Sacerdotes piae: priestesses and other female cult officials in the western part of the Roman Empire from the first century B.C. until the third century A.D.

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Chapter 1: Methodological and historical backgrounds

Introduction

As women are central to this dissertation, this chapter starts with an overview of ancient and modern writings about women in antiquity, showing the place the present thesis takes in the field (section 1). This *status quaestionis* is followed by a short discussion of the role of women, both in Rome and in the western provinces of the Empire, providing the necessary background to which the phenomenon of female priesthood can be interpreted (section 2).

I have already indicated in the introduction that Roman religion was not the religion of the City only, and it is the differences in priestships open to women between Rome, Italy and the provinces that are striking, just as provincial religion with its various facets itself. Closely related to religion and the differences between Rome and the provinces is the process of Romanization, which will be discussed in section 3. A key factor in this process, linked to the existence of provincial religion is urbanisation and the development of urban life. Therefore, a special section deals with the municipal organization of religion and the role civic religion played in the lives of the inhabitants of provincial towns (section 4).

As the concepts public and private have played an important role in works about both Roman women and Roman religion – not only in the works of modern scholars but also in the Roman discourse – they will be discussed in section 5. The last section (section 6) of this chapter deals with inscriptions, the main sources used in this thesis. A discussion of the characteristics, possibilities and limitations of epigraphic evidence for the study of priestesses will be provided.

1: Status Quaestionis

Ancient History was for a long time determined by a traditional way of interpreting the sources; this was done by men and in the context of the nineteenth and twentieth century bourgeois’ view on the sexes, resulting in several persistent assumptions about the roles and proper place of men and women in Roman society. In the sixties and seventies, as a result of the women’s movement, the study of women in Antiquity became more common. After the concept of gender was introduced to historians

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1 Schmitt Pantel and Späth (2007) 32.
by Joan Scott in 1986, it became a core notion: instead of paying attention to women, separate from men, the masculine was incorporated and the role played by gender as a social construct was emphasized. Furthermore, attention was paid to the biases of the (mainly literary) sources that were only rarely directly produced by women. As a consequence, other sources entered the field of women’s ancient history, like inscriptions, sculpture, coins, papyri and vase paintings.

1.1: Works on religious roles of women in the western provinces

However, despite these important changes, many works about religious roles of women in antiquity rely solely or mainly on literary sources. As the literary sources are produced by men from the upper class and tend to focus on the elite, they are doubly biased. These works have moral, didactic and artistic aims and are often not contemporaneous with the things they describe. They are prescriptive and have a limited scope, tending to obscure the role of women, especially those acting in the public sphere. They are – on the field of religion – only interested in women’s activities in rites in which men did not play a role.

Therefore, the information these literary sources offer about (the importance of) priestesses is limited; only when they acted in untraditional or exceptional ways attention has been paid to female sacerdotes (mostly the Vestals). Women holding religious offices in the provinces are virtually absent from these works – although that has more to with a Romano-centric attitude than with gender. Probably for these reasons, modern works about Roman priesthoods concentrate on male priests and on Rome. And when the religious roles of Roman women are discussed, the focus is on female public festivals (e.g. the Matronalia), likely as a by-product of the assumption that women were almost exclusively concerned with fertility and children, as Schultz writes. This thesis tries to restore

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6 For more information about the gender approach and the role of feminism in ancient history, see e.g.: Gold (1997); Hallett (1993); Rabinowitz (1993); Sharrock (1997).
7 Considering this change in sources used, DeForest (1993) iii, is a bit too negative when she writes that ‘Almost everything we know about women in Greco-Roman antiquity has been passed down through the writings of men.’ Examples of positive results in women’s history when using other ‘non-literary’ sources: Glinister (2006) 92: the use of votives in Hellenistic central Italy point to a greater participation of women in religion than often been thought. And: Schultz (2006) 4: literature combined with epigraphy and archaeology show that the religious activities of Roman women were more extensive than often assumed.
8 As may be clear, I will discuss here the modern works that concentrate on the western provinces; those about the east, like Van Bremen (1996), are left out of the discussion.
13 This explains the fact that the literary sources neither pay much attention to male priests in the provinces.
the balance by showing that women could hold religious offices in cults that were not preoccupied with fertility.

As the ancient literary sources on Roman religion concentrate on (Republican) Rome, modern studies have not paid much attention to religion in the provinces, even though the provincial towns were no copies of Rome and deserve to be studied in their own right. Fortunately, this is changing nowadays and recently the differences between the religion of the Urbs and religion in the provinces have become the subject of various studies. Still, most works about women and religion in Roman antiquity focus on (the republican city of) Rome and are sometimes very general in nature; despite the fact that in the last two decades several detailed articles have been published about priestesses in specific areas outside Rome, or books of which parts are devoted to women’s religious offices. A covering study however, is still lacking, and as I have already mentioned in the introduction, this dissertation aims to fill this gap.

1.2: Views on the religious roles of women in Roman antiquity

The most important views that can be summarized from modern studies on the religious roles of Roman (i.e. mainly from the City) women can be divided in four main categories. The first group, to which for instance John Scheid (1992) belongs, represents the traditional view. Although he has moderated his opinion in 2003, Scheid’s previous view has been followed by several others. In 1992 Scheid wrote that women were excluded from the most important and official aspects of religion and acted only in marginal cults, ‘on the fringes of religious life.’ Religion – the one true religion – was essentially a man’s affair. In 2003 he still asserted that women always acted as a complement to men and never out of their own initiative, but that this did not imply marginality. He also stated that the Roman female sacerdotes Cereris were possibly the complements of the male flamen Cerialis and/or the aediles of the Aventine Triad. However, the available evidence does not offer any

15 Ladage (1971) discusses both priesthoods in Rome and the western provinces of the Empire. He does not pay attention to priestesses, and mentions them only occasionally.
16 For example those by Beard, North and Price (1998) I, chapter 7; Cancik and Rüpke (1997); Spickermann, Cancik and Rüpke (2001) and others.
19 The only book fully devoted to priesthoods held by women in antiquity is Guerra Gómez (1978). As it discusses not only Greek and Roman priestesses, but women involved in Christianity as well, it is very general in nature and provides only descriptions instead of discussions. When the author mentions inscriptions, he does not discuss individual priestesses or the context of the inscriptions.
22 Scheid (1992) 400.
23 Scheid (2003a) 138, 144: ‘Complémentarité ne signifie pas marginalité.’
24 Scheid (2003a) 143-144, 145. Scheid (2003a) 142-143 writes that in the Ludi Saeculares matrons offered a supplication to Juno, but did so on the initiative of the quindecemviri. They complemented the quindecemviri.
information about the precise relationship between the different priest(esse)s of Ceres (see chapter 3).
It seems that as a consequence of a persistent view on female public roles and terms defined by
literature written by men, women who acted in religious roles equal to those of men were considered
by Scheid as exceptional and in need of a special explanation. In any case, such a dependence of
priestesses on priests can certainly not be attested in the provinces of the Empire.

The second group of modern authors criticizes the traditional view. They also stress the special
character of female priesthoods, but do not see this character as marginal or merely complementary.
Schultz is an example; she thinks that priestesses have to be seen as a separate category, distinct from
male public priests. She writes that we should not hold ‘the requirements of male public priests as
definitive for all public priests’, because the ‘category of female priesthood is distinct from, not simply
an exceptional subset of, Roman priesthoods.’ Raepsaet-Charlier agrees with Schultz. She has stated
that the roles of priestesses and other women active in religion were different from those of men, but
no less essential for the religious life of their communities. Therefore, their roles should not be
viewed negatively. When ‘the male’ is taken as basis and standard, one runs the risk of considering the
actions of women necessarily as ‘less valuable’. Of course, Roman society was male-centred, but
that does not have to imply that in religion the female was necessarily less important. Clearly, this
view has much to offer, but we have to take care not to over-stress the role of women, as some authors
tend to do. In addition, it is questionable whether priestesses in the provinces are indeed to be viewed
as a separate category from priests – in fact, I think not, as male and female sacerdotes had much in
common, ranging from their tasks to their descent to their prominence in municipal life.

A third group exists of modern scholars who do not overestimate or underestimate the role of
women in Roman religion but lay (perhaps too) much stress on the (supposed) character of the cults in
which women served. They write that women concentrated on the worship of goddesses of healing

like the flaminica Dialis and Regina sacrorum complemented the flamen and the rex. This implies that Scheid
sees the quindecimviri in the first place as men, and not as priests. The question can be asked whether this is
justified, and whether ordinary Roman men took the initiative to organize important rites like supplications,
without the assistance of priests – which I think is rather unlikely.

women’s position within the Roman state and society have over-determined views of her religious roles. It is
therefore assumed that those cults and rites in which women actively participated must, a priori, have been
marginal, because of that very participation.’


26 Cf. Schultz (2006) 149. This view has some similarities with that of Scheid (2003a).

27 In Le Deuxième Sexe, De Beauvoir (1949) has extensively discussed the thesis that the male is normative and
essential, while the female is inessential: he is the Subject and the Absolute, she is only the Other.


30 See e.g. Silberberg-Peirce (1993-1994) 30.

31 Obviously, differences between priests and priestesses will have existed – possibly in decision making, for in
Rome this seems to have been reserved for male priests, see e.g. the Arval Brethren. Cf. Scheid (2003a) 138.
However, the evidence for male sacerdotes in the provinces who are involved in decision making is virtually
absent, like that of their female colleagues. Therefore, I think that a division of priests and priestesses in the
provinces in two separate categories is unjustified.

32 Schultz (2006) 3 has also noted this focus on ‘women’s rites’ in many modern studies.
and procreation and acted in rites related to fertility and sexuality.\textsuperscript{33} However, the sphere of influence of divinities connected to fertility and childbirth was not restricted to these aspects, and the worship of female deities in general was an integral part of Roman religion.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, it is certainly not true that women – especially those in the provinces, as we shall see – only acted in ‘women’s cults’, focused on fertility and performed for ‘women’s goddesses’.\textsuperscript{35} ‘Women’s cult’ is an ideological loaded term\textsuperscript{36} that is better be avoided and the circular argument that when women were involved in the cult of a deity, this deity was concerned with feminine issues should be thrown overboard.\textsuperscript{37} Besides, women who held priestly positions which involved activities traditionally viewed as reserved for males (e.g., sacrificing, see also chapter 4 section 1.1) should not be seen as ‘crossing into ‘male’ territory’ as some scholars think, but simply as women who held an office with accompanying tasks that ‘belonged’ to them, just as taking care of the household or bearing children, and just as other priesthoods and political offices belonged to men.\textsuperscript{38}

Finally, a group of modern scholars who have concentrated on women’s religious roles in the provinces can be detected. Most share the same view and think that religion provided a chance for ‘marginal groups’, including women, to advance their social standing. Religion was one of the few areas in which women could appear in public.\textsuperscript{39} Some authors even maintain that religion was the \textit{only} public space where women could play ‘a significant formal role.’\textsuperscript{40} Even though this is exaggerated, as the existence of e.g. benefactresses show, the importance of religion and religious offices for women in Italy and the provinces is clearly visible in the epigraphic sources, as this thesis shows.

