

**RELIGION AND SOCIETY**  
Rituals, Resources and Identity in the  
Ancient Graeco-Roman World

The BOMOS-Conferences 2002-2005

EDITED BY

ANDERS HOLM RASMUSSEN  
AND SUSANNE WILLIAM RASMUSSEN

with

Ittai Gradel, Jens A. Krasilnikoff and Karen Rørby Kristensen

EDIZIONI QUASAR

---

ROMA MMVIII

Analecta Romana Instituti Danici – Supplementum XL  
Accademia di Danimarca, 18, via Omero, I - 00197, Rome

© 2008 Edizioni Quasar di Severino Tognon srl, Rome  
ISBN 978-88-7140-371-7

Published with the support of grants from:  
*The Carlsberg Foundation*  
*Landsdommer V. Gieses Legat*

Cover: A Domitian *denarius*. Reproduced with kind permission of the  
auction house Gorny & Mosch, Munich (from auction 152, lot no. 2112).  
Photo: Lübke & Widemann.

# Female Cult in the Struggle of the Orders

by INGVAR MÆHLE

Did Roman women play a part in the struggle of the orders? Could female religious cult be a vehicle of social and political change? Is it possible to discover, behind the elitist, male misogynist perspective of our sources, Roman women acting independently, in their own terms? The aim of this paper is not to conjure up new sources and propose verifiable statements on how life really was like for the women in ancient Rome. Certainty and knowledge is beyond our reach. The aim of this paper is rather to sketch the possible social and political significance of female cult. At best I will provide a more fruitful model of understanding than the existing alternatives.

During the early Roman Republic, the period between the expulsion of the Kings in 509 BC and the last secession of the plebeians in 287 BC, the political system changed from an exclusive aristocracy of birth to a competitive oligarchy.<sup>1</sup> The old nobility of birth, the patricians now had to compete for public office alongside men risen from the commons, the plebeians. Although the outcome of the struggle was far from a democratic system in Athenian terms, at least it made popular support more important for the ruling class and gave the citizens a wider choice of candidates in elections. The political exclusion of the commons was enhanced by social prejudice, legal barriers against intermarriage between the orders and patrician monopoly of the major religious cults. Women played a crucial role in overcoming these barriers, not as electors or magistrates, but as wives, mothers and daughters. The social and religious barriers to a sharing of political power in the male

sphere could not have been overcome without the co-operation and active participation of the female sphere. I will investigate whether the female members of the patrician and plebeian elites can be described as major players or just pawns in this conflict.

Female influence in the public sphere is described by all our sources either as an evil in itself or, when the positive effects cannot be denied, as rare exceptions from the norm. Livy, who is our main source to the struggle of the orders, gives us only occasional glimpses into the female sphere, and then obviously from a traditional male perspective. But it is possible to disclose, between the lines in his *History*, a more continuous influence exercised by highly organized female networks.

In a period where reliable information even about what happened in public life, in the male sphere, is scarce, we should not expect to discover exactly who did what behind the scenes. We might plausibly argue that a wise patrician *pater familias* would listen very carefully to his wife's and perhaps also his daughter's views before he gave her to a plebeian upstart. The breaking of the legal and social intermarriage ban may even have been promoted by the patrician mothers and daughters themselves, because of a scarcity of suitable patrician males. After the match, as Livy relates, they probably demanded that the plebeian husbands should be given equal opportunities in competition for office.<sup>2</sup> The rise of these new men in the course of time reduced the patricians' hold of the magistracies and therefore perhaps con-

---

1. Cornell 1995, 342.

2. Liv. 6.34.

tributed to further diminish the number of eligible patricians. The patrician bachelors may have welcomed the increase in the choice of brides for both personal and political reasons.

