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 4: The religious side of being a priestess

Introduction

In this chapter I investigate the religious and practical side of holding a religious office. Although offices held by women have sometimes been regarded as purely honorific, it will become clear that this was certainly not the case with priestly offices in the western part of the Roman Empire. Priests, male and female alike, had to take an active part in ritual action. Being a priestess could imply that the woman in question had to devote quite some time to her religious office. Certain prescriptions may have even required that she adapted her family life to her priesthood, as we shall see.

The first theme of this chapter concerns the tasks that priestesses and women with other religious offices had to carry out after they had been appointed. What did a priestess actually have to do? Obviously, the most important duty of male priests was sacrificing – or rather: overseeing a sacrifice – but there is some controversy about the question whether women had to carry out the same task. As I will argue below, there is enough convincing evidence to state that women had to oversee blood sacrifices like their male colleagues. Apart from sacrificing, there were many other tasks involved in holding a religious office, varying from presiding at festivals and processions – performed by priest(esse)s – to humble responsibilities as keeping the keys of the sanctuary, executed by members of the lower cult personnel. These tasks will all pass under review.

The second theme of this chapter are the special requirements that could have been attached to female priesthods – could and not were, because most seem to have been reserved for women acting in a limited number of cults only. I will deal with ceremonial clothing and the outward appearance of priestesses, and with their age and years of service. As both ancient authors and many modern scholars have paid much attention to women’s sexuality in relation to religion, this chapter concludes with a discussion of religious chastity and sacred prostitution in the West.

It has to be kept in mind that the evidence is rather limited. In many cases only a few scattered inscriptions illustrate the topics under discussion, and accordingly nothing can be concluded about their spread or universality. Nevertheless, as I have already pointed out in the first chapter, these isolated documents can be illustrative of the diversity of aspects related to female religious offices and therefore deserve to be mentioned. In some cases, evidence related to other cults than those included in the catalogue, will be used as additional evidence.
2: Religious tasks

Although we might be curious as to what exactly Roman religious officials had to do during the period they held their office, the Romans themselves did not think this interesting enough to discuss extensively or record on stone. As a consequence, very little is known, not only about the duties of priestesses, but also about those of priests. Even the tasks of an important priest like the flamen Augusti remain obscure.\(^1\) Therefore, we have to tie together all bits of information we can find, gathered from different types of evidence and periods and related to different kinds of priesthoods. Obviously this is problematic, also because in many cases religion was very much a local affair. For that reason, much in this section remains a bit uncertain. The only topic on which the inscriptions in the catalogue provide a reasonable amount of information, is sacrificing – fortunately one of the most important aspects of Roman religion. Therefore, this section starts with a discussion of women and animal sacrifice.

2.1: Sacrificing

The role of women in sacrificing has been subject to much debate. It is taken for granted that they could sacrifice things such as milk, incense and honey (e.g., as preliminary sacrifices), but their role in blood sacrifices is another matter. The most recent view is that they did sacrifice animals – or rather, that they let victimarii or popae kill them, which was the general habit, also with regard to male priests.\(^2\) Adorning the victim, checking its sexual status, leading it to the altar and finally killing it was not performed by the sacerdos but by members of the lower cult personnel.\(^3\) As Moede writes, far more important than the act of killing was handing the offered substance to the deity\(^4\) – and this could be done by priests and priestesses alike.

The evidence that is generally used to support the view that women were excluded from animal sacrifice is either misinterpreted\(^5\) or related to special occasions and special rituals, which implies that under normal circumstances women did take part, as has convincingly been argued by Hemelrijk.\(^6\) In addition, there is evidence that positively attests to women sacrificing.\(^7\) There are