\textit{2: The role of women in Roman society}

In this section, I will discuss a few basic aspects of the (ideal) position of women in Roman society and Roman religion that serve as a background to which priestesses and women with other official religious roles can be interpreted. Generally speaking, in the literary sources women were perceived to

\begin{itemize}
  \item E.g. Edlund-Berry (1994) 25, 32. See also: Staples (1998) 47, 97; Raepsaet-Charlier (2005) 181. Another example is Asdrubali Pentiti (2008) 201, who calls goddesses like Bona Dea, Venus Diana, Juno Regina and Mater Matuta 'protettrici del mondo femminile'.
  \item Cf. Schultz (2006) 15. Koch (1955) is a good example of a modern scholar who links religion, women and fertility. He writes (p.21-22) about the phenomenon of the combined priesthood of Venus and Ceres that has been attested in Italy (see chapter 3): ‘Alle Wahrscheinlichkeit spricht dafür, daß die Parallelordnung und die gelegentliche Priestergemeinschaft der Kulte aus dem Wesen der beiden Gestalten, sofern Ceres und Venus Frauengöttinnen sind, erklärt werden müssen.’ Chirassi Colombo (1981) 412, 425-426, is another example, who sees Ceres partly as a women’s goddess.
  \item Scheer (2000) 159; Rives (2007) 128; Raepsaet-Charlier (2005) 193. Cf. Connelly (2007) 2: In Greece, religion was the only area in which women could hold the same positions as men.
  \item Staples (1998) 3.
\end{itemize}
be different from men; they were viewed as the – morally deficient – ‘Other’.\textsuperscript{41} They were often supposed to be moral inferior and liable to uncontrollable emotions, because of which they needed to be guarded and their influence had to be limited.\textsuperscript{42} They did not possess official political power; their power was informal, and as a consequence, they usually did not figure in political history, or only in a negative way (if they were too influential).\textsuperscript{43} In analogy with their lack of official political power, which always included an element of representation, it has been argued that women could be priestesses for themselves or for other women, but that they could not represent the Roman people or other communities.\textsuperscript{44} As we shall see, in some respects this is an over-simplification: women could be representatives of their town or a collegium. And as politics encompassed religion, one could even state that women were indirectly included in political life.\textsuperscript{45}

In general, juridical sources provide a more positive picture of women than literature. From the first stages of Roman law onwards, women had relatively much freedom and many rights in private law, though their position in public law was fairly restricted.\textsuperscript{46} In the provinces, Roman citizenship provided women with certain rights and accordingly a strong juridical and economic position:\textsuperscript{47} in the right of succession, equal parts were reserved for sons and daughters in case of intestacy.\textsuperscript{48} The possessions of a woman remained hers after her marriage \textit{sine manus}; they were protected against her husband.\textsuperscript{49} In addition, women could manage their own wealth and estates and were able to make dedications,\textsuperscript{50} but only when they were \textit{sui iuris} and not under \textit{patria potestas} (i.e. not subjected to the power of the male heads of their families) and were not married \textit{in manus} (i.e. not placed under the legal control of their husbands).\textsuperscript{51} According to the \textit{ius liberorum}, women who were \textit{sui iuris} became

\textsuperscript{41} Joshel and Murnaghan (1998) 3; Parker (1998) 154-155. Gold (1993) 280-281 writes, in my opinion a bit exaggerating: ‘(…) women generally seem to have been considered first in terms of gender’ and only secondary in terms of social status. (…) The issue of gender was always dominant, taking precedence even over social class.’

\textsuperscript{42} Some negative stereotypes of women were that of the wicked stepmother and of evil wife who was cruel, rude, entered the male sphere, and had a negative influence on her husband, Pomeroy (1976) 185-186; Foubert (2010) 100.

\textsuperscript{43} Laurence (1997) 129. There were some exceptions to this, which show that in some cases women could possess \textit{auctoritas} that extended well beyond the informal, see Purcell (1986). The empress Livia is the best example, but in his article, Purcell mentions several other women with a certain amount of power.

\textsuperscript{44} Scheid (2003b) 131.


\textsuperscript{47} And possibly a stronger social position as well: citizen women might have been desirable marriage partners for men who possessed citizenship and wanted to have citizen children.


\textsuperscript{51} Treggiari (1991) 16, 32; Dixon (1986) 100; Gardner (1993) 86, 93; Spickermann (1994a) 29. And they were never in the full sense the head of a household, as they did not have \textit{potestas}, Gardner (1993) 87. When they were married \textit{in manus}, women became the agnates of their own children, which had great consequences for her inheritance, Crook (1986) 61; Treggiari (1991) 31; Gardner (1995) 384.
legally competent (i.e. were freed of the tutela) after they had given birth to three children.\textsuperscript{52} Furthermore, in the imperial period the power of the guardian was restricted.\textsuperscript{53} Obviously, this was only of real importance for elite women and women who possessed a reasonable amount of money – but these are the ones that generally held religious offices.\textsuperscript{54}

Still, the ideal Roman woman was a matrona, whose behaviour reflected on her husband.\textsuperscript{55} She was a married woman, a mother who took care of the household, lived a retired life and possessed certain specific qualities, like castitas (chastity) and pudicitia (modesty).\textsuperscript{56} She was supposed to wear the stola.\textsuperscript{57} However, this ideal that was stressed by ancient authors does not necessarily fit with reality.\textsuperscript{58} Often, there was a discrepancy between ideals and expected behaviour and reality.\textsuperscript{59}

A woman’s social rank depended on that of her male relatives, usually her father or her husband.\textsuperscript{60} That is to say: officially, women could have no rank (though they could be citizens!), but in practice they had, as the rank of men extended to their close female family members. Obviously, this was different regarding libertae, who reached their rank by gaining freedom. In this thesis I take rank as the membership of a certain social class, based on the main Roman criteria, e.g. the possession of a certain amount of wealth, birth and marriage. This implies that I use the terms senatorial, equestrian and decurial to indicate the rank of the priestesses. Furthermore, I will use the – anachronistic but nevertheless useful – term ‘middle class’ to identify those priestesses who did not belong to the ranks mentioned here, but were neither libertae, nor slaves (see chapter 3, section 3.4). I will also refer to libertae and servae as belonging to a rank. Social standing is used here as the result of a combination of several factors, like prestige and rank. But standing was also – and perhaps mainly, as Rives writes – determined by wealth\textsuperscript{61} and access to power, either directly or indirectly by exercising influence and having a large social network. Where rank was fixed, standing could change. Accordingly, (a high) standing was, of course, not only reserved for men, but it was obtainable for women as well.\textsuperscript{62}


\textsuperscript{54} Even though this does not necessarily imply that all wealthy priestesses were also sui iuris, it seems that in many cases they were, as they could use their own money and do not seem to have figured as will-less tools in dynastic family strategies (see e.g. the epilogue), possibly in contrast to women in the Greek east, see: Van Bremen (1996).

\textsuperscript{55} Foubert (2010) 33. When a woman was insulted, it was a direct insult to her husband, Gardner (1995) 389.

\textsuperscript{56} Hemelrijk, forthcoming; Foubert (2010) 27, 28, 31.

\textsuperscript{57} Hemelrijk, forthcoming; Foubert (2010) 31-32.


\textsuperscript{59} E.g., women took part in various economic activities. Foubert (2010) 36, 41. Therefore, Gold (1993, 281) is exaggerating when she writes: ‘Rarely did a woman have a public role or a public voice.’ Besides, she contradicts herself by stating (284) that ‘There is a large amount of epigraphical evidence for many other [besides Eumachia en Mamia, passim] prominent and wealthy women in Pompeii and in other cities in Italy, and we may assume that such women often took an active role in the life of their communities.’


\textsuperscript{61} One could even maintain that wealth was in some way more important than rank, for possessing enough money was a formal requirement for obtaining an office, Rives (2007) 115.

3: Romanization and its influences on towns and people

In virtually all studies about Roman religion in the provinces, the term Romanization, a ‘process of cultural transformation by which indigenous peoples were integrated into the Roman empire,’\(^63\) figures prominently. As there is much controversy about this problematic term\(^64\) it deserves to be discussed here as far as relevant to my subject, though I will not summarize the whole debate, for this has already been done by others.\(^65\)

According to a recent view, there was no deliberate policy of Romanization,\(^66\) neither in politics, nor in the field of religion.\(^67\) Instead of a ‘top-down’ and one-way process, Romanization – in general, but more specifically in the field of religion – is nowadays considered to be a two-side process in which Rome influenced the provinces and vice versa.\(^68\) This implies that Roman religion is not the religion of the capital alone, nor the absolute standard.\(^69\) Moreover, no homogenous Roman civilisation (and neither one native, for that matter!) existed; it was no fixed entity but changed constantly.\(^70\) Therefore, becoming Roman was not adopting an unchanging set of habits, but it was taking part in the discussion about what should be the contents of this set of habits, as has been observed by Woolf.\(^71\) There were so many kinds of Romans to become that becoming Roman did not mean assimilating to any ideal type, but rather acquiring a position in the complex of structured differences in which Roman power resided.\(^72\)

The responses to Romanization among various ethnic groups, classes, genders, spheres and even in the same person were manifold. It was no single thing conceived by one single mind and applicable to any period or situation; local agents were not passive but cooperated more or less willingly in this highly complex and gradual process of acculturation.\(^73\) This resulted not in homogeneity, but instead in a great variety of new local or regional societies that were blendings of

\(^65\) E.g., Terrenato (2001); Curchin (2004).
\(^66\) Millett (1990) 38. But he still adheres to a top-down model.
\(^67\) Rüpke (2007b) 4, 5: ‘The dominant Roman model for religion was not expansionist; it was rather absorbing.’
\(^69\) Millett (1990) 37; Turcan (1997) 2; Terrenato (2001) 4; Vallat (2001) 109; Webster (2001) 210; Hemelrijk (2006b) 180. Cf. Schörner (2006) 77; Cadotte (2007) 419, 423. Webster (2001) 220, stresses the importance of bottom-up processes, resulting in sub- and countercultures and ‘resistant adaptation’. Unfortunately, a focus on the social groups below the elites is often virtually impossible. Webster asserts that sources that appear Romanised could ‘operate according to a different, indigenous, set of underlying rules’, Webster (2001) 219, but as this different ‘set of underlying rules’ can not easily be recovered, it has to be left out of this discussion.
\(^70\) Woolf (1998) 7; Curchin (2004) 9. Cf. Beard (1995) 174, about the negotiability of Roman identity. From early times onwards, there was cultural exchange between the Latins, Umbrians and Etruscans, see Rüpke (2007b) 2. Nevertheless, for reasons of convenience, I will use the terms ‘Roman civilisation’, ‘Roman religion’ and ‘Roman influences.’
\(^72\) Woolf (1998) 245.
Roman and indigenous cultures, positioned somewhere on the scale between ‘Roman’ (i.e. of the capital) and native.  

Curchin gives the following apt summary: ‘(...) Romanization was not a deliberate or conscious policy, nor was it an attempt to eradicate the indigenous culture. It was spontaneous rather than planned, gradual rather than rapid, and resulted in integration rather than subjugation of the indigenous culture. Romanization was not a goal to be achieved; it was a phenomenon brought about through the fusion of two cultures.’

A complicating factor was the process of Hellenization, which in several areas played a role before Romanization, especially in the field of religion (see also chapter 3, *passim*). At some places, Greek culture remained strong in the Roman period, which implies that the new ‘Romanised’ cultures that came into being were a mix not only of Roman and native elements, but possessed certain Greek characteristics as well. As has been remarked, Romanization was no single, uniform process, and this resulted in great differences between provinces and towns.