Speculation, even when it is constructive, however, can only serve as preliminaries to systematic investigations. The formal exclusion of women from politics makes such investigations almost impossible. Women did however participate in public life in matters of religion, and fortunately the annalists have handed down to us some crucial events. The conflict that erupted between the matrons in the temple of Patrician Modesty, *Pudicitiae Patriciae* in 295 BC, illustrates how women through the religious cults could make an impact on the balance of political power in their own terms. I will use this conflict as the starting point of my investigation. Livy tells the story, not omitting his insights into female nature:

Virginia, Aulu's daughter, a patrician wedded to a commoner, Lucius Volumnius the consul, had been excluded by the matrons from their ceremonies, on the ground that she had married out of the patriciate. This led to a short dispute, which the burning anger of the sex soon kindled to a blaze of passionate contention. Virginia boasted, and with reason, that she had entered the temple of Patrician Modesty both as a patrician and a modest woman, since she had been wedded to the man to whom she had been given as a maiden, and was ashamed neither of her husband, nor of his honours, nor of his victories. She then added a noble deed to her proud words. In the Vicus Longus, where she lived, she shut off a part of her mansion, large enough for a shrine of moderate size, and, erecting there an altar, called together the plebeian matrons, and after complaining of the injurious behaviour of the patrician ladies, said "I dedicate this altar to Plebeian Modesty; and I urge you, that even as the men of our state contend for the mead of valour, so the matrons may vie for that of modesty, that this altar may be said to be cherished – if that is possible – more reverently than that and by more modest women." This altar, too, was served with almost the same ritual as that more ancient one, so that no matron but one of proven modesty, who had

been wedded to one man alone, should have the right to sacrifice there. Afterwards the cult was degraded by polluted worshippers, not matrons only but women of every station, and passed finally into oblivion.<sup>3</sup>

Virginia was married to the illustrious general Volumnius, and had indeed no cause to be ashamed of her spouse. Volumnius was probably in alliance with the Fabii against the Claudii<sup>4</sup> and Livy made much of the enmity between Volumnius himself and Appius Claudius.<sup>5</sup> In the previous year Appius Claudius had to be forced by his own soldiers and officers to receive help from Volumnius and his troops in the war against Etruria. The Claudii were notorious for their arrogance and scorn of plebeian upstarts, and enjoyed great influence with their fellow patricians. Although Livy doesn't explicitly say so, it is tempting to conclude that Appius Claudius masterminded the conflict to hurt Volumnius. Appius Claudius was already known to be the staunchest opponent to the *Lex Ogulnia* of 300 BC, which opened two of the most important priestly colleges, the *pontifices* and *augures*, to the plebeians. The man who built the Via Appia and the first aqueduct, and carried out the census in a way that gave greater voting power to the poor and much offence to the nobles, did not tolerate plebeian rivals to steal his thunder. Courting the people's favour was, according to Claudius, a patrician prerogative. As presented by Livy, the exclusion of Virginia from the community of patrician matrons on account of her marriage to a plebeian, is merely an appendix to the larger struggle over the *Lex Ogulnia* five years earlier. Modern scholars have consequently disregarded the women's contribution in the struggle.<sup>6</sup>

A different interpretation is, however, possible if Livy's account is not taken too literally. Livy may have placed the episode in 295 BC, the year after Volumnius and Claudius had their famous quarrel, only because it seemed to fit his story. Livy is notorious for placing

3. Liv. 10.23.4-10.

4. Curti 2000, 87.

5. Liv. 10.18-19.

6. Treatment of the cult of the *Pudicitiae Patriciae* is absent in standard reference works such as the Cambridge Ancient History, Eder 1990, Scullard 1980, and Cornell

events at random, for his repetition of events, and even for inventing “facts” to fill up gaps in the narrative.<sup>7</sup> Whether or not the conflict climaxed in 295, there are several reasons for treating the episode as an independent act in the female sphere. First, it is unlikely that the patrician matrons should wait more than 70 years before making their point. The plebeians had supplied consuls almost regularly since 366, and the first of them, Lucius Sextius, the sponsor of the law that made this possible, was married to Fabia, a patrician.<sup>8</sup> The reason why we hear nothing of any exclusion of her from the society of patrician matrons may of course be due to the great power of the Fabii. Nevertheless it seems strange that the patrician matrons took no part in any controversies regarding social status and rights of worship before all the great issues were finally decided in favour of the plebeians. If the patrician matrons could act in 295, they could have acted earlier, and they probably did, if not through the network associated with the *Pudicitia cult*, then through another.