\(^1\) Fishwick (2002) 198.
\(^4\) Moede (2007) 165.
\(^5\) E.g., sources used to argue that women were not allowed to use wine when sacrificing, Flemming (2007) 95.
\(^6\) Hemelrijk (2009) 254-256. Priestesses who were depicted sacrificing, did this not only for goddesses, but for gods as well, Hemelrijk (2009) 261. Cf. priestesses in Greece, who also supervised blood sacrifices on behalf of the city, Osborne (1993) 402; Connelly (2007) 179-180.
\(^7\) Varro LL 5.29 writes that women sacrificing Romanu ritu covered their heads with a rica (see also below, section 2.3). Nowhere is stated that sacrificing Romanu ritu did not expand to blood sacrifices. Cf. Schultz (2006) 136. See Glinister (2011) 110, 132, about the sacrificial capacity of the Salae.
several, sometimes quite explicit, reliefs on stones that record priestesses.\textsuperscript{8} These carvings show the victims and in one or two cases the priestesses themselves involved in sacrificial actions.\textsuperscript{9} Good examples are the grave monuments of several priestesses of Ceres.\textsuperscript{10} The first is a low relief from Corfinium on a marble plaque with the epitaph of Helvia Pothine.\textsuperscript{11} The relief, of which only the lower left corner is left, shows a sacrificial scene with a sow – the usual victim for Ceres – standing in front of an altar. Behind the victim a female \textit{sacerdos} and a small assistant are depicted (see figure 6).\textsuperscript{12} On the grave monument of another woman – named Helvia Quarta – who had been \textit{sacerdos Ceres et Veneris} in Sulmo, an altar and a young man or woman holding the victim are carved.\textsuperscript{13} Cat.no.111 is also an epitaph – unfortunately in bad condition – of a certain Sabina who lived in Puteoli and held office as \textit{sacerdos Ceres}. Again a victim, together with a knife and torches, is depicted.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image6.png}
\caption{Epitaph of Helvia Pothine}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{8} In images priests were usually referred to by sacrificial instruments, Fless and Moede (2007) 255. Several reliefs accompanying inscriptions that record priestesses depict knives used for sacrificing: cat.no.104 (\textit{sacerdos XVviralis}), \textit{RIB} 1129 (archiereia of Herakles; not included); cat.no.38 (Ceres). However, knives can also be found on inscriptions that do not record priestesses, and seem to belong to the group of religious attributes, including e.g. also \textit{paterae}, that can be found on many stones.

\textsuperscript{9} However, the killing itself is only rarely visible on reliefs, and when it is depicted, only dying bulls – no pigs and sheep – are shown. Many reliefs only depict cult instruments or victims, Moede (2007) 168, 173.

\textsuperscript{10} Hemelrijk (2009) 261. Cf. cat.no.53 of Flavia Ammia. According to Forbis (1996) 370 and (1990) 510; Ladage (1971) 59, Flavia Ammia fulfilled the ceremonies of \textit{sacrifice} particularly diligently. The link between the Pompeian \textit{porcaria publica} (public pig keeper) and her former mistress Clodia, \textit{sacerdos publica} of Ceres (cat.no.103 and 102), also strongly suggests a female priestly role in animal sacrifice, as Van Andringa (2009) 84 has pointed out.

\textsuperscript{11} Cat.no.67.

\textsuperscript{12} Cf. \textit{IG} 14, 702: a relief depicts Ceres, a pig and an altar.

\textsuperscript{13} Cat.no.120.
Pigs has also been carved on a funerary cippus that was erected in modern Sidi Bou Beker (Africa Proconsularis) to commemorate Iulia Rufina.\textsuperscript{14} Its relief shows the priestess standing on a cartouche containing her name. With her right hand she holds a torch over a small round flaming altar; her left hand is damaged. Her hair is covered by a sort of cap bound under the chin. Pigs are depicted on both sides of the priestess. Furthermore, a large fountain or sheaf of corn, a snake and a basket of fruit are carved. At both sides a long torch can be detected. Iulia Rufina is only called sacerdos, but regarding the popularity of the Ceres cult in Africa and the carvings of typical objects of the Ceres-Demeter cult, it is likely that she had been priestess of the goddess.