### 3.1: The diffusion of Roman(ised) habits and difficulties identifying them

The various aspects connected with ‘Roman models’ were diffused in several ways, including by religion, where native and Roman cults merged and their rites were enriched. Something that has been subject to much discussion is the role of the local elites in the process. It is obvious that, apart from religion, they played a role in administration and in monumentalizing cities, two other elements that were important in the process of Romanization. Many elite members wanted to demonstrate loyalty to Roman rule and competed with each other in trying to show off their ‘romanness’ and in

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76 Terrenato (2001) 3, compares Hellenization and Romanization: in Italy Hellenization was the closest parallel to Romanization; ‘in the sense that it [Hellenization] was a process that reduced differences across a range of disparate phenomena such as elite taste, the organization of land or political systems, across a peninsula where local and ethnic peculiarities always played the strongest role (...).’
78 Kunz (2006) 372. In some areas, not only Roman, native and Greek cultural influences can be detected, but Punic as well, for example on Sicily and in northern Africa, Kunz (2006) 372.
79 Mattingly writes that several separate ‘Roman’ identities came into being, which can best be detected in the field of religion, Mattingly (2002) 540. Especially the heterogeneity of Italy has been stressed by modern scholars, Terrenato (2001) 5; Benelli (2001) 14. This heterogeneity had a chronological side, Patterson (2006) 125-126.
83 Millett (1990) 37; Hanson (1997) 76, 78. Mackie (1983) 54-65, has shown the importance of the local elite in the organisation of municipalities in Spain.
order to gain certain advantages.\textsuperscript{85} However, despite the idea that individual choices of elite members played a major role in the process of Romanization, the motives of individuals are usually unknown.\textsuperscript{86}

Apart from lacunary evidence\textsuperscript{87} and the regional variety that has already been mentioned, there are other complicating factors related to Romanization.\textsuperscript{88} The first is that Rome itself changed constantly, not only as a result of internal events but also of influences from outside.\textsuperscript{89} Its culture was an amalgam that was continually re-defined, both in Rome and the provinces.\textsuperscript{90} This results in great difficulties when one tries to distinguish between the categories ‘Roman’ (i.e. of the City), provincial and native.\textsuperscript{91} These problems are aggravated because often very little is known about pre-Roman local societies and religions, and the relevant sources are difficult to interpret.\textsuperscript{92} Furthermore, it is often problematic or even impossible to make a distinction between Roman immigrants\textsuperscript{93} and Romanised natives.\textsuperscript{94} In short: there was no binary opposition between Roman and native, as Keay writes.\textsuperscript{95}

3.2: The impact of Romanization

Nevertheless, it may be clear that the Roman conquest brought major changes in the various local cultures and societies. It has already been mentioned that religion, urban administration and monumentalization, taken care of by the elite, were important aspects of Romanization. This is not surprising, given the fact that the Roman Empire was based on cities, and that many believed in the superiority of urban life.\textsuperscript{96} Acquiring citizenship was considered to be valuable and a privilege, at least until Caracalla.\textsuperscript{97} The people living in these cities based their ‘Roman’ identity on knowledge of Latin, Graeco-Roman literary culture, and their adoption of what was perceived as the ‘traditional’ Roman way of life and Roman values.\textsuperscript{98} However, the cities were no exact copies of Rome; apart from

\textsuperscript{85}Whittaker (1997) 152; Ando (2000) 230-231, who is writing about imperial portraits, but whose statement is in my opinion equally valid in other situations. See also Vallat (2001) 108.
\textsuperscript{86}Cherry (1997) 72.
\textsuperscript{87}Cherry (1998) 82-100.
\textsuperscript{88}Although they were not exclusively linked to Romanization as such, changing identities, tensions between textual and archaeological evidence and the (often necessary) focus on the elite have to be taken into account as well, Mattingly (2002) 538-539. Webster (2001) 211, 217-218: pro-regional varieties, contra focus on elite.
\textsuperscript{89}E.g. the Carthaginian influences on Rome and Roman religion, mainly after the start of the Punic wars, Kunz (2006) 302.
\textsuperscript{92}Cherry (1998) 2; Rüpke (2001) 72. Also: Spickermann (2001b) 35.
\textsuperscript{93}Related to religion, the type of immigrants in provincial towns could play a role: economic immigrants often favoured peregrine religions, while people immigrating because of political reason, e.g. soldiers, were more concentrated on Roman religion, Kehrer (1997) 31.
\textsuperscript{94}Cherry (1997) 73.
\textsuperscript{95}Keay (2001) 116.
\textsuperscript{97}Lintott (1993) 186.
\textsuperscript{98}Hemelrijk (2008b) 10.
imitations and adaptations of Roman habits and values, there were many differences.\footnote{99} In addition, the
degree of urbanization varied a lot between the various provinces: Africa and southern Spain were
highly urbanized, while in northern Gaul very few towns existed.\footnote{100}

No wonder that most changes occurred within those social groups that came into most intensive
contact with the people who represented Roman government and authority: the local elites.\footnote{101} On the
other hand, this would imply that women, who had no official role in administration, were much less
influenced. Probably for this reason, little has been said about the role of women in the process of
Romanization,\footnote{102} and when their role is discussed, women are indeed supposed to be less Romanised
than men. Fontana for example, writing about epitaphs from Leptis Magna, states that the ‘process of
Romanization (…) seems to affect only minimally women, relegated to domestic life removed from
power.’ (…) men appear oriented towards the public world and a quicker acculturation, while women
remain almost completely outside the sphere of Latin and Romanization.\footnote{103} This same argument of
the link between a domestic life and traditional values has been put forward by Rothe in her discussion
about dress in the Rhine-Moselle region. While the men in this area\footnote{104} wore Roman dress, the women
retained their native clothing.\footnote{105}

However, in the cities (as contrasted to the countryside, and probably also the less Romanised
Rhine-Moselle region) this was not always the case. There, social rank could be more important than
gender, as Hemelrijk writes.\footnote{106} This was especially true for certain phenomena which are often
connected to Romanization, like the system of euergetism and its accompanying public honours, the
habit of erecting inscriptions\footnote{107} and religion.\footnote{108} As we shall see throughout this thesis, the inscriptions
of many priestesses show their adherence to Roman values. Spickermann writes: ‘Die Existenz von
Priesterinnen in öffentlichen Kulte setze zudem einen hohen Romanisierungsgrad einer Region
voraus.’\footnote{109}

\footnote{100} Lintott (1993) 130-131.
\footnote{101} Woolf (1998) 77.
\footnote{104} With the remarkable exception of the people in the Treveran area, where the men wore traditional clothing
while the women wore Roman dress, see Rothe (2009) 72 for a possible explanation. See also Hemelrijk,
forthcoming 2013.
\footnote{105} Rothe (2009) 71.
\footnote{106} Hemelrijk (2008b) 7, 18, and forthcoming.
\footnote{107} Spickermann (1994a) 7, 380, 381.
\footnote{108} As wives of Roman colonists women could be mediators between different population groups. Glinister (2006)
102, writes about Hellenistic Italy that women ‘played a crucial role in the adoption and adaptation of cultural
elements and the appropriation of ritual forms on both sides, helping to establish a new, shared culture and sense
of identity.’ In my opinion, this role was likely also played by women elsewhere in the Roman Empire where
Roman colonists married native women.
4: Civic religion in the provinces

4.1: Civic religion and the role of the elite

It has already been mentioned that ‘Roman life’ meant ‘city life’, and this applied also to religion. Roman religion was in the first place a religion for a defined group of citizens.\(^{110}\) Therefore, municipalisation was a catalyst in changing local religious systems in the western part of the Roman Empire.\(^{111}\) In the cities and towns the major festivals, temples and priests (both male and female) can be found\(^{112}\) and the municipal charters that are preserved pay attention to religious matters.\(^{113}\) The legal status of the town (and its inhabitants) was important in this matter: towns with Roman rights stood generally closer to Roman religion\(^{114}\) and Roman citizens tended to be more interested in the religion of their conquerors than people without Roman citizenship.\(^{115}\) It was religion that for a great part defined someone’s status in his or her community.\(^{116}\) Ando writes: ‘Romans characterized membership in their community through participation in political and religious rituals that were variously open to or required of people of different legal ranks.’\(^{117}\) In this way, power was distributed and social hierarchies were consolidated, also because the elite held most of the priesthoods and decided which cults were public (see also section 5.6 of this chapter).\(^{118}\)

Like many other aspects of Roman culture, Roman religion was mainly adopted by the local elites whose members will therefore figure prominently in this thesis.\(^{119}\) That it was the elite who was most involved in Roman religion need not surprise us, for Roman religious institutions in the provinces were useful in the competition for prestige, honour and standing, which was a crucial feature of provincial culture (see also chapter 5; euergetism and public honours).\(^{120}\) Beard, North and Price write: ‘By and large, in every kind of community the local élite tended to display less interest in local


\(^{111}\) Van Andringa (2007) 86.

\(^{112}\) Spickermann (2001b) 41. For the roles of cities in the German provinces, see: Spickermann (2001b) 21, 24.

\(^{113}\) Though only concerning finances and administration. Therefore, religion in municipalities was a way of managing local administration, as Raggi (2011) 343 writes. He (p. 334) also states convincingly that the concept of Roman religion (that is: religion controlled by the elite) was transported to the municipalities in provinces, and not so much its contents.


\(^{116}\) Besides, the civic cults provided a sense of belonging: ‘(...) identification with the city was closely bound up with devotion to its chief deity,’ Rives (2007) 108. See also Rives (2007) 110.


\(^{120}\) Beard, North and Price (1998) 336.
indigenous cults than in the universal deities associated with the Roman empire. The imperial cult, in which so many elite women served as priestesses, was of course the most important of these universal cults.

Not only in Rome a link between political and religious offices existed, but also in the provinces: magistrates and priests were members of the same socio-economic elite and civic priesthoods were comparable to civic offices (the model of civic religion). However, in Rome and the rest of the Empire, no priestly class existed; the basic rites – mainly prayer and sacrifice – of Roman religion were open to everyone. This did not mean that everybody was always fully independent with regards to religion: ‘It was only as members of a group that individuals depended on someone else for the performance of basic rituals, since in every group, whether a household or an association or a city, there were people whose role was to represent the group in its dealings with the divine (…).’

4.2: Differences between towns and regions

Despite tendencies towards generalisation, regional unity and interaction, there was no homogenous religious structure in the Roman Empire, as has been remarked above. Apart from the in some places persistent presence of Greek religious practices, native religions (or parts of them) continued to exist everywhere in the Empire. Even when deities had Roman names, they might have been perceived as local gods. Therefore, religion in the Roman Empire was mainly a local affair, with room for personal choices. There was not one religion, but neither several totally independent religions. Religious life in a local city was flexible and open, with few rules worked out, and largely based on local traditions and initiatives. This means that, although the basic elements of the civic model of religion (see above) can be found in the whole Empire, eclecticism was an important part of religion: no single model of religion does justice to the situation in antiquity.

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121 Beard, North and Price (1998) 338. Cf. 339: ‘Religious display must have been central in the competition for status.’
124 Gordon (1990c); Rives (2007) 43.
127 Bendlin (1997) 52. Obviously, neither was there a homogenous religious structure before the Roman conquest, see De Cazanove (2007) 45; Rives (2007) 108.
128 Kunz (2006) 370; Orlin (2007) 63: ‘The closer contacts with the Greek world in the late third century left their marks all over Roman religious practice.’
133 Bendlin (1997) 48. Even the calendar could in theory each year be revised by the duoviri; Raggi (2011) 338.
Gaul and Germania illustrate nicely the divergence between religions in various areas, and at the same time show the effects of Roman rule. In pre-Roman Germania there were no urban traditions or literary culture, which makes this area very different from the provinces in the Mediterranean area. There was no ‘einheitliche religiöse Tradition’, and therefore a regional religion with specifically local elements came into being after the Roman conquest.\textsuperscript{134} The same was the case in Gaul, where no uniform religion in the pre-Roman period existed, resulting in city cults with different Gallo-Roman local pantheons, although the rites became Roman.\textsuperscript{135} This regionalism is also clearly visible in religious offices held by women, as will become clear throughout this thesis.

5: Public and private in the Roman Empire

In studies about the lives of women in general and of those living in antiquity in particular, the gendered distinction between public (outside the house, mainly related to the state; reserved for men) and private (inside the house, related to the family; confined to women) usually occupies an important position. Therefore, it needs to be discussed here as well.\textsuperscript{136} Furthermore, it has special relevance for this thesis, because the dichotomy is also closely connected to Roman religion.\textsuperscript{137} There is, for instance, no consensus about the precise meaning of the concepts ‘public cult’ and ‘public priest’, and a connection between ‘public religion’ and women has both vigorously been contested and defended. For example, as we have seen above, it has been argued that the religious roles of Roman women were, with only a few exceptions, confined to the marginal (i.e. non-public and foreign) cults. In its entry about public priests, the Oxford Classical Dictionary of 1996 asserts that in Rome no public priestesses held office except the Vestals, although several inscriptions have been found – and not only in Rome – that identify women explicitly as sacerdotes publicae.\textsuperscript{138}

So if we accept that sacerdotes publicae existed, what does the word ‘public’ mean? Various explanations have been offered. Nearly a century ago, it has been suggested that the term publica in the title of a priestess was an indication of a high(er) status of the cult in which she served.\textsuperscript{139} In 2006 Schultz wrote that the title sacerdos publica ‘suggests that some female religious officials could act in their own right on behalf of the Roman people.’\textsuperscript{140} She also suggested that the four sacerdotes publicae

\textsuperscript{134} Spickermann (2001a) v; Spickermann (2001b) 17.
\textsuperscript{136} Cf. Feldner (2000) 381.
\textsuperscript{137} The terms civic cult, public cult, official cult and state cult are often used as synonyms by various modern scholars, but sometimes with slightly different connotations, e.g., ‘for the public good’, or ‘officially approved’. To avoid confusion, I will use them as synonyms.
\textsuperscript{139} With regards to the cult of Athena in Naples, Peterson writes: ‘(...) it seems evident that the appearance of a public priest is an indication of the importance of the cult with which he is associated,’ Peterson (1919) 198-199.
\textsuperscript{140} Schultz (2006) 79.
who served Ceres in Rome and Teanum Sidicinum (see also chapter 3) may have served in a cult that was organised differently from the Ceres cult elsewhere.\footnote{Schultz (2007) 14-15, note 35.}

As these explanations do not seem to be based on a thorough study of the dichotomy between public and private, they lack a sound base. To fill this gap, I shall give a short introduction to the relevance of the dichotomy for studies on Roman life, before discussing the ancient literary sources concerned with \textit{publicus} and \textit{privatus}, thereby paying special attention to the religious use of these terms. As in Roman thought the concepts ‘Roman’ and ‘foreign’ were closely related to the dichotomy, the literary sources with regard to these terms will receive some attention as well. Furthermore, I will deal with the modern views on the public-private dichotomy and explain the position taken in this thesis.