Second, the establishment of the original *Patriciae Pudicitae* was, in my view, itself a part of the campaign to keep the plebeian upstarts at bay.<sup>9</sup> If it was not intended as such, the new deity could simply have been called *Pudicitia* along with other personifications of abstract concepts, like *Concordia* from 367 BC and *Salus* from 302 BC. The cult was clearly a provocation from the start, and it was probably not the only device employed by the patrician matrons to assert their status. This is not to say that all patrician matrons were of one mind regarding the plebeians. Some patricians fought them as a matter of principle; others cemented alliances by giving their daughters

in marriage to them. Whether or not the patrician mothers agreed to such decisions,<sup>10</sup> they would as mother-in-laws have to become tolerant of plebeian consuls, pontiffs and augurs, if not out of respect for the head of the family, at least to protect their daughters from loss of social status. Probably both female opponents and protagonists of the equalisation of rights between the orders used their influence earlier than 295.

Third, the conflict also has to be seen in terms of the peculiarities of Roman marriage law. As wife of a plebeian, Virginia enjoyed certain privileges not shared by all of her fellow patrician matrons. Whereas the *confarreatio* marriage practised by the patricians only<sup>11</sup> transferred the absolute power of the bride's life and property from her father to her husband, a more flexible form of marriage was used in mixed marriages. It is outside the scope of this paper to go into the legal technicalities in Roman marriage law. The point, made forcefully by Lindersky, is that patricians generally would avoid transferring all power over their offspring to plebeians. This made divorce and separate estates a practical possibility, and may have given the patrician brides more independence in relation to their husbands. It also prevented them from losing status as patricians.<sup>12</sup> The patrician matrons' actions against Virginia were an attempt to fill this loophole. In the course of time and the steady decrease of pure patrician blood, this informal kind of marriage without *manus*, i.e. the transfer of parental power, became customary among the nobility. For the women concerned this meant that they could exercise a certain economic independence and could not be legally killed by their jealous husbands for

1995. Hence the rather short bibliography at the end of this article. It is mentioned in passing by Linderski 1986, 259, and also in a footnote by Hölkeskamp 1987, 190 n. 149.

7. Liv. 3.44-48: A plebeian Virginia opposed the lustful wishes of one of Appius Claudius' ancestors in 449 BC and her death caused a secession of the plebs. Is this just a coincidence?
8. Liv. 6.34. According to Livy this marriage was the cause of the struggle that ended with a sharing of the consulate between the orders. Marcus Fabius Ambustus' younger daughter complained that her plebeian husband was barred from the path to honours that laid

wide open to her older sister's patrician husband. Fabius decided to aid Lucius Sextius.

9. Possibly the patrician shrine was, as R. Bauman and R. Palmer state (Bauman 1992), founded shortly after the poison trials of 331 by the curule aedile Fabius Rullian. This is however not mentioned by Livy, and some kind of worship of the chief feminine virtue, Modesty, must in any case have been considerably older.
10. Formally the decisions in question were within the powers of the *pater familias* alone.
11. Presumably as an instrument to build up a closed cast.
12. Linderski 1986, 259-260.

real or imagined adultery. Back in the bad old days of the early Republic, this may have been reason enough for a patrician woman to marry a plebeian like Volumnius. The rise of the plebeians to political eminence entailed greater independence for their noble wives than what was possible in the strict marriages within the closed cast of patricians. Progressives among the patricians might very well have welcomed this.

Participation in religious cult was a powerful indicator of social status, not only in the male, public sphere, but also in the female sphere. The women in control of these cults had the power to increase or detract from a woman's social status by allowing or forbidding her to take part in the rituals. We have no information about other female cults involved in the political struggles of this period. This does not mean that controversy was confined to the cult of the *Pudicitiae Patriciae*, merely that this episode was mentioned by Livy, almost in passing, to account for the establishment of a parallel plebeian cult. The cults must have been powerful instruments to formalise status, not only by regulating access, but also by locating the participants in the internal hierarchies. It does not automatically follow from this, however, that the female cults were independent or that they made any substantial impact in the public sphere. An assessment of the relative importance of these cults ultimately depends on what model is used to investigate relations between the sexes.