Apart from this iconographic evidence, there are various inscriptions which show that women could play a role in taurobolia. As these inscriptions record priestesses serving Magna Mater, they are not included in the catalogue (except those from Beneventum, see below). Nevertheless, I will discuss them here as they provide additional evidence for women’s sacrificial capacity.\textsuperscript{15} CIL 13.1754 from Lugdunum is a dedication for the wellbeing of Septimius Severus and his family. The name of the deity whose favour was asked, is omitted but it is likely that Magna Mater was meant for a taurobolium was given (cf. chapter 2=kale sac.). The dedicators were assisted by several religious officials, amongst whom Aemilia Secundilla, a priestess.\textsuperscript{16} Other examples mention priestesses from Beneventum who had made a dedication to Attis and the local goddess Minerva Paracintia, and had supervised taurobolia.\textsuperscript{17} One priestess from Beneventum is even recorded on two inscriptions as the official who carried out the sacrificial rite. Her role is described by the words ob taurobolium traditum a Servilia Varia sacerdote prima. Unfortunately, these inscriptions do not make clear what exactly the tasks of the priestesses were, but at least they show clearly that in the cult of Magna Mater, female sacerdotes had a leading role in blood sacrifices.

A last inscription that has to be mentioned here is from Caesarea in Mauretania. It records a sacrifice for Saturn ‘victuma accepta ab Iulia Respecti filia Vitale Rusguniense’ (the victim was accepted by Iulia Vitalis of Rusgumiae, daughter of Respectus).\textsuperscript{18} It is possible that this Iulia Vitalis was a priestess, though she could also have been an assistant whose task it was to receive the victim.

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\textsuperscript{14} Cat.no.209.
\textsuperscript{15} Of course, one could argue that the cult of Magna Mater was different from that of e.g., Ceres, but my point is simply to show that women performed blood sacrifices.
\textsuperscript{16} See Spickermann (1994b) 234 about this inscription. Varro provides some textual evidence that attests to a female role in sacrificing – though no animal sacrifice – on behalf of private individuals. He writes that during the Liberialia priestesses of Liber in Rome sacrificed cakes to the god for any purchaser, Varro, LL 6.3: (...) sedent ut sacerdotes Liber anus hedera coronatae cum libis et focolo pro empte sacrificantes- (...) the priestesses of Liber, old women crowned with ivy, sit with cakes and a focolus, and they sacrifice [the cakes] for any purchaser. Transl. Based on that of G. Nagy. Cf. Schultz (2006) 73
\textsuperscript{17} Cat.no.44.
As the inscription has not fully been preserved this problem cannot be solved, but nevertheless it is clear that the woman was involved in animal sacrifice.\footnote{Due to the uncertainties regarding the woman’s religious office – if she had one, which is uncertain – this inscription is not included in the catalogue.}

A special aspect that needs to be stressed when discussing gender and sacrifice is the nature of the deity involved. Hemelrijk has argued that participation in animal sacrifice ‘was cult-specific rather than gender-specific.’\footnote{Hemelrijk (2009) 266. Cf. Hemelrijk (2007) 327. Cf. Greece, where the kind of sacrifice was depended on the circumstances, Connelly (2007) 180-181. Cf. Osborne (1993) 403, 404. See also Fishwick (2004) 250: the kind of sacrifice could also depend on local preferences.} The small quantity of evidence for women sacrificing animals should be related to the limited number of priesthoods they could hold, and to the sacrificial rites of these cults.\footnote{Hemelrijk (2009) 267.}

Examples are the \emph{flaminic peace of the imperial cult: unlike the emperor, empresses were probably not commonly honoured by blood sacrifices. Instead, they received offerings of wine and incense. Therefore \emph{flaminic peace may not have had to perform a blood sacrifice} - in contrast to the \emph{sacerdotes Cereris}.\footnote{Hemelrijk (2007) 327. However, this a sacrifice of wine and incense was also common in the worship of a (defied) emperor, for apart from carrying out an animal sacrifice, a \emph{flamen} sacrificed often by offering a (much cheaper!) \emph{supplication} of wine and incense, Fishwick (1987) 132-133.}