The prominence of the distinction between public/male and private/female in studies on Graeco-Roman society is the result of the great importance that both modern scholars and ancient authors have attached to politics – seen as the public sphere \textit{par excellence} – in which Greek and Roman women could not participate and on which they could exercise no \textit{direct} influence by holding political offices. As the community was considered to be more important than the individual, in Roman eyes public acts (including public religious rituals) were valued more than private ones. As a consequence modern scholars have often considered the role of women in Roman society as restricted, even marginal. However, the exclusion of women from the political sphere does not imply that they were excluded from other aspects of public or civic life as well.\footnote{Weintrab (1997) 12, 28; Rigginsby (1997) 49; Corbier (1998) v; Hemelrijk (2004) 189, 196.} Although in the western part of the Roman Empire the public roles of women were mainly limited to religious life and euergetism, in the East they could also act as (honorary) magistrates, for example as gymnasarchs.\footnote{Van Bremen (1996) ; Corbier (1998) v.} In addition, women – both in the East and the West – could act publicly without harming their reputation by assisting their husbands in times of crisis. The \textit{fides} and \textit{pietas} these women displayed towards their men were accepted motives for their public activities.\footnote{Hemelrijk (2004) 190-191.}

The ‘grand dichotomy’ of public versus private was not limited to Greek and Roman culture, but played a significant role in western society until fairly recently.\footnote{Weintrab (1997) 1; Barbey-Morand (2003) \textit{passim}; Corbier (1998) ii.} This provides a problem, for our modern (Christian) notions of this topic are not necessarily the same as those of the Greeks and Romans, and the fact that they are heavily influenced by conceptions from the nineteenth century – the period when the Latin words \textit{publicus} and \textit{privatus} became fashionable – inserts an extra layer that may distort our view of the way the dichotomy was incorporated in ancient society. Furthermore, the modern views on the dichotomy have changed several times since the nineteenth century: ‘Es ist (...
deutlich zu erkennen, daß die moderne begriffliche Fassung antiker Verhältnisse trotz der dabei benutzten, gleichbleibenden antike Wortkörper die Veränderung der modernen Verhältnisse und ihrer modernen Beschreibung (...), widerspiegelt (...).”

Public and private – in general, in relation to women and as religious concepts – have to be seen as historical concepts that are related to specific social situations, instead of universal categories. In other words: the distinction is no anthropological constant.

The following lines from the foreword to the work of Cornelius Nepos confirm clearly that the – in this case: gendered – dichotomy between public and private is – and was – no anthropological constant and that Roman women did not live secluded lives – in contrast to Greek women, according to Nepos. Instead, Roman women could act in the middle of public life, both related to spatial aspects and to social occasions.

Contra ea pleraque nostris moribus sunt decora quae apud illos turpia putantur. quem enim Romanorum pudet uxorem duere in convivium? aut cuius non mater familias primum locum tenet aedium atque in celebritate versatur? quod multo sit aliter in Graecia; nam neque in convivium adhibitur nisi propinquorum, neque sedet nisi in interiore parte aedium, quae gynaeconisit аппellatur, quo nemo accedit nisi propinquua cognatione coniunctus.

‘On the other hand, many actions are seemly according to our [i.e. Roman] code which the Greeks look upon as shameful. For instance, what Roman would blush to take his wife to a dinner-party? What matron does not frequent the front rooms of her dwelling [i.e. the atrium and other rooms to which guests are admitted] and show herself in public? But it is very different in Greece; for there a woman is not admitted to a dinner-party, unless relatives only are present, and she keeps to the more retired part of the house called “the women’s apartment,” to which no man has access who is not near of kin.’

Although the terms public and private are not mentioned explicitly, this quote from Nepos is but one of the many ancient sources which refer to (aspects of) both terms in connection with women. In the following section, the most relevant sources will be discussed. I will try to recover the implicit and explicit criteria these sources give of what publicus and privatus meant to the Romans. It has to be

146 Winterling (2005) 228.
kept in mind though, that a gap existed between ideal and reality, as with so many other social concepts.

5.1: The ancient sources on public and private

When in the ancient literary sources the words *publicus* and/or *privatus* are used, very often little additional information is given, although it is clear that *publicus* and *privatus* had different meanings and could be used in many different contexts. In Digest 50.17.2 a clear explanation of what Ulpian considered to be a ‘public office’ is given. This is an important passage, for here women are explicitly mentioned:

*Feminae ab omnibus officiis civilibus vel publicis remotae sunt et ideo nec iudices esse possunt nec magistratum gerere nec postulare nec pro alio intervenire nec procuratores existere.*

‘Women are excluded from all civic and public functions and therefore can neither be judges, nor can they hold magistracies, nor bring a lawsuit, nor intervene on behalf of others, nor act as procurators.’

According to this fragment, public functions were responsibilities held, or tasks carried out, for the good of and in name of others and/or the community as a whole. Hence the addition *civilibus*, which seems to stress the fact that these tasks were part of being a Roman citizen. The *officia* mentioned here refer to legal-formalistic functions that are viewed as the foundations of Roman politics and society. It is remarkable, that in the enumeration of acts and offices given here, no religious office is mentioned, although many priests (and priestesses!) held their priesthoods as representatives of their

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149 Cf. also Cicero, *Verr. 2.2.4.11; Amic. 4.15. See also Horace, *Ars Poet. 397.*

150 Ando and Rüpke (2006) write correctly that using the Digest as proof of practices in the early imperial period, is risky. However, the things stated by Ulpian in this quote do not seem to have been different in earlier times; cf. Livy 34.7.8-9, quoted in the introduction.


152 The same *officia civilia* are mentioned in *Paul. D. 5.1.12.2*, where it is said that women cannot be judges, ‘not because they do not have any judgement, but because it is accepted that they do not hold civic offices’; *…) non quia non habent iudicium, sed quia receptum est, ut civilibus officiis non fungantur.* See also Gardner (1993) 88-9, 100-101; Feldner (2000) 385, 386.

153 However, an element of representation can also be found in for example family cults, where the *patrfamilias* or a (male or female) *sacerdos in familia* represented their family.

154 Cf. Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.34.124, where private persons are contrasted to magistrates: *Ac ne illud quidem alienum est, de magistratu, de privatorum, [de civium,] de peregrinorum officiis dicere – ‘At this point it is not at all irrelevant to discuss the duties of magistrates, of private individuals, [of citizens,] and of foreigners’. Cf. Cicero, *De Finibus* 5.20.57. Cf. Ando and Rüpke (2006) 9. Translations by Loeb Classical Library.

community, and were elected by magistrates or the city council.\textsuperscript{156} In his \textit{Institutiones} however, quoted in Digest 1.1.1.2, Ulpian writes:

\textit{(…)} publicum ius est, quod ad statum rei Romanae spectat, privatum, quod ad singulorum utilitatem: sunt enim quaedam publice utilia, quaedam privatim. publicum ius in sacris, in sacerdotibus, in magistratibus constitit. privatum ius tripertitum est: collectum etenim est ex naturalibus praeceptis aut gentium aut civilibus.

‘(…) Public law is that which regards the condition of the Roman state; private, that which concerns the interests of individuals; for some things are of public and others of private interest. Public law has reference to holy matters, priests and magistrates. Private law is threefold: for it is derived either from natural precepts, or from those of the nations or from those of the state.’\textsuperscript{157}

We see here that religious matters are mentioned even before magistracies, so this endorses the view that priesthoods were public (or civic) offices and offers the possibility that in the first quote from the Digest, priesthoods were omitted on purpose because women acting as priestesses were an accepted phenomenon, perhaps even common. Furthermore, we see that here the dichotomy between public and private is related to numbers, or ‘us together’ and ‘us apart’: public means collective, while private means individual. In his \textit{De Inventione}, Cicero summarizes this clearly:

\textit{Publicum est quod civitas universa aliqua de causa frequentat, ut ludi, dies festus, bellum.}

‘A public occasion is one in which for some reason the whole community takes part, as games, a holiday, or war.’\textsuperscript{158}

This link between private-individual and public-collective can also be detected in Cicero’s \textit{De Legibus} 2.19, where ‘Marcus’ says that in his ideal state ‘no individual should have his own gods, neither new ones, nor foreign ones, unless they are publicly recognized’ (\textit{separatim nemo habessit deos neve novos neve advenas nisi publice adscitos}).\textsuperscript{159} Festus explains what \textit{publice adscitos} implied, for he defines \textit{publica sacra} as ‘\textit{quae publico sumpto pro populo fiunt}’ (those paid for by public money and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{156} Gardner (1993) 85: Women ‘had no part in those public activities which formed part of the political aspect of being a citizen.’

\textsuperscript{157} This translation is based on Ando (2008) 67. There is no consensus about the exact translation of the terms \textit{gentium} and \textit{civilibus}, but that is not relevant here.

\textsuperscript{158} Cicero, \textit{De Inv.} 1.27.40. Cf. Cicero, \textit{Pro Murena} 76.

\textsuperscript{159} Obviously, the situation in which deities had to be publicly recognised, already existed in Rome, Rives (1995) 7.
\end{flushright}
conducted for the people), while *privata sacra* are those that are practiced ‘*pro singulis hominibus familiiis gentibus*’ (for individual men, families and gentes).⁶⁶ According to this last definition, private is not necessary limited to separate individuals, but encompasses also groups of relatives as ‘private persons’.

In sum, according to the Digest and Cicero, two sources spanning a long period of Roman history, the *kind* together with the number of persons involved was an important component of the term public. Public encompassed a certain kind or group of people: sometimes, as for example on religious occasions, the whole civic community (and its financial resources, see below section 5.7),⁶¹ including women; sometimes the political community, excluding women.

5.2: The ancient sources on Roman and foreign

Apart from the dichotomy between public and private, another distinction that is closely connected to it, especially regarding Roman religion, deserves our attention. In the provinces of the empire, *sacra publica* could also be the native cults that were not considered to be Roman (and were, accordingly, ‘foreign’) but were allowed by the pontifices to be performed.⁶² In these cults both men and women served as *sacerdotes*. Therefore, not only ‘public’ and ‘private’, but also ‘foreign’ and ‘non-Roman’ or ‘native’ are important terms in the discussion about religious roles of women.⁶³ Yet, as is the case with the dichotomy between public and private, it is very difficult to make a clear distinction between the two concepts, even though the Romans themselves used the terms. Festus gives a definition of the so-called *sacra municipalia*, which are, in fact, non- (or: pre-) Roman religions:⁶⁴

*Municipalia sacra vocantur, quae ab initio habuerunt ante civitatem Romanam acceptam; quae observare eos voluerunt pontifices, et eo more facere, quo adsuessent antiquitus.*

‘Those holy matters are called municipal which a people had from its beginning, before it received Roman citizenship, and which the pontiffs wanted them to continue to observe and to perform in the way in which they had been used to perform them from old times.’