According to the traditional view, as presented by one of the foremost authorities on Roman religion and also a contributor to this volume, John North:

Little or nothing was under women's control: the priests were all male, except for the Vestals who had to be conceded a quasi-male status to mark them off from their sisters. Women could certainly make vows and dedications in private contexts; and there are even hints that private cults were specially women's responsibility. The new Greek rites, however, brought with them Greek priest-

esses, who had to be given Roman citizenship, and a distinct place in public ceremonial and procession for the women of Rome. There was, of course, nothing threatening about this: male priests were in ultimate control; and the Ceres cult gave ritual reinforcements to the family and reproductive roles of women.<sup>13</sup>

The general opinion seems to be that female cults were either subordinated to the male religious authorities, or were only concerned with women's traditional roles and functions in a patriarchal society, or were peripheral to mainstream religious and public life. Religion reinforced the systematic subordination of women that existed in all other areas of community life.

This power-oriented subordination model agrees both with feminist ideology and the outlook of our almost exclusively male sources. According to this view there is no female freedom and power to speak of when there is no equality between the sexes. Recently, however, this view has been challenged by a number of authors, perhaps most consistently by the historian J.C. Meyer:

We should, he suggests, not seek for equality, but equilibrium in the gender-based division of labour, social space and power. According to Meyer, an equilibrium of separate, autonomous spheres is a better model than subordination of the female sphere by the male.<sup>14</sup> The exclusion of women from the male, public sphere was to a certain degree compensated by the exclusion of men from the female sphere. What happened here, in more private surroundings and on the women's own terms, was arguably much more interesting and valuable. According to Meyer, we should use information from contemporary patriarchal societies to fill in the blanks, and correct the exclusively male perspective in our sources.

His observations, derived from anthropological fieldwork in a traditional village in Turkey, are in fundamental agreement with Henny Harald Hansen's studies of Kurdish women.<sup>15</sup> Although women were described by the men

13. North 1989, 619.

14. Meyer 2004.

15. Hansen 1958; 1961.

as inferior, weak and feeble-minded, confined to the house and subservient to their husbands, they were nonetheless predominant in 75% of the village, controlled most of the families resources and had their own independent networks and hierarchies. The determination of an outsider's status in relation to the family was within the discretion of the *Mater familias*. The women's confinement to the "house" only meant that they kept their distance from the village square when possible or, if they went out, wore a veil. This experience with social reality in a formally patriarchal society is highly relevant to the study of women in ancient Rome.

If the female sphere is better described as co-ordinated with rather than subordinated to the male sphere, it means that the equalization of social status between the orders could not have been successful without the acknowledgement and co-operation of the upper-class female networks. If a patrician wife lost the status she was born with by marrying a plebeian, or if the wife of a plebeian magistrate did not rise in social status in the same way as the wives of patrician magistrates, this must have detracted from the status of her husband as well, even when his status was not actively challenged in the male sphere. The reverse, an acknowledgement from the female sphere of his wife, confirmed the husband's status in the process. The principles laid down in the *Lex Ogulnia*, important though this law was, had to be endorsed by the female sphere to be realised in full.

Rome's upper-class matrons were moreover managers of households with numerous economic enterprises, lower-class dependants or clients, and contacts far and wide. Their husbands could not rule the city and conduct its wars without delegating most of the authority concerning these matters to them. Roman politicians of later ages boasted of their generosity and magnanimity, formalised in their morning reception, the *salutatio*, of "friends", i.e. clients, from all rungs of the Roman social ladder. It must however have been a brave man indeed, who without prior introduction turned up at a nobleman's house unexpected to beg for a favour. An introduction could of course

be arranged through a client or friend of the patron, but then the petition had to be formally made and perhaps explicitly rejected by the patron or his official representative. This could be an embarrassment to both parties. All this potential awkwardness could, however, be avoided if the plea was channelled through the female sphere. The client-to-be would send his wife to the matron or a go-between, and a friendly reception of the request could be prepared in advance. This allowed the patron to agree "spontaneously" to help, after thorough deliberation before the favour was officially asked.

In so far as a Roman politician's chances were increased by his ability to acquire clients, his wife may have played a crucial role by using her networks to increase the household's status in the community. The expulsion of Virginia from the patrician *Pudicitia* cult was an attempt by a clique of patrician matrons to reduce the status of Volumnius' household. Obviously they were too late, if the incident indeed occurred in 295. More importantly, however, the establishment of a parallel plebeian cult probably had wide repercussions. First, it made matrons married to plebeians more independent of recognition by the patrician matrons. Second, it allowed plebeian matrons to build up their own networks on the basis of plebeian religious cults, thereby further diminishing the patrician hold of religion. This paralleled the development in the male sphere. Third, these plebeian religious cults were probably more successful in incorporating the overwhelmingly plebeian majority of matrons. The patricians were too few and exclusive to accomplish this. The plebeian cult-leaders could use this to attach more clients to their households and thereby increase the social power of their husbands. Social power, religious worship and political populism could in this way work in combination to destroy the last barriers to the birth of a new political system. This could work both to the advantage of plebeian upstarts and patricians with a popular inclination. A plebeian or (if such a status were truly realised) ex-patrician wife could be a valuable political asset.