Even though depictions are no exact reflection of reality,\footnote{The \emph{kind} of animal that was sacrificed was also often specific to the cult concerned: pigs were killed in honour of Ceres, while for example Juno received a cow. Cf. Scheid (2007), 264; male gods received castrated male victims and goddesses female victims. It should not be forgotten, that deities usually honoured with victims also received bloodless sacrifices performed by priest(esse)s. In the \emph{aedicula} of the \emph{macellum} in Pompeii a statue of a priestess who is sacrificing incense has been found. See also the reliefs of cat.no.201 from Saddar (Numidia) and cat.no.172 from Djenum (Africa Proconsularis), both depicting a sacrificing woman.}\footnote{Cf. Spickermann (1994a) 6.} the difference between what was depicted and what was real cannot have been too great, because the relief had to be recognizable and linkable to a specific cult.\footnote{Schörner (2006) 70.} Therefore, I think we may conclude from both inscriptions and carvings that priestesses, certainly those involved in the Ceres and Magna Mater cult, did perform blood sacrifices. This implies not only that they represented their community (or individual members of that community) in the eyes of the gods during the most important rite of Roman religion, but also that they acted clearly visible in front of that community, for most sacrifices were carried out in the open space in front of the temple, near the altar.\footnote{Scheid (2007) 263. Cf. Fishwick (2004) 235; Schultz (2006) 136.}

Finally, some words have to be said about those women who were part of the lower cult personnel and attended animal sacrifices. Iconographic evidence shows that priests and priestesses could be assisted by \emph{tibicines, ministri, victimarii} and other assistants.\footnote{Fless (1995) 99.} On reliefs the \emph{popae} and \emph{victimarii} who kill the animal are always male, but it might be possible that women could also hold this job. There is one...
inscription that records the name of the freedwoman Critonia Philema who was popa. It is uncertain whether popa is not meant as an abbreviation of popinaria (cook), but if not, this Critonia is the only popa who is known to us by name. This would mean that the involvement of women in blood sacrifices could go much further than has often been thought.

2.2: Processions, festivals and banquets

Apart from sacrificing, festivals and processions were important facets of Roman religion. Again, the evidence I will discuss here partly derives from other cults than those of the priestesses in the catalogue (i.e. of that of the emperor and of Isis). With one epigraphic exception, mentioned below, the evidence of festivals in honour of for instance Ceres and Juno consists of literary texts that are all focused on Rome, while that of Isis and the imperial cults relates to the provinces and is therefore a more fruitful source of comparison.

Fishwick has argued that the imperial cult consisted of several rituals during the year, for instance the festivities held at the birthday of the emperor in question. In addition to the days on which specific rites had to be carried out in the whole Empire, the imperial cult consisted of local festivities. It is likely that local rites also played the most important role in the cults of the priestesses in the catalogue, for we have seen that many served deities that had clear local roots or characteristics. However, one can expect that at least in Italy, in areas close to Rome and influenced by the City at an early stage, certain major festivals in honour of goddesses like Venus, Juno and Ceres may have been shared by different towns. The epigraphic exception I mentioned above proves this: in Nepet (region 7), a town that became a colony in 383 BC and was therefore thoroughly Romanised in AD 18 when the inscription was erected, a magister pagn and a magistra celebrated the Cerialia. What exactly they had to do though, is unknown.

Although most evidence stems from the eastern part of the Empire, Fishwick has shown that also in the imperial cult in the West processions were held on major festival days. During such processions, statues (e.g., that of the reigning or the deified emperor) were probably carried around. That during processions objects were shown to the public is also told by Apuleius. In his Metamorphoses he describes a procession in honour of Isis. Although this description contains obviously elements that were specific to the cult of this goddess, I think the general lay-out of the