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⁶⁶ Festus, 284L. Cf. Paul in Festus: *publica sacra quae pro populo fiebant, privata quae pro singulis hominibus familiiisque appellabant.*

⁶¹ This could imply ‘the Roman people’, but also the citizens of a small town somewhere on the fringes of the Empire.


⁶⁴ 146L.
Furthermore, Festus offers a definition of what he explicitly calls ‘foreign rites’: *sacra peregrina*. These rites are

*quae aut evocatis dis in oppugnandis urbibus Romam sunt conata, aut quae ob quasdam religiones per pacem sunt petita, ut ex Phrygia Matris Magnae, ex Graecia Cereri, Epiduro Aesculapi: quae coluntur eorum more, a quibus sunt accepta.*\(^{165}\)

‘either those that have been introduced in Rome by way of summoning the gods in the besieged cities, or those that are obtained in peace because of some religious reasons, as Mater Magna from Phrygia, Ceres from Greece, Aesculapius from Epidaurus: those are worshipped according to the manners of those, from whom they are received.’

So even though a distinction was made between Roman, foreign and native, the practice of *evocatio*, mentioned by Festus, shows that the boundaries between the terms were not fixed.\(^{166}\) Therefore, in itself, the concept ‘foreign’ does not explain much, for the Romans absorbed ‘foreign’ cults and rites during their whole history,\(^{167}\) and ‘the line between Roman and non-Roman might be drawn differently in different contexts.’\(^{168}\) In addition, Roman public religion encompassed the traditional cults of the ‘Romans’ (or rather: the cults the Romans themselves labelled as ancestral) *and* newly established cults, over which the Senate made decisions.\(^{169}\) Therefore, *sacra peregrina* is an artificial concept.\(^{170}\)

The cult of Magna Mater, defined by Festus as ‘foreign’ is a good example of the blurring boundaries between Roman and foreign (and public!). It was officially incorporated in the Roman state during the Republic after consultation of the Sibylline books: in 204 BC, the eastern goddess Cybele was granted (as *Mater Deum Magna Idaea*) a public cult inside the *pomerium* of Rome.\(^{171}\) Despite attempts to Romanise the cult of the goddess, it was often portrayed as something dangerously foreign, especially with regards to the self-castrated *Galli*.\(^{172}\) ‘The image of frenzy, dancing, and oriental ecstasy is only one side of the picture. The other side shows a cult whose ritual forms overlap with those of Roman civic religion, broadly encompassed in the framework of state control.’\(^{173}\)

This was the result, according to Mary Beard, of a debate on the nature of the Roman and the foreign, of

\(^{165}\) 268L.

\(^{166}\) Ando (2003b) 233. Nevertheless, every time the Roman Senate saw something that needed to be repressed, it was labelled ‘foreign’; Ando (2003b) 201.

\(^{167}\) North (2003) 201.

\(^{168}\) Orlin (2010) 104.


\(^{172}\) Beard (1994) 166, 175, 178.

defining a Roman identity. This identity had eroded as a result of the growing Empire, which led to the incorporation of so many different rites and cults. In conclusion, the division between Roman, foreign and public was in reality a fluid one.

5.3: Modern views

Although a distinction between public and private in their different meanings may be helpful to interpret various situations in the ancient world, a rigid division between the two concepts does not do justice to the fluid reality in antiquity. The terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ are not only liable to change, they are also relative concepts, just like ‘foreign’ and ‘Roman’ as we have seen in the previous section. In discussions about the house, which in our society is seen as the private place par excellence, the relativity of the ‘dichotomy’ has been demonstrated clearly. In his book on houses in Pompeii and Herculaneum, Wallace-Hadrill argues that Roman houses incorporated a spectrum that varied between totally public and totally private, with ‘subtle grades of relative privacy’. For instance, in buildings that are generally considered ‘private’ such as houses, people used the ‘language of the public’, e.g. by using columns, an architectural element that was linked to public buildings. Furthermore, certain rooms that were private most of the time had a public function during certain parts of the day, for example the atrium, where a patron’s morning salutations took place.

Not only with respect to houses, but to other aspects of Roman society as well, there seem to have been no strict boundaries between public and private. The most relevant example is the distinction between the forum and the domus, terms which have often been linked with the political community and the household, and men and women respectively – though we have seen above that the domus was not totally private. Partly as a consequence of modern predispositions about the proper roles of men and women, the concepts outside and inside, visible and invisible, powerful and powerless and dominant and subordinate have also been connected to the distinction between forum and domus. These dichotomies were not absolute, and reality was much more complex.

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179 Already in 1992, Eck had written that in Rome, the atrium was an extended forum, Eck (1992) 362, 365.
Several other examples, all relevant to the lives of women, can be found.\textsuperscript{184} The status of collegia is most illuminating and important for this thesis, as various women held religious offices within collegia. According to Steuernagel, collegia formed an alternative political, social and religious network.\textsuperscript{185} They were not totally private (except family groups or domestic collegia, see also section 5.8), nor completely public, though some were publicly recognized.\textsuperscript{186} The members of this last group of collegia enjoyed a certain status within the local community, for example the Cereales in Carthage and surroundings (see chapter 3).\textsuperscript{187} 

Temples and religious rites also show the blurred boundaries between public and private: public temples (i.e. those dedicated publicly) could be used for private purposes (e.g. the erection of votives), and public rites (i.e. those enacted for the well-being of the/a community) could be interpreted and valued differently by each attendant: ‘even public cults could have a private dimension.’\textsuperscript{188} Individual private cults could be ‘absorbed by cities’, and accordingly their priests could become civic priests.\textsuperscript{189} Alternatively, many popular rites were not celebrated centrally and many public rites were only attended by priests and a few others.\textsuperscript{190} Roman gods and goddesses were often worshipped on different levels, varying from totally public, supervised by the pontifices and carried out on the forum for the well-being of the whole city, to totally private, in the form of a libation poured by an individual before his dinner. These stages are clearly visible in the cult of the goddess Ceres: she was worshipped in Rome in a state cult for the whole community, figured probably in several (mainly South Italian) places in Thesmophoric cults that were usually only open to initiates, and was honoured everywhere in the Italian countryside at farmsteads and in private sanctuaries (see also below).\textsuperscript{191} 

These examples illustrate plainly that it is highly problematic to make a clear distinction between public and private with respect to various aspects of Roman society – religion being no exception – and that the two terms cannot be seen as a binary opposition.\textsuperscript{192}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{185} Steuernagel (2006) 142.
\textsuperscript{186} By giving benefactions collegia could influence the public sphere, Steuernagel (2004) 206. Furthermore, the architecture of their buildings often referred to that of public buildings, Steuernagel (2004) 191.
\textsuperscript{187} Rives (1995) 204.
\textsuperscript{189} Gordon (1990c) 246.
\textsuperscript{190} Rüpke (2007b) 4.
\textsuperscript{191} Cf. Rüpke (2007a) 1: ‘Traditionelle, öffentliche und öffentlich finanzierte Kulte und Kultorte müssen aber keinen Gegensatz zu religiösen Aktivitäten von Gruppen bilden; in manchen Fällen bieten sie solchen privaten Aktivitäten sogar die Infrastruktur.’
\end{footnotesize}
5.4: Politics, community and ‘publicness’ and the changing role of women

In this section I will discuss some – often rather restricted – definitions of public and private given by modern scholars and pay attention to the elements that have been perceived as essential aspects of the two terms. These aspects include location and money, already mentioned above, and the role of the local council. It will become clear that all these elements have their own difficulties and are not easily applicable to the role of women in Roman religion.

Very often, and in conformity with the ancient sources, a link has been made between *publicus* and ‘community’ or ‘politics’. According to Riggsby, who stays close to the definitions offered in the sources, *publicus* means: ‘of or pertaining to the people/community’, that is: all acts that belonged to or affected the community, and were executed in public. A public activity was an ‘activity which interests the community *qua* community.’ Privatus is then negatively defined as ‘anything or anyone not connected to the community as a whole’. However, this definition leaves little room for the sliding scale. Furthermore, according to this definition groups of which various people were members – like collegia – would all be private. As I agree with Steuernagel’s view on collegia as summarized above, which defines collegia neither as public, nor as private, I think Riggsby’s definition is too strict.

Winterling, who writes that in the Roman Republic a difference was made between the *res publica* (defined by him as *städtischen Gemeinwesen*) and the *domus*, stresses the importance of the political connotations of the term *publicus*. The opposition of *domus* and *res publica* had implications for gender relations as well: Winterling states – probably a bit too simplistic – that in Republican times acting in political life was reserved for men, while women were directed to their homes. This dichotomy between *domus* and *res publica* started to change during the late Republic and resulted in socio-political relations that could not anymore be described adequately by the words *publicus* and *privatus*. This became even more difficult in the imperial period: ‘Die Kaiser selbst unterließen in politischer Hinsicht die Trennung von Rolle und Person und damit die alte Unterscheidung von *magistratus*, dem ein Amt bekleidenden [the civic equivalent of *publicus*, VG], und *privatus*, dem amtlosen Bürger.’

The empresses and other women of the imperial family also fit in this changing period. They acted in public, and not only with regards to traditional ‘female’ areas. It has been suggested that the imperial women followed the example of the Roman priestesses of Ceres and the Vestal Virgins, who

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196 *Collegia* were not included in the *lex Ursonensis* (see Rüpke (2006a) 37) as they were obviously not considered to be the object of public religion in the sense of ‘pertaining to the whole community’.
197 However, as the evidence from the early Republic is meagre, one could question Winterling’s statement about the existence of a strict dichotomy between *res publica* and *domus* in this early period.
200 Corbier (1998) iv, vii. However, one should not forget the important aristocratic women from the Republic.
had important autonomous roles and received certain privileges.\footnote{Scheid (2003a) 150; Bielman and Frei-Stolba (2003) xvi.} The evidence of women holding priesthoods and acting otherwise outside their domus shows clearly that in the last decades of the Republic and during the imperial period the dichotomy between res publica and domus did not overlap with the dichotomy of man versus woman.\footnote{However, although new oppositions of ‘private’, ‘public’ and ‘imperial’ came into being, the traditional Roman view on public and private can still be found in literature from the first until the third century AD: the res publica was still contrasted to the domus, and magistratus was viewed as the opposite of privatus, Winterling (2005) 236, 239. Therefore, the ‘römishe Selbstbeschreibung mittels der publicus-privatus-Dichotomie was nicht – wie zur Zeit der Republik – durch Einheitlichkeit und Konsistenz, sondern durch Differenzen, Kontrafeltizitäten und Paradoxen gekenzeichnet (…).’ Winterling (2005) 243.}

5.5: Location and its relation to public religion

Apart from the stress on the political aspects of the public-private dichotomy, it is clear that in the view of many modern scholars location is important as well. The domus was the private place where women were supposed to live their lives (although they did not always do so, as may be clear). However, the Roman house also plays an important role in the discussion about public and private in Roman religion. Several scholars have linked the extent to which a cult was ‘public’ or ‘private’ to the location where it was practiced: the Roman house is considered to be the primary place where private religious activities of diverse small groups took place.\footnote{Cicero, De Har. Resp.: quod fit per vigines Vestalis, fit pro populo Romano, fit in ea domo quae est in imperio. Cf. 17,37, Ad Att., 1,12,3, 13,3; Juvenal, Sat. 9,117; Cassius Dio 37,35; Suetonius, Div. Iul., 6; Brouwer (1982) 210; Versnel (1992) 48. Besides, ‘private’ family cults were not isolated from the public sphere; most conformed to the official, ‘public’ cults, Savunen (1997) 119; Cancik (2006) 33-34; North (2007) 116, 121. Cf. Rüpke (2007a) 2, Rives (1995) 34; Derks (2002) 542. Private houses could be used as a location for the cult of important deities of individual towns, for example that of Dionysos in Ephesos, but also of various cults in Rome, see Schäfer (2007) 163. And the other way round: most Mithraea (which are usually seen as private) in Rome and Ostia were located in public buildings and sanctuaries. This is also true of the Mithraea in Gaul and Germany, and of the shrines of other so-called mystery cults as well, see Spickermann (2007) 127.} Although I agree with this view to a certain extent (see my definition of private activities of women below), there is a snag: a rite, crucial for the Roman people as a whole, such as the December festival in honour of Bona Dea was performed pro populo in a domus – albeit one of a magistrate.\footnote{Rives (1995) 151. Cf. Stanbrough (1978) 559, 589.}