This hypothetical reconstruction, if considered plausible, makes it possible to decipher a seemingly pointless and partially self-contradiction by the rationalist and misogynist Greek historian Polybius. In 213 the young Publius Cornelius Scipio stood for the curule aedileship, although he was only 22 years old. Polybius thought that Publius' elder brother Lucius already was a candidate, but didn't have as much popularity as Publius. Publius therefore decided that he would help his elder brother by running for office together with him. The story is obviously based on a misunderstanding of a reference in the Scipio family archive. Lucius was not a candidate and was probably younger than Publius. The rest of the story is however primarily focused on religion. According to Polybius, Publius had to trick his mother into preparing a white toga for him by playing on her religious superstition:

Seeing that his mother was visiting the different temples and sacrificing to the gods on behalf of his brother and generally exhibiting great concern about the result – he had only to concern himself with her, his father having left for Spain [...] he as a fact, told her that he had twice had the same dream. He had dreamt that both he and his brother had been elected to the aedileship and were going up from the Forum to their house, when she met them at the door and fell on their necks and kissed them. She was affected by this, as women would be, and exclaimed, "Would I might see that day" or something similar. "Then would you like us to try, mother?" he said. Upon her consenting, as she never dreamt he would venture on it, but thought it was merely a casual joke – for he was exceedingly young – he begged her to get a white toga ready for him at once...<sup>16</sup>

Polybius demonstrates here his contempt both of women and religion, and his point is to prove how his hero, Scipio Africanus the Elder cynically used the superstitions of others to achieve his own rational objectives. We know, however, that it was M. Cornelius Ceteghus, from the same gens, but not from the same family, who was elected to the second

curule aedileship, and that Publius Scipio was the only Scipio running for the magistracy this year. His candidacy was strongly opposed by the tribunes on account of his youth, but his popularity overcame these difficulties.<sup>17</sup> If his mother was sacrificing at the various shrines and temples for the success of her son, it was on behalf of the future conqueror of Carthage, Scipio Africanus himself. Add to this that he actually asked her, in his father's absence, to be allowed to run for office, and the following picture emerge: Scipio had to ask for his mother's permission to use the family's economic and social resources in the election campaign. Partly his success was connected to his mother's religious activities. Whether or not the gods intervened on the family's behalf, these activities brought the *mater familias* into contact with a number of women connected to the female religious cults. When the fictitious candidacy of a fictitious elder brother is removed, the story reveals that Scipio's mother plays the leading role in the drama. For some reason this explanation didn't suggest itself to Polybius.

Scipio Africanus' wife Aemilia was, according to Polybius, reputed to be extremely wealthy, and she

...used to display great magnificence whenever she left her house to take part in the ceremonies that women attend, having participated in the fortune of Scipio when he was at the height of his prosperity. For apart from the richness of her own dress and of the decorations of her carriage, all the baskets, cups, and other utensils for the sacrifice were either of gold or silver, and were borne in her train on all such solemn occasions, while the number of maids and men-servants in attendance was correspondingly large.<sup>18</sup>

We don't know whether this powerful lady had anything to do with the repeal of the Oppian law in 195 BC.<sup>19</sup> This law had been passed in 215 BC after the twin military disasters at Trasimene and Cannae, and stated that "no woman should possess more than half an

16. Polyb. 10.4.4-5.4.

17. Liv. 25.2.6-8.

18. Polyb. 31.26.1.

19. Liv. 34.1.



ounce of gold or wear a parti-coloured garment or ride in a carriage in the City or in a town within a mile thereof, except on the occasion of a religious festival."<sup>20</sup> According to Livy, the matrons organized an impressive demonstration:

The matrons could not be kept at home by advice or modesty or their husbands orders, but blocked all the streets and approaches to the Forum, begging the men as they came down to the Forum that, in the prosperous condition of the state, when the private fortunes of all men were daily increasing, they should allow the women too to have their former distinctions restored. The crowd of women grew larger day by day; for they were now coming in from the towns and rural districts. Soon they dared even to approach and appeal to the consuls, the praetors, and the other officials, but one consul, at least, they found adamant, Marcus Porcius Cato...<sup>21</sup>

Livy does not explain why the tribunes proposed to repeal the law or why the male citizens agreed to this. Why they should care about this is a mystery to us. Nor does he mention any of the female leaders, to whom Cato must be referring as the dignified and modest women in the crowd.<sup>22</sup> But we may very well guess who they were.

Though the female sphere was socially, religiously and, in a more restricted sense, politically important, it was not autonomous. The male and female spheres were not in complete equilibrium, because there was also an element of subordination. The equilibrium model should be linked to the traditional subordination model to allow for the full complexity of gender relations in patriarchal societies. The female sphere neither has to be parallel to the male sphere and enjoying full autonomy, nor be subordinated and totally dependent on the male sphere. It can also be encapsulated and exercise substantial autonomy within conditions determined by the male community. This encapsulation model has the advantage over the subordination and equilibrium model in that it avoids making women merely pawns in the male social

game, while it acknowledges the importance of formalized rights and coercive power.

It is profitable to analyse the female sphere according to the same principles that F.G. Bailey applies to local politics in his *Stratagems and Spoils - A Social Anthropology of Politics* (1969). In such *encapsulated political structures*, the players follow internal rules, establish their own hierarchies and fulfil their tasks in relative independence of the central political structure. At the same time, the rules of the local game can be changed by the central structure, resources necessary to the local structure can be withdrawn, and the individual players' connections to the central structure can strengthen their position locally and vice versa. Nobody can deny that what happens in this encapsulated structure is important, or that it enjoys a substantial measure of self-government. The central structure can of course use its power to interfere in the encapsulated structure, but the encapsulated structure can also influence the balance of power on the central level, or try to resist attempts at central interference. I will suggest that the religious activity of women in ancient Rome was conditioned by similar rules:

1. *Internal self-government*: Although all religious activity had to be sanctioned by the *pontifex maximus*, the male high priest of the Roman state, the details of ritual, administration and hierarchies within the cults were probably left for the worshippers themselves to sort out.<sup>23</sup> The explicit exclusion of males from a number of ceremonies attests for their internal autonomy and self-government. The story of the establishment of *Pudicitae Plebeiae* indicates that it may have been normal for religious cults to be established by women without recourse to male authority.
2. *Impact on the public (male) sphere*: The female cults were not marginal, or insignificant, in Roman society. Women were often called upon to perform ritually at times of

20. Liv. 34.1.3.

21. Liv. 34.1.5-7.

22. Liv. 34.2.8.

23. Staples 1998, 1-8.

crises in the State.<sup>24</sup> The cults were instrumental in organising and integrating the female part of the community, determining status and providing networks for their leaders. These networks were important for the women concerned but could also be used for the benefit of their husbands. This must have been important in the struggle of the orders.

3. *Ideology and practise*: The female cult did not endorse every part of the patriarchal ideology, which would mean, among other things toleration of male adultery with concubines, death penalty for women caught in drinking wine, and slave-like subservience to the nominal head of the household. Their rituals were the antitheses of this. The cults did however reinforce ritually the separation of the male and female sphere, but from a distinctly female perspective. The ideology of the patriarchal society was therefore not identical with the ideology expressed by the males. It had a female counterpart, and this was perhaps closer to the social reality experienced by real husbands and wives. The looser bonds between husband and wives practised in mixed marriages from the fourth century BC onwards, helped in further undermining the social reality behind male, misogynist propaganda. The so-called plebeian revolution meant greater freedom for upper-class women.
4. *Encapsulation by the male sphere*: The self-government enjoyed by the female cults was an internal autonomy, ultimately dependent on the goodwill of the males in power. The worshippers could be suppressed collectively through legislation or by religious sanctions from the high priest. A cult very popular with women and people from the lower ranks of society, the Bacchanal, was banned in this way. The worshippers could also be suppressed individually by their husbands. If the husband was unwise and chose conflict over harmony, he could act the tyrant unchecked in his own household. Undoubtedly there

were also tyrannical wives and wives with enough independence to leave the household, but this were a small comfort to all those women who couldn't. The men were as a rule able to overcome any opposition from the women, if they chose to do so.