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28 Hemelrijk (2009) 263. Cat.no.269.
31 Fishwick (1987) 133; Fishwick (2004) 268-273. Cf. Merlat (1960) 202, 205-206: sacred processions, in which statues of deities were carried, were common in the Orient. These processions were led by priests, wearing special clothing. Rogers (1991) 80-126; Van Nijf (1997) 192-193 and Rives (2007) 114, mention a procession of various statues in Ephesos: first came those of the emperor and empress, followed by others, amongst which several of Artemis. These statues were kept in the sanctuary of Artemis. Special groups (e.g., ephebes) had their own task during the ceremonies, ‘affirming the distinct social roles that the different parts of the population were supposed to play.’
procession can be transferred to other cults as well. Lucius-ass tells the reader that the initiates of Isis were followed by the high priests of the goddess. These ‘carried before them the distinctive attributes of the most powerful gods’ (potentissimorum deum proferebant insignes exuvias). The first carried a special lamp, the second a portable altar, the third a palm branch made of gold, the fourth a symbol of justice, the fifth a golden winnowing-fan and the last an amphora. The priests were followed by people dressed as gods (cf. section 2.3) and others carrying secret attributes. It is worth noting that sacred objects (sacra) were also carried by the priestesses of Juno in Rome. Apart from statues and sacred objects, standards and sceptres seem to have been common objects that were carried during processions (often, of lower ranked religious officials carried ritual objects, see below).

Unfortunately, the inscriptions in the catalogue and their accompanying reliefs do not provide any evidence of priestesses leading processions, although some information about carrying sacra can be retrieved. Some inscriptions found in North Africa record canistrariae (basket carriers) – see below, but there is also iconographic evidence from this area. Symbols related to the Ceres cult, like torches and corn ears are often depicted on North African inscriptions. Ovid writes that torches were carried by white-clad people during the Iudi Cereales as a reference to the search of Ceres for her daughter Proserpina. Torches were especially connected to the Demeter cult in Eleusis. One of the Eleusinian priests was called torch-bearer (δαόδωγος) and according to Juvenal (15.140), torches were the special emblems of the Eleusinian priests in general. We have seen in chapter 3 that the African Cereres had strong connections to the Greek Thesmophores and therefore it is likely that the African priestesses of the Cereres (and possibly also their Italian colleagues) carried torches during certain religious rites. On one inscription from Rusispir in Mauretania a priestess is called lampadiferā which is presumably the equivalent of δαόδωγος.

Priests of the imperial cult were supposed to pay for and organise the festivals that were celebrated in honour of the emperor. It is possible that flaminicae did the same for the festivities organised for the living empress and the divinised women of the imperial house. Paying for festivals was also done by priestesses of other cults. Valeria Situllina from Cartima, Iulia Paulina and Flavia Ammia from Capena and Agusia Priscilla from Gabii organised spectacles and ‘magnificent ceremonies’ on entering their priesthood, for which they paid themselves (see chapter 5). Although the contents of

32 Apuleius, Metamorphoses, 11.10-11.
33 Ovid Am. 3.13.30.
35 While in general, there are many reliefs depicting processions, Moede (2007) 170. Processions are also depicted on wall-paintings, e.g., in the Pompeian House of the Wedding of Hercules. This painting shows a procession near the temple of the goddess Venus, who was served by priestesses, Small (2007) 187. See Henig (1984) 39-41 for an impression of a religious procession and the following sacrifice.
36 Ovid, Fasti 4, 495, 620.
37 Juvenal, Sat. 15.140-142.
these ceremonies are unknown, it is likely that they had a religious component. Other references to religious festivals however, are not attested on the inscriptions in the catalogue.

In his discussion of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus, Merlat mentions the organisation of banquets in which the priests may have been involved. In a cult like that of Jupiter Dolichenus these were probably reserved for initiates.\textsuperscript{39} In other cults, however, other groups than those overseeing the sacrifice were usually allowed to take part. Still, as Scheid states, the ‘single overriding principle which governed sacrificial banquets was that of hierarchy and privilege. Those overseeing and carrying out the sacrifice generally ate their share straightaway, at community expense.’\textsuperscript{40} We shall see in the next chapter that organizing banquets was also undertaken by female sacerdotes. Two priestesses from Baetica organized a banquet \textit{ob honorem sacerdotii} and Iulia Paulina from Capena paid for a banquet for the decurions and the municipes, apart from the ceremonies she organized on entering her priesthood. The last example of a priestess paying for a banquet is rather striking. Caesia Sabina, priestess of Fortuna Redux,\textsuperscript{41} was ‘the only woman’ to provide a banquet for the mothers, sisters and daughters of the decurions and for the citizen-women of every order (\textit{haec sola omnium feminarum matribus Cvirorum et sororibus et filiabus et omnis ordinis mulieribus municipibus epulum dedit}). For this reason, she was honoured with a statue given by the \textit{sorores piissimae}. Who these ‘sisters’ were remains unclear.\textsuperscript{42} It is uncertain whether this banquet was organized on a religious occasion and if it was linked to the priesthood of Caesia Sabina (see also chapter 5).