Not only houses but also other supposedly ‘private’ areas were important in relation to religion. It has been stated that a shrine built on private property has to be considered as private,\footnote{Rives (1995) 185. Cf. Rives (2007) 82: In Rome, public cults had temples that were public monuments and rites that were performed by public magistrates or priests in name of the whole people.} and, the other way round, that ‘the use of public space implied public recognition.’\footnote{Rives (1995) 117.} Rives mentions Thugga in North Africa where the main shrines were public, because they had entrances to the central market.\footnote{The importance of the market place for public religious life is not only stressed by Rives,}
but also by Savunen. She writes that a public cult was practised in the forum.\textsuperscript{208} However, I do not agree with Rives and Savunen for public temples in the provinces were not always located in the city centre.\textsuperscript{209} In the Digest it is even explicitly stated that a place that was publicly dedicated could be located either in the city or in the countryside.\textsuperscript{210} The best examples are sanctuaries of the goddess Ceres that were often built outside the city walls (cf. Vitruvius 1.7.1, see below). Possibly, one of the temples in Pompeii near the Stabian gate was dedicated to the goddess\textsuperscript{211} and in Falerii the temple of the goddess mentioned in \textit{CIL} 11, 3083 was probably built outside the city limits.\textsuperscript{212}

Ando has stressed the importance of the \textit{pomerium} in Roman religion, mainly in relation to the dichotomy of ‘foreign’ versus ‘Roman’. He writes that the \textit{pomerium} incorporated various binarisms that were central in public life, like ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ and ‘Roman’ versus ‘foreign.’ Furthermore, he implicitly states that the cults inside the \textit{pomerium} were ‘Roman’, while the ‘foreign’ cults were practiced outside this boundary.\textsuperscript{213} Yet, even the \textit{pomerium} appears to have been of no decisive importance in connection to public religion and Roman or non-Roman cults. Latin, ‘public’ deities could have their temples outside the \textit{pomerium}, (e.g. Diana on the Aventine) while an exotic goddess such as Magna Mater – who also received an official cult – was granted a sanctuary inside the \textit{pomerium}. And Ceres, Liber and Libera, (see chapter 3) received a temple outside the \textit{pomerium}. Their temple was either built on the Aventine, opposite the Circus Maximus (Tac. \textit{Ann} 2.49), or under the modern church of Santa Maria de Cosmedin on the old \textit{forum Boarium}.\textsuperscript{214} Furthermore, it is problematic to use the term \textit{pomerium} outside Rome: it is uncertain whether all local cities had their own \textit{pomerium}, while they certainly did have public cults.\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{208} Savunen (1997) 119. However, private cult acts (i.e. of individuals) could also be conducted on the Capitol, as Seneca’s description of people doing their business on the Capitol, quoted by Augustine, \textit{De Civ. Dei} 6.10, suggests.

\textsuperscript{209} Derks, (2002) 451. With relation to the temple itself – not necessarily linked to its location – Derks (2006, 244) writes that the public character of a cult (in his case the cult of Lenus Mars in Trier) can be deduced from the \textit{monumental architecture} of its sanctuary. However, according to his earlier article from 2002 (p. 541) a public cult was not necessarily connected to a monumental temple.

\textsuperscript{210} Digest 1.8.9: \textit{Sacra loca ea sunt, quae publice sunt dedicata, sive in civitate sint sive in agro.} ‘Sacred places are those that are dedicated publicly, either in the community [i.e. a town], or in the countryside.’ ‘Publicly’ here means the by emperor of his authorized agent, as is specified in 1.8.9.1. Elsewhere, Ulpian has specifically defined a \textit{locus publicus}, although his explanation is not very elucidating: \textit{Publici loci appellatio quamadmodum accepitatus, Labeo definit, ut et ad areas et ad insulas et ad agros et ad vias publicas itineraque publica pertineat} - ‘The definition of public place is accepted as Labeo has defined, so that it is related both to areas, islands, fields, public roads and to public ways.’ Ulp. D. 43.8.2.3. My own translations.

\textsuperscript{211} Savunen (1997) 137. The sanctuaries of Demeter and Korè in \textit{Magna Graecia} were also located on the outskirts of the town, often near springs, Hinz (1998) 236.

\textsuperscript{212} Taylor (1923) 76-77, 243. In Africa, Ceres temples was often located near theatres, e.g., in Lepcis Magna and in Bulla Regia, Poinssot (1963) 49-50. Cf. Foucher, \textit{tabbouret.perso.slt.fr/maghreb/FoucherPaganisme.doc}, 8. However, often, the precise location of a temple is unknown. See for instance: Poinssot (1963).

\textsuperscript{213} Ando (2003b) 235.

\textsuperscript{214} Spaeth (1996) 7, 82, 83. Speath favours the Aventine as location, because it was a plebeian district and Ceres had links to the plebs.

\textsuperscript{215} There is evidence for \textit{pomeria} of various towns in the Empire, and Goodman (2007) 60 writes that \textit{coloniae} likely had one. When towns did not have a formal \textit{pomerium}, they had other boundaries like walls, that defined the area where burials were not allowed, an important function of the \textit{pomerium} in Rome, Goodman (2007) 62.
Vitruvius offers an explanation for the different locations of the sanctuaries of various
divinities. These locations were in accordance with the rites, the character and the sphere of influence
of the deities in question, and had little to do with their importance, ‘Romanness’ or ‘foreignness’:216

_aedibus vero sacris, quorum deorum maxime in tutela civitas videtur esse, et Iovi et Iunoni et
Minervae, in excelsissimo loco, unde moenium maxima pars conspicatur, areae distribuantur.
Mercurio autem in foro aut etiam, ut Isidi et Serapi, in emporio (…). Marti extra urbem sed ad
campum; itemque Veneri ad portum. (…) Item Cerei extra urbem loco, quo non omnes
semper homines nisi per sacrificium necesse habeant adire; cum religione, caste sanctisque
moribus is locus debet tueri. ceterisque diis ad sacrificiorum rationes aptae templis areae sunt
distribuendae._

“For the temples, the sites for those of the gods under whose particular protection the state is
thought to rest and for Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, should be on the very highest point
commanding a view of the greater part of the city. Mercury should be in the forum, or, like Isis
and Serapis, in the _emporium_ (…) Mars outside the city but at the training ground, and so
Venus, but at the harbour. (…) 2. Ceres also should be outside the city in a place to which
people need never go except for the purpose of sacrifice. That place should be under the
protection of religion, purity, and good morals. Proper sites should be set apart for the
precincts of the other gods according to the nature of the sacrifices offered to them.”

What Vitruvius offers here, are only guidelines and an explanation of the sacred geography of Rome
itself. They are not necessarily a description of reality as there were no fixed rules217 ‘No master plan
of Rome’s social topography existed’, according to Rüpke, and this was the same for provincial towns
in the imperial period.218 Timгад in Africa is a good example: during the reign of Trajan, there was no
space free within the city walls, so new large sanctuaries were built outside, even the Capitol.219 In
addition, in the imperial period, the choice for temple locations could depend on imperial propaganda
and preferences, for temples of gods who did not belong to the Capitoline triad could be built on
prominent spots.220 This implies that it is virtually impossible to conclude anything about the public or
private and Roman or non-Roman character of a certain cult, based only on the location of its temple.

In sum, the criterion ‘location’ provokes many difficulties and is therefore better avoided or at
least used with great caution. Only when it is known whether a shrine was built or a religious act
carried out on public land, one can be reasonably sure that the shrine or religious act (and therefore

216 Vitruvius 1.7.1-2; transl. Loeb Classical Library. See also Stambough (1978) 560-561.
also the person acting) had at least partly a public character. But even then location should never be used apart from other criteria.

5.6: Organising public religion in Rome, Italy and in the provinces: the role of the local council

The third element that has been put forward in the discussion about public religion, is the way Rome and local communities organised their cults. According to Rives, public cults were integrated in the socio-political structures of the town; they were part of the civic organisation and determined (partly) what it meant to be a citizen of that town. Furthermore, a connection between socio-political power and religious identity existed. Together, these formed the ‘civic model of official religion’, which varied per city (see above, section 4). It has been stated that in ‘official public cults priestly power was linked to the social and political order [i.e. the elite] and priestly duties were combined with other public offices.’ As may be clear, this view excludes female priests, and is therefore too limited. The importance of the local elite in public religious life, however, is undisputed. Corbier writes that most religious roles of women were reserved for members of the local elites. Often (though certainly not always!) this was the case indeed – which is unsurprising, as the same was true for men. Rank and standing were more important than gender.

It is an accepted opinion that municipal magistrates and the local council determined whether a deity was to receive public worship and had to be recorded in the official calendar. Public religion in the Lex Ursonensis was controlled by the local political elite, i.e. the decuriones. However, new cults could probably (also) be established by wealthy and influential individuals who had a particular

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221 The control of public religion by the elite in Rome itself can best be shown by the introduction of what the Romans themselves called foreign deities. Performing the rites necessary for a proper introduction of foreign gods was the task of the quindecemviri. However, it was the Senate that decided if a foreign deity was to receive a state cult. See also Ando (2003a) 197–198.
222 Rives (2007) 85, 113. The same can be said of the cults shared by the citizens of the Empire: because you were part of the Roman community, you took part in the ‘state cults’, Ando (2007) 444.
224 Savunen (1997) 119; Gordon (1990c).
225 Rüpke (2004) 193 writes: ‘(...) the élite were those most often present at religious rites, and public priesthoods were at the same time private banqueting circles offering a context for leading Romans to meet, to discuss, and to sacrifice on private grounds.’
227 For instance, several libertae are known who acted as sacerdotes (for examples see chapter 5, section 3.1) and the African priestesses of Ceres probably did not belong to the local élite (see chapter 3, section 3.4).
228 Rives (1995) 10, 96, 98; Derks (2002) 542. Cf. Woolf (1998) 220; Woolf (2001) 120, 122-123: Municipal and colonial charters show that the organisation and financing of the public cults were the responsibility of the civic authorities, supervised by the governor. However, it was impossible for the civic authorities to control all religious activity. About the decuriones and their relationship to priesthoods in Late Antiquity, see: Horstkotte (1989) 166.
229 Rüpke (2006b) 22-23. This is different from the situation in Rome, where the priestly colleges mainly decided about ritual. Other differences between religion and Rome and the provinces include the importance of euergetistic priesthoods, a phenomenon especially linked to provincial towns, see chapter 5, section 4.1.
interest in them.\textsuperscript{290} In Africa, more temples were built by individuals than by public authorities.\textsuperscript{291} Therefore, personal interests of members of the local elites determined the selection of public cults.\textsuperscript{292} That the new cults had to be approved of by the ordos\textsuperscript{293} and a shrine had to be dedicated by a magistrate to be public\textsuperscript{294} was no obstacle of course, for the decuriones were the local elite. However, this implies that when a woman who – obviously – was no magistrate dedicated a shrine, it has to be considered as private.\textsuperscript{295} Rives writes that in Carthage some stage ‘in between’ existed: the ordos could recognize the dedication of a shrine without establishing a public cult for the deity in question. This resulted in the existence of ‘semi-public’ institutions and the lack of a clear distinction between public and private cults. In Thugga private shrines with a \textit{de facto} public status and function existed.\textsuperscript{296}

