ashes and stored them in a marble, stone, glass, or terracotta receptacle. They either placed them in a niche in the family tomb or, in the case of lower class people, buried them in the ground.²⁶

Bodies destined for burial, on the other hand, were often preserved by a gypsum cast, a different way to prepare for rebirth. Wealthy individuals rested in ornately decorated sarcophagi, while the poor might be laid directly in the ground. A coin was often placed in the mouth of the corpse to buy passage on Charon's boat, a practice that is still common in many Mediterranean countries.²⁷

On the evening of the burial or cremation, the family ate a funerary feast called a *silicernium* at the gravesite.²⁸ This ritual honored the deceased and provided an opportunity for intense mourning. Festus calls it the place "where the families were cleansed by tears" (*quo fletu familia purgabatur*, 377L). In this statement we find grief and, once again, the association of death with the need for purification.

Cleansing Rituals

Romans believed that death defiled the living. Several rituals performed over the course of a nine-day period after the burial cleansed the family and the *domus* from the contamination of the corpse. Cicero describes the first of these, the sacrifice of a pig, at the gravesite (or the place where the *os resectum* was buried, in the case of cremation),

²⁵ Cic. *De Leg.* 2.22.55.

²⁶ Toynbee, 50.

²⁷ Ibid, 49.

²⁸ Varro *Men.* 303.

which legally sanctified the ground for the burial.²⁹ Later in the day after the burial, the family underwent the *suffitio*, a cleansing ritual that involved fire and water.³⁰ The Romans took the danger of defilement seriously; in the *Aeneid*, the characters at Misenus' funeral performed the *suffitio* immediately after placing his ashes in the urn.³¹ Then, a nine-day period of cleansing rituals, called the *feriae denicales* (literally, "cleansing festivals"), began, and mourning continued.³²

Once again, we see that the funerary ritual mimicked the *dies lustricus*, the ritual that integrated a newborn into the family. The *feriae denicales* lasted for nine days, the same number of days that elapsed between the birth and the *dies lustricus* of a male child. Both the passage to and from the living world took the same amount of time and both were associated with uncleanness.

The nine-day period culminated with the *cena novendialis*, the ninth day feast, and the burial of the *os resectum*. The feast occurred at the gravesite, but unlike the feast on the day of the burial, this was a joyful occasion. The Romans believed that the deceased took part in the *cena*, a fact that underscores the power of rituals to bring members of a family together, even after they have been separated by death.³³ After the

²⁹ Cic. *De Leg* 2.22.

³⁰ Fest. 3L.

³¹ Daniel P. Harmon, "The Family Festivals of Rome." *ANRW* 2.16.2: 1592-1603 (1978): 1602; Virg. *Aen.* 6.229-30.

³² Cic. *De Leg.* 2.22.55; Cass. Dio 69.10.3.

³³ Petron. *Sat.* 65.

feast, the period of official mourning ended, and the family removed their mourning clothes.³⁴

The Parentalia

Henceforth, the family worshipped the deceased alongside their other ancestors. A rite honoring them, called a *parentatio*, was performed annually.³⁵ Ovid in his *Fasti* describes the kinds of gifts that might be offered:

Est honor et tumulis, animas placare paternas,
parvae in exstructas munera ferre pyras.
parva petunt manes: pietas pro divite grata est
munere; non avidos Styx habet ima deos.
tegula porrectis satis est velata coronis
est sparsae fruges parvae mica salis,
inque mero mollita Ceres violaeque solutae:
haec habeat media testa relictia via.
nec maiora veto, sed et his placabilis umbra est:
adde preces positis et sua verba focus (2.533-42).

There is honour paid also to tombs – appeasing the paternal spirits and bringing small gifts to the pyres erected for them. Small things are what the *manes* ask for; devotion pleases them, rather than a costly gift. Styx in the depths has no greedy gods. A tile covered with a spread of garlands is enough, and a sprinkling of corn and a meager grain of salt, and Ceres softened in wine and a scattering of violets. Let a clay vessel contain these, left in the middle of the road. Not that I forbid bigger things; but even by these a ghost can be appeased. Add prayers and appropriate words when the braziers have been set up.³⁶

This tradition resembles the gift giving at the anniversary of the *dies lustricus*, revealing that the ancestors never left their family, but remained an important part of the family and their ritual life. The funeral was the first and most important ritual that defined the new relationship between the living and the dead, but it was not the last ritual interaction

³⁴ Corbeill, 98.

³⁵ Harmon, 1603.

³⁶ Translation by Wiseman and Wiseman 2011.

between them. Members of the household continued to associate with one another in the ritual sphere long after the burial and the *cena novendialis* were complete.

Conclusions

Several themes emerge from an analysis of the *funus* rituals. The rites and customs associated with death and burial allowed families to prepare their loved ones for the next life and helped to make the transition a smooth one. The *pompa* publicly honored the accomplishments of the deceased as they took their place among the *di parentes* in the household cult. At the same time, cleansing rituals protected the family from defilement by the corpse. In all these of rites, the family members celebrated the life and mourned the death of their deceased relative, and were comforted by the idea that the deceased might be enjoying a peaceful afterlife.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, household ritual played an integral role in the religious life of the Romans. Daily worship drew the family members together in common activity and created a community in the household. The family worship embodied the values and identity of the family, so that they became nearly inseparable from each other. In essence, one could not have a Roman family without its ritual practices.

By performing rituals which added members into or moved members out of the religious community, they created a way to add or remove people cleanly from the family itself. Their customs brought the transitions to forefront and dealt with significant changes in a positive and healthy way. They also provide space to adjust to the transitions and, if necessary, to grieve. Specifically, the rituals that accompany major events symbolically bring about the advent of the ideal outcome for each situation. At the *dies lustricus*, a group of people recognize and celebrate the birth of a new child who has a future as a member of their community. The wedding is both the complete unifying of a couple as man and wife and an opportunity for the bride to conclude life with her family and transition into the household of her husband's family. The *domum deductio* enacts and acknowledges the change she is going through, while the rituals at the groom's house subsume her fully into their family and religious community. Finally, the *funus* allows ample time for grieving, but it also paves the way for ancestor worship of the family member and allows participation of the family in the shift from this life to the afterlife. Each of these ceremonies assume that there will be a positive outcome (the child will live, the marriage will produce children, and the deceased is at peace) and reinforce this

idea for the family members, while still acknowledging the magnitude of the change taking place and allowing people to deal with it.

The rites surrounding major transitions helped individuals and their family members cope with major changes, but they also reveal to modern readers some important facts about the Roman family. The birth rituals show how they cared deeply about their children for both emotional and practical reasons. In the wedding ceremony, indifference or disregard for women and their concerns is evident, but so is recognition of their centrality to the household and importance for bearing children. The funeral reveals how much individuals valued the praise and respect of their family and ancestors. They performed the rituals for their family members, so that one day that would be done for them.

Ritual created a stable community that endured the entrance and departure of members, both expected and unexpected. The modern family, which is often torn apart by the slightest of troubles or undesirable circumstances, might do well to learn from their example.

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