2.3: Dedicating

Although all kinds of people erected votives, assisting people who wanted to make a dedication to a deity seems to have been one of the tasks of priestesses and other women with religious offices.\textsuperscript{43} However, most dedications recording priestesses are paid and carried out by the sacerdos (\textit{magistra, ministra}) herself.\textsuperscript{44} Sometimes the priestesses made a dedication together with her relatives or with help from someone else, usually a priest.\textsuperscript{45} Like dedications made by ordinary people, many dedications of priestesses and other female religious officials were very simple and probably made to

\textsuperscript{39} Merlat (1960) 198-199. About priestly engagement in feasting in Cyrenaica, see: Reynolds (2011) 503.
\textsuperscript{40} Scheid (2007; Rupke) 267-8.
\textsuperscript{41} Her religious office is recorded in cat.no.136, while the banquet mentioned here is recorded in \textit{CIL} 11, 3811 (not included in the catalogue).
\textsuperscript{42} Priestesses paying special attention to women can be found elsewhere: Reynolds (2011) 504-505 mentions the priestess Antonia Mego who feasted the unmarried girls of Cyrene and surrounding area.
\textsuperscript{43} See also Fishwick (2004) 289-290.
\textsuperscript{44} Sometimes the dedication was explicitly connected to a religious office, see: \textit{CIL} 11, 1916 = \textit{ILS} 4366 = \textit{SIRIS} 577 (not in the catalogue): \textit{Ob honorem / Isidis Aug(ustae) / Apollini sacrum / Critonia C(nae) i(berita) Chrotis / minist<e=l>rio suo / donum dedit} –Sacred to Apollo, Critonia Chrotis, freedwoman of Cnaeus, gave this gift during her \textit{ministerium}, on account of her office of Isis Augusta. Transl. by Clark (2011) 354 footnote 32. See chapter 5, footnote 88 for another example.
\textsuperscript{45} E.g., cat.no.238 (Vegesela, Numidia) and 133 (Ticinum, region 11)
fulfil a vow. Even though dedications for the well-being of the emperor were a very common phenomenon, there are surprisingly few of these in the catalogue. The reason for this remains unclear, it may have been simple coincidence. The number of dedications made by priestesses, magistrae or ministrae on behalf of other people is small. May be it was not common to record the assistance of a priestess during a dedication just because this was such a regular task, or perhaps the name of the priestess who had aided the dedicant was only mentioned on special occasions.

An interesting dedication that needs to be mentioned in this section stems from Spoleto (region 6), and dates possibly from the fourth century AD. Its meaning is not fully clear.

[Lu]Scus Bon(a)e de(a)e / dedicatus ut liceat / per masculos rem/undari permit(tente) Pom[peia(?)] / com[magistra(a) ara(m) posu[it] / Ren() Maxim(a) uxso(r) Umbr[o]nis p(rimi)p(ilaris) posit(a) in va[cua] / suo

“A sacred grove has been dedicated to Bona Dea. In order that it may be cleansed again by members of the male sex, Renatia Maxima, wife of Umbro, ex-primipilar, has erected this altar, with the approval of the joint-magistra Pompeia. It has been placed on her empty land.”

It seems that one of the magistrae had erected an altar to cleanse or help cleansing the grove of Bona Dea. As she was a magistra of the goddess this can be seen as part of her religious duties. Afterwards she had consulted with her colleague who had to approve of the erection. Brouwer writes that Renatia Maxima possibly erected the altar on her own land because of strict building regulations in the grove. This inscription shows that making dedications could be done for a whole group of worshippers – i.e. those of Bona Dea – which was also a task of male religious officials, as several inscriptions of individual Augustales who erected inscriptions nomine Augustalium show. In my opinion it is likely that other female religious officials than the magistrae Bonae Deae had the same task, even though no other inscriptions than the one of Renatia Maxima and her colleague Pompeia can be found in the catalogue.