\textbf{5.7: Financing public religion and the appointment of public priests}

Referring to Festus’s definition about \textit{sacra publica} quoted above, several modern scholars have stressed the importance of the way public cults were financed. Rüpke writes: ‘The public character of cults is not a matter of space, but of initiators and financing.’\textsuperscript{297} As the \textit{sacra publica} were organised on behalf of the civitas as a whole, they were paid for by public means.\textsuperscript{298} Private cults on the other hand were funded by ‘sub-groups’ of the civitas, for example pagi, vici or family groups.\textsuperscript{299} This implies that what these modern scholars call private cults could attract large numbers of people. This is in accordance with the view that some cults were confined to a town or small area but did nevertheless possess public rites, while others were popular but did not possess any public festivals, temples, cult associations or priests.\textsuperscript{300} The story Pliny the Younger tells us about the old and small (\textit{vetus sane et angusta}) sanctuary of Ceres on his estate near Comum illustrates this nicely. Once a year it attracted a great number of people from the surrounding area (\textit{magnus e regione tota coit populus}) who came to do their business and to make and fulfil many vows (\textit{multae res aguntur, multa vota suscipiuntur,}

\begin{itemize}
\item[290] Compare this confusing situation with that of dedications: often it is impossible to distinguish between public and private dedications. Usually, fluent transitions are at stake. See: Eck (1989) 40.
\item[291] Rives (1995) 178. Of course, the ordo had to give its approval when a temple was to be built on public land.
\item[292] Rives (1995) 184. Therefore, public religion was ‘a purely local phenomenon’ and cults that fitted with local needs were labelled public, even though some general empire-wide cults existed, e.g., the emperor cult, which connected the cities where these cults were practised to the \textit{Urbs}, Rives (1995) 12-13, 51, 96.
\item[294] Cf. D. 1.8.9, see above, footnote 210. See also Stambaugh (1978) 559.
\item[297] Rüpke (2006a) 39. Cf. Rüpke (2006b) 22, who writes, based on the \textit{Lex Ursonensis}: ‘(…) the financing of the cult is the leitmotif that holds together the whole passage on religion.’
\end{itemize}
multa redduntur). As the sanctuary was old and small, Pliny wanted to restore and enlarge it with a porticus – obviously of his own, i.e. private – money.\textsuperscript{241}

In practice though, the relation between the way a cult was financed and its public or private status is not as straightforward as it may seem, for it is often impossible with the available evidence to determine whether a cult was paid for by public money.

Another criterion that has been put forward as an important facet of Roman public religion is the way priests and priestesses were appointed. Generally, public sacerdotes are supposed to have been appointed by the local council. Savunen mentions three (other) possibilities: she writes that the priests and priestesses were either chosen by public assembly, from a list of candidates that was drawn up by the sacerdotes themselves, or that they acquired their religious office by way of co-option, and that the city council played a role in the process.\textsuperscript{242} Savunen further thinks that the priest(esse)s of non-public cults – often those with eastern roots – were chosen by the worshippers.\textsuperscript{243} Unfortunately, Savunen does not provide us with any references, so her statement remains doubtful.

Usually, the epigraphic material does not offer any clues to the way of appointment. Only when it was indicated that a priestess was appointed by decree of the decurions or was elected by the local council, we can more or less be sure that she was a ‘public priestess’, according to this criterion (see chapter 5, section 2.1). And the other way round: when a sacerdos or magistra was called sacerdos or magistra in familia, it is clear that she did not hold her religious office in the name of the whole civic community or a segment of it, but was chosen by the private ‘collegium’ of a grand household or a familia of slaves.\textsuperscript{244} Examples like these are rare and therefore, appointment cannot be, for the study of Roman priestesses at least, a decisive factor in determining whether a specific priestess was a ‘public’ religious official or not.

5.8: Summary

As may be clear, it is very difficult to give a satisfying definition of the terms public and private. One thing that can safely be stated, is that neither public and private, nor Roman and foreign, can be viewed as strict dichotomies; instead, a sliding scale that changed according to time and place, is, in my opinion, the most appropriate model to fit the two terms.\textsuperscript{245} The sharp distinction between public and private that is made in many ancient sources and modern works is not applicable to the situation in

\textsuperscript{241} Velim ergo emas quattuor marmoreas columnas (...), emas marmora quibus solum, quibus parietes excolantur. Erit etiam faciendum ipsius deae signum, quia antiquum illud e ligno quibusdam sui partibus uteritate truncatum est, Pliny, Epist. 9.39. See also Eck (1989) 38. In Narbonese Gaul, many of such rural sanctuaries that were not reserved for a family or gens but for the rural population, can be found, Haeussler (2011) 422.

\textsuperscript{242} Savunen (1997) 119, 128.

\textsuperscript{243} Savunen (1997) 119. She states further that non-official cults were open to everyone, and that all worshippers were equal in theory. This is clearly too general an assumption, and not applicable to e.g. the cult of Mithras.

\textsuperscript{244} E.g. \textit{CIL} 6, 9637; \textit{CIL} 6, 9638 = \textit{CIL} 6, 26807; \textit{CIL} 6, 10138 = \textit{ILS} 5248, all from Rome.

\textsuperscript{245} Cf. Lambrecht (2005) 87, 89, 92.
the Roman world: cults, *collegia* and other (religious) phenomena could represent stages ‘in between’ and women – often perceived as only acting in the private sphere – acted in public as priestesses. Evidently, the Roman ideal that women were confined to the house differed a great deal from reality, which means that that the dichotomy between male and female was not simply exchangeable with that of public versus private.

To do justice to the practice in Roman daily life, in this thesis I will define ‘public’ as all social roles, places and activities open to people other than close friends and family members. As a consequence, a whole range of roles, places and activities can be categorized as ‘public.’ But public activities had one thing in common: to be able to carry out a public role, one had to ‘do’ something. This could for instance be taking part in elections, carrying out sacrifices for the community, paying *summae honorariae* or being initiated. A public role was not held because one acquired it automatically, as was the case with membership of family groups to which one belonged by birth (or as a consequence of enslavement).

To refine this and to incorporate the model of the sliding scale, I will use the term ‘semi-public’ to indicate all roles, places and activities that were related to smaller, restricted groups of people other than the whole community, or to locations that were open to a limited number of people who were no family group. This implies that priestesses, *magistrae* and *ministrae* acting in *collegia*, are defined as ‘semi-public’, even though they have been classified as ‘private’ by some modern scholars.

Private activities of women on the other hand are those conducted for herself or her family. A priestess who represented her own family and carried out rites with only her family members taking part I consider to be a private priestess (*sacerdos in familia*). This implies that the main thing I adopt from the literary sources is Festus’s definition of *privata sacra* (those practiced for individual men, families and *gentes*). This does not mean that the other criteria that have been put forward in the

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246 Cf. Stambaugh (1978) 588, who mentions Roman *collegia* that took part in public religious festivals, and Rives (1995) 73, who writes that the *dendrophoroi* of Magna Mater had a semi-public status.


248 Another example, but only applicable to men, are the *privati* (in the sense of citizens without magistracies). Every male citizen was automatically a *privatus*, unless was elected as a magistrate and became a *publicus*.

249 Cf. Steuernagel (2004) 191, who makes a distinction between *öffentlich* and *häuslich-familiär*. *Öffentlich* can be divided into ‘official’, i.e. of the city, and collective, i.e. of *collegia*. Of course, one could argue that the term ‘semi-private’ would be equally appropriate as ‘semi-public’, and that ‘semi-public’ suggests that it is the exact middle between the poles ‘private’ and ‘public’, but this is not what I intend to say. The term ‘semi-public’ is unfixed, but for reasons of convenience, only this term – apart from ‘public’ and ‘private’ – will be used in this thesis.

250 Kloppenborg (1996) 16. That the members of *collegia* themselves saw their group not as private is shown by a bronze inscription, found in a house in Volsinii (*CIL* 11.2702 = *ILS* 7217). Here, a certain Ancharia Luperca, patroness of a *collegium*, is honoured with a statue, to be set up in the clubhouse of the *collegium*, ‘so that her devotion towards us [the members of the *collegium*] and our goodwill towards her will be visible for all in the public view (...) – *ut eius erga[a] nos pietas et nostra erga eam vo[luntas publica etiam visione[m] conspiciatur.* Transl. by Hemelrijk (2008a). According to this inscription, what is considered ‘public’ is in fact the interior room of the clubhouse, showing that it was possible to consider a small community other than the whole civic community also as public.
literary sources and by modern scholars – location, organisation and authorisation by the local council, financing and appointment of sacerdotes – are unimportant, but simply that they are not applicable to the study of priestesses. With this in mind, I have excluded from this thesis all priesthoods and other religious offices held by women within a family. This means that I have included in the catalogue all inscriptions in which is not explicitly stated that the woman in question held her religious office in familia or from which contents it can be concluded that she was priestess of a family group. In the next section, attention will be paid to some general aspects of the inscriptions on which this thesis is based.

6: Epigraphy and the study of Roman priestesses

Even though women and children are underrepresented in the epigraphic record, inscriptions are our most direct source for the lives of individuals and of people who are hardly present in the literary sources, such as (non-imperial) women. Rives even explicitly states that the ‘importance of women in civic life is an (...) aspect of the ancient world that is known almost entirely from inscriptions (...)’. For instance, some religious offices held by women, are only known through inscriptions (see chapter 2). Furthermore, inscriptions are indispensable for the study of areas outside Rome, for most ancient literary texts focus on the City. Considering this, it is obvious that inscriptions are the main source material for the study of Roman priestesses in the towns and cities of Italy and the western provinces. Due to the fact that inscriptions have their own peculiarities, it is necessary to spend a few words on them. Firstly, I will discuss the reasons people could have had for erecting an inscription, a habit which is closely linked to Romanization. Secondly, I will pay attention to problems and limitations of the use of inscriptions and thirdly, some of the most important types of inscriptions will pass under review.

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251 For instance, when a list of names of slaves and freedmen of one household is recorded.
252 Salomies (2001) 80. Though they are more clearly visible in inscriptions than in other sources, MacMullen (1986) 435.
253 Joshel (1992) 7, 9. Saller, (2001) 117. Cf. Keppie (1991) 9; Salomies (2001) 79. However, it needs to be kept in mind that even in inscriptions the image provided of women was a result of general views about their appropriate roles (and of epigraphic conventions). Nor should it be forgotten that the image of women on inscriptions reflected on her husband, Dixon (2001) 93, 99, 115. Cf. chapter 5, section 1.2.
255 Schultz (2006) 10, 70. Obviously, knowing the titles of certain religious offices does not necessarily mean that we know anything else about the women who held them. Some priesthoods are better documented than others, and the religious offices of priestesses are better known than those held by the ancillary staff.
256 Keppie (1991) 9. This is not to say that the Roman literary sources pay no attention to religious officials in ‘barbarian’ societies, but they do not discuss Romanised priestesses.
Erecting inscriptions was an important facet of city life, which was characteristic of Roman culture, and therefore spread gradually together with urbanisation. Of course, outside cities inscriptions can also be found, for instance those related to the military or those found in rural sanctuaries, but most stem from cities.

Individuals could have several reasons when they decided to set up an inscription, though often these reasons are so closely linked they cannot be separated from each other. The first is showing or increasing one’s standing and wealth. Erecting an inscription was a public act; enumerating one’s offices, including the religious ones was for a great part meant to impress the onlooker. Therefore, inscriptions can help us to reconstruct the way individuals wanted to be perceived by their fellow citizens and their descendants, and which values they chose to display in public (see also chapter 5, section 1.2). The dedication of a monument with an accompanying inscription and sometimes elaborate carvings not only showed that the dedicator possessed sufficient money, but also that he or she wanted to make his or her name and titles public. And – last but not least – it showed that the dedicator had adopted (parts of) the Latin language and culture, which could be used to enhance the social standing of the dedicator. All this implies that inscriptions are not representative of the whole population, but represent mainly those who were wealthy and those who were considered worthy enough to receive an inscription (or erect one for oneself).

A second reason people could have had to erect an inscription had to do with the importance of the written word and the relation between the dedicator, his or her community and the divine. The fact that the large majority of votive altars did not have images but did have text seems to indicate that in general the text was the most important. According to Mary Beard, writing played a central role in defining the nature of the relation between humans and gods. ‘Written records, with their insistence on naming, served as a marker of the individual’s permanent place in relation to the gods or a

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258 Millar (1983) 124. Furthermore, the spread of Latin in relation to the adoption of Roman epigraphy is important, Benelli (2001) 8.
260 See e.g. Edmondson (2002) 45. Literacy in general was not confined to cities, see e.g., Derks and Roymans (2002).
263 From everywhere in the Roman Empire, inscriptions show that the persons who erected them were not native speakers of Latin, Parca (2001) 70.
265 Cherry (1997) 75; Haensch (2007) 176. Cf. Haensch (2007) 185, quite a small number of people was impregnated by the epigraphic habit.
particular god, as a symbol of active ‘membership’ of the pagan community.’ 267 The stress on membership of a certain community can also be detected in other types of inscriptions which were often meant to integrate the person who dedicated the monument into the community (a town, or a collegium). 268 Both men and women stressed their special and much valued position in their local society as patron or patroness, benefactor or benefactress and, of course, as priest or priestess. A good example are the inscriptions erected by women who were priestess of a town (see chapter 2, section 2.3).