5. *Dependence on men*: The opportunities open to women in the economic, social, and religious fields were, as with men, dependent on their parentage. In this way an upper-class women might, if not suppressed by a father, husband or mother-in-law, lead a freer and more fulfilling life than a nominally free, but poor man. Unlike men, however, their place in society was not only determined by birth, age and gender, but also by their sexuality. Virginity, marital fidelity and motherhood were not merely descriptive terms, but also the basis for legal rights, religious functions and social status. In the final analysis, a woman's rights were determined by these factors: Did the woman concerned have sexual intercourse with none other than her husband? Did this husband occupy the appropriate places in the social, political and religious hierarchies?<sup>25</sup> Had she given birth, and if so – how many of the children lived and what was their sex?

In the *Pudicitia* cult Virginia qualified as a worshipper because she had only been married once and was faithful to her husband. She disqualified because the husband was plebeian. Her establishment of a rival cult did not challenge the principle that a woman's rights and status should be based on her sexuality. It only allowed for the determining factor, the man, to be plebeian. She could do this, and be the leader of a religious cult because she belonged to the elite and was married to a consular. The autonomy exercised within the cult and by Virginia was internal. It was encapsulated, but not eclipsed by male power. And it was probably an important factor in the power struggle of the males in third-century Rome.

24. Staples 1998, 7.

25. The secret December rites of Bona Dea, essential for the well-being of the community, were conducted ex-

clusively by women, in the house of a praetor or a consul. This sacrifice was performed by Vestal Virgins on behalf of the Roman people. Cic. *Har. resp.* 17.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bailey, F.G.  
1969 *Stratagems and Spoils - A Social Anthropology of Politics*, Oxford.
- Bauman, R.  
1992 *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, London.
- Cornell, T.J.  
1995 *The Beginnings of Rome*, London.
- Curti, E.  
2000 "From Concordia to the Quirinal: Notes on Religion and Politics in Mid-Republican / Hellenistic Rome". In: Bispham, E. & Smith, C. (eds.), *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy*, Edinburgh, 77-91.
- Develin, R.  
1986 "The Integration of the Plebeians into the Political Order After 366 B.C.". In: Raaflaub, K.A. (ed.), *Social Struggles in Archaic Rome - New Perspectives on the Struggle of the Orders*, Berkeley, 327-352.
- Dixon, S.  
2001 *Reading Roman Women*, London.
- Eder, W.  
1990 *Staat und Staatlichkeit in der Frühen Römischen Republik*, Stuttgart.
- Hansen, H.H.  
1958 *Allah's døtre: Blandt muhammedanske kvinder i Kurdistan*, København.  
1961 *The Kurdish Woman's Life*, (*Nationalmuseets Skrifter, Etnografisk Række VII*), København.
- Hölkeskamp, K.J.  
1987 *Die Entstehung der Nobilität*, Stuttgart.
- Linderski, J.  
1986 "Religious Aspects of the Conflict of the Orders: The Case of *confarreatio*". In: Raaflaub, K.A. (ed.), *Social Struggles in Archaic Rome - New Perspectives on the Struggle of the Orders*, Berkeley, 244-261.
- Meyer, J.C.  
2004 "Women in Classical Athens - In the Shadow of North-West Europe or in the Light from Istanbul". In: Mæhle, I.B. & Okkenhaug, I.M. (eds.), *Women and Religion in the Middle East and the Mediterranean*, Oslo, 19-48.
- North, J.C.  
1989 "Religion in Republican Rome". In: *The Cambridge Ancient History VII.2, The Rise of Rome to 220 B.C.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge, 573-624.
- Pomeroy, S.B.  
1976 *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves. Women in Classical Antiquity*, London.
- Scullard, H.H.  
1980 *A History of the Roman World 753 to 146 B.C.*, London - New York.
- Smith, C.  
2000 "Worshipping Mater Matuta: Ritual and Context". In: Bispham, E. & Smith, C. (eds.), *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy*, Edinburgh, 136-155.
- Staples, A.  
1998 *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins - Sex and Category in Roman Religion*, London.