A third reason to erect an inscription was the wish to be commemorated or to remember someone beloved. 269 As naming was an essential aspect of all Roman inscriptions the purpose of setting up monumental inscriptions in general was to preserve the name and reputation of the person(s) whose name(s) was (were) inscribed. A ‘fear of oblivion’ was an important characteristic of Roman society. 270 The numerous epitaphs that have been unearthed, amongst which several that record priestesses, show this clearly.

6.2: Problems and limitations of the use of inscriptions as historical source

Epigraphy has some very enthusiastic students; some have even maintained that inscriptions speak to modern onlookers as they did to contemporaries. 271 However, many reasons can be found which show that this view is far too positive. The most obvious is, that the archaeological context – which is of great importance for the interpretation of inscriptions 272 – is often lacking. 273 Generally, the inscriptions were not monuments in themselves, but were part of a larger object, like statues or buildings that were brightly painted to draw attention. 274 Most inscriptions are not found in situ, and therefore it is often impossible to combine epigraphic and archaeological data (see also chapter 2, section 2.2). 275 Therefore, we have to consider what the inscriptions do not, or cannot, tell us 276, and, where possible, to combine inscriptions with other sources.

A second point that has to be mentioned is the availability of the epigraphic sources. Only a small part – possibly about 5% – of the total number has been preserved 277 and what is left (and can be studied by us) is the result of various factors. The location of the archaeological site is especially significant. For instance, excavations that have been carried out in the city centre provide relatively

many inscriptions related to civic matters, while sites located far from the centre yield more funerary inscriptions. Generally speaking, most inscriptions have been preserved just by accident, for instance when they were re-used as building blocks. Moreover, not all surviving inscriptions have been published and thus remain unavailable for students.

In addition to the more or less accidental loss or survival of inscriptions, the epigraphic habit is another factor that can distort our conclusions about chronological and geographical distributions of certain types of inscriptions. The practice of inscribing on stone and other durable materials had its own development, independent of the phenomena of which it gives an account. In Italy, a gradual increase in the number of inscriptions can be detected, which started during the late Republican period and was quickened under the emperor Augustus. A peak – not confined to Italy – occurred in the second half of the second century AD, followed by a sharp decrease until the lowest point was reached in the later third century AD. However, this pattern varied per Italian region, and can be related to the urban density of the region (and to that of archaeological research!). Unsurprisingly, the areas around Rome have yielded more inscriptions than sites elsewhere on the peninsula. There is also a difference in the epigraphic density of provinces. Compared to other provinces, northern Africa has produced a very large quantity of inscriptions, but these are not evenly distributed between Africa Proconsularis, Numidia and Mauretania. This will be illustrated in the second chapter, where we see that most priesthoods held by women are attested in Africa (apart from Italy), mainly in Proconsularis and, to a lesser extent, in Numidia.

A possible explanation for the epigraphic habit has been sought in the process of Romanization, its accompanying spread of urbanisation and Roman citizenship, and the wish to commemorate the newly acquired status. Although the increase of the total number of inscriptions during the first and second centuries AD reflects the spread of certain Roman habits, the decrease of the third century does not. An explanation for this decrease that has been put forward is the crisis of the third century, but there is no consensus in this matter. Besides, Mouritsen argues convincingly that there was no universal epigraphic practice, and that one should not speak of one epigraphic habit, but of multiple local and social habits.

278 Patterson (2006) 121. Patterson also mentions the history of the site, 119.
279 Millar (1983) 82.
280 MacMullen (1982); Van Nijf (1997) 23. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the rise and decline of a certain phenomenon based on numbers only, MacMullen, paraphrased by Van Nijf (1996) 23.
283 Patterson (2006) 123.
284 Millar (1983) 82.
287 Mouritsen (2005) 39, 52, 62-63. In Pompeii for example, a changing pattern in self-representation of the elite is clearly visible. This pattern was different from that in Ostia. There is no reason to suppose that Mouritsen’s examples are exceptional, and therefore it can be assumed that similar patterns can be traced in the epigraphic
All factors mentioned so far resulted in an uneven distribution of inscriptions, which inevitably raises the question how representative the surviving inscriptions are of the original number of inscriptions and whether one can base any conclusions on the absence or presence of (a specific type of) inscription(s) in a certain place or period.\textsuperscript{288} Obviously, a quantitative analysis of inscriptions cannot lead towards statistics that are valid in detail; at best rough orders of magnitude and tendencies can be discovered.\textsuperscript{289} Accordingly, the discussion of the numerical, chronological and geographical spread of priesthoods open to women (chapter 2) will be rather general.

The factors mentioned above also lead to the existence of isolated documents and it is questionable whether it is possible to make any positive statements based on the presence of only a few inscriptions in one place or a small number related to a certain topic.\textsuperscript{290} These inscriptions are of limited use, even while they can be interesting.\textsuperscript{291} Millar rightly remarks that ‘(...) the historical value of relatively scattered inscriptions can only be indicative or illustrative.’\textsuperscript{292} This will be clearly visible in the fourth and fifth chapter of this dissertation, where sometimes single inscriptions are used to illustrate the many different aspects that could be part of the life of a priestess. Obviously, they do not say anything about the \textit{universality} of these aspects.

Another problem that needs to be mentioned here is the difficulty of dating inscriptions; in many cases this is impossible or very uncertain (e.g. when based on lettering).\textsuperscript{293} Often, inscriptions cannot even be dated in an indirect way (for example by using the context or related inscriptions).\textsuperscript{294} Sometimes however, when various inscriptions are erected in the same place, they can be dated to a wider period\textsuperscript{295} or relatively with respect to each other.\textsuperscript{296} Most inscriptions included in the catalogue, however, cannot be dated.

\textsuperscript{288} Patterson (2006) 124.
\textsuperscript{290} Patterson (2006) 124.
\textsuperscript{292} Millar (1983) 125.
\textsuperscript{294} Haenssche (2007) 184
\textsuperscript{295} Individual inscriptions can sometimes roughly be dated as a results of certain \textit{formulae}. Inscriptions starting with \textit{Dis Manibus} can be dated to the period of the end of the 1st until the end of the 3rd century (see catalogue). When male names are mentioned, the period can sometimes be refined to the end of the 1st until the end of the 2nd century, because from the end of the 2nd century onwards, \textit{praenomina} were generally omitted. Furthermore, imperial names used by ordinary people can sometimes give information about the period they lived. For Roman names, see Salway (1994).
\textsuperscript{296} Savunen (1997) 9. For an example of two inscriptions that record priestesses and that can be dated relatively to each other, see: Zimmermann and Frei-Stolba (1998) 108-110.
6.3: Types of Inscriptions

Many inscriptions have religious contents and record priesthoods: they mention individual priest(esse)s and refer to their privileges and honours.297 I have collected inscriptions of several types that record priestesses: funerary, honorary, dedicatory, building inscriptions, and others, like a tabula patronatus.298 The first three groups are the most frequently represented, and therefore some of their characteristics will be discussed here. However, it is often difficult to categorise an inscription in a certain group without knowledge of the archaeological context.299 Especially when the inscriptions are damaged, the distinction between honorary inscriptions and epitaphs is not always clear.

Epitaphs are the most common type of inscriptions: two thirds of all Latin inscriptions are funerary.300 In my database, of a total number of about 296 of which 262 can more or less securely be categorised, 140 inscriptions are epitaphs; this is circa 47.3 %, so slightly less than the general two-thirds.301 Nevertheless, the largest category of inscriptions recording priestesses are epitaphs and this fits with Bodel’s statement that funerary inscriptions are the best – qualitative and quantitative – source for discovering the lives of the lower strata of Roman society and the lives of women.302

Funerary inscriptions usually contain the name of the deceased, sometimes an indication of her or his social rank and age and the name of the person who set up the inscription and his or her relation to the departed. A few lines could be added to describe the deceased. In the later second and third century often a laudatory epithet (e.g., dulcissimus, incomparabilis) was included.303 In the fifth chapter (section 1.2), several of these epithets will be discussed. The relief that accompanied some funerary inscriptions was usually closely connected to the dead person.304 A grave monument of a priestess for example, could depict a veiled woman who carried sacrificial attributes. In most cases however, only the sacrificial instruments are depicted, or nothing at all.305

In the catalogue, 34 inscriptions are honorary; this is circa 11.5% of the total. Honorary inscriptions were usually erected in honour of prestigious people who had proved themselves exceptionally useful for their local community, for instance by spending a large amount of money on civic benefactions or fulfilling an expensive priesthood. Honorific inscriptions are our most important

301 Perhaps this is a result from the fact that priestesses possessed a higher standing than other women, were wealthier than most and used their wealth for the public good, as a consequence of which the part of honorary inscriptions, building inscriptions and others that attested to the wealth of the women was higher. However, the 37 inscriptions that cannot be categorized with certainty are presumably either epitaphs or dedications. This means that the percentage of funerary inscriptions attesting to priestesses must have been higher than 46.8 %.
305 More about sacrificing and the sacrificial attributes carved on stone will be said in section 1.1 of chapter 4.
source for the system of euergetism and are as a consequence, very useful for the study of the public roles of women. In chapter 5, especially section 4.2, honorific decrees for priestesses will figure regularly.

Votive inscriptions were the most common religious inscriptions. At least 72 (24.3%) inscriptions in the catalogue are dedicatory. Usually, dedications were inscribed on altars and were drawn up in a fixed formula that contained the name of the god, the name of the dedicant and a concluding sentence – generally indicating that the reason for the dedication of the altar was the fulfillment of a vow. Sometimes, the social rank of the donor was given. Votive altars were often set up in large rows in sanctuaries ‘as testimonies to the power of the god’, so everybody who visited the temple could see them and understand their meaning, even if the person was illiterate. In addition, devices like \( v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito) \) made clear to everyone at what type of inscription they were looking. Votive altars were permanent symbols of the offering which was, after all, only a temporary act. In chapter 4, more about the priestesses’ role in erecting dedications will be said.

Conclusions of this chapter

As may be clear from this chapter, despite the wealth of available epigraphic evidence, a thorough study of women who acted as priestesses in the western part of the Roman Empire is still lacking. Most attention has been paid to priesthoods held by men in Rome. And when female religious roles are discussed, their priesthoods in the provinces are mostly neglected. This is for a great part due to the literary sources, which propagate an image of women, ideally labelled as chaste matronae, who possessed a secondary or marginal position in society. Nevertheless, many women could dispose of their own (often considerable) wealth, and held a relatively strong position in private law. As Roman law spread during the process of Romanization, in which the local elite played an important role, this meant that wealthy women in the provinces could enjoy the same advantages as the women in the City. Apart from law, other civic institutions spread as a result of Romanization, like the concept of religion. Yet, religion in the provinces was very much a local affair, in which the local elites were again influential; they held the main priesthoods and made decisions about the organisation of the cults. Modern scholars have often divided these cults into public and private ones, but this distinction is problematic. No strict dichotomy existed; instead we should think of public and private as terms posed on a sliding scale. For the present thesis this means that I exclude the inscriptions recording women

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307 Rives (2001) 131. Cf. Susini (1973) 61; Haensch (2007) 177. However, persons erecting dedications made up only a small percentage of the people who worshipped a certain god and therefore they are not representative for the total group of worshippers. Furthermore, they are distributed unevenly over the Empire, Haensch (2007) 181.
active in religious roles within families. However, this leaves enough other inscriptions – mainly epitaphs, honorary inscriptions and votives – for a study of female religious officials in the western part of the Roman Empire.