46 An exception is the dedication of an antistita from Metz, cat.no.264. This inscription was erected ‘after an indication in a dream’ (somnio monita).
47 E.g., cat.no.185.
48 A dedication from Iliberris in Baetica that was requested by the ordo, is a modern forgery, CIL 2-5, 39. Unsurprisingly, the name of the assisting priestess could be inscribed in the ablative. In cat.no.24 the words sacerdote Iulia Procula are used. A parallel with a male priest in a Syrian cult (CCID 525): [perf] Valentinem sac(erdomatem). Belachyeco (2001) 296-297
49 Cat.no.116. Transl. based on Brouwer.
50 Brouwer (1989) 380-381, writes that men probably cleaned away dead branches and pruned the trees of the sacred grove. As they were normally not allowed to enter the grove, it had to be ritually purified after they had left by erecting an altar.
51 Brouwer (1989) 381.
52 E.g. AE 1993, 471; AE 1993, 474; CIL 6, 2026.
Deities honoured by dedications made by priestesses

In order to discover if a priestess felt a special kind of devotion to the deity she served, we have to look at the deities they honoured with dedications. Eck writes that in the Roman Empire most dedications were set up for Jupiter and Hercules, followed by other Graeco-Roman deities and ‘oriental’ deities like Magna Mater and Isis. The inscriptions in the catalogue provide no examples of dedications made by priestesses to Hercules, but there is ample evidence of dedications to other Graeco-Roman divinities and for Magna Mater, although local deities are also represented. Jupiter, Juno, Diana, Venus and Ceres (not mentioned by Eck) are most frequently honoured.

Although Alföldy has stated that the number of dedications for a certain deity reveals little about the popularity of his or her cult, it seems that goddesses were more popular than gods with priestesses. The predominance of Ceres in the dedications made by priestesses can be explained by the high number of sacerdotes Cерерis in the catalogue: most dedications to Ceres have been erected by women serving this goddess. Apart from votives set up in honour of their ‘own’ deities priestesses made also dedications to others. Many examples from different parts of the Empire, including Rome, can be found. In Carthage, for instance, a priestess named Sallustia Luperca, served Ceres or the Cereres, but made the dedication that has saved her name from oblivion to Juno. Obviously, like other women (and men) priestesses needed the help of specific deities for specific problems.

2.4: Other tasks

It has been suggested that assisting people in ritual cleansing and washing may have been another duty of sacerdotes. I rather think that members of the lower cult personnel were involved in these tasks, although the catalogue provides no evidence. Interpreting oracles and explaining dreams could have been done by priests and priestesses, according to Merlat. About inscriptions with formulas like ex visu, monito, somno monitus he writes ‘Il se peut, mais ce n’est pas nécessaire, que l’interprétation de ces songes ait été confiée à des prêtés.’ The only inscription, in which both a priestess and a formula referring to a dream are mentioned, is erected by an antistita from Divodurum in Gallia Belgica. As no

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53 Including dedications erected by women to these gods, see e.g., CIL 13.11221; Wiegels (2001) 213-214.
55 A Greek inscription from Corstopitum in Britannia, erected by an archiereia, is not included in the catalogue, RIB 1, 1129.
57 This is noteworthy, for male gods made up a greater part of MacMullen’s list of main deities mentioned in Latin inscriptions. MacMullen (1981) 6 provides a table with their relative popularity: nine were male, four were female.
59 Cat.no.161.
60 Merlat (1960) 206-207. The priestess of Venus in Cyrene (Plautus, Rudens 404) tells a girl to fetch some water for her, but probably this was to be used for sacrificing. The bowl used is described as sacred, see 2.5.473 and 475.
61 Merlat (1960) 207-209.
one else except the priestess is recorded on the inscription, it seems that she erected the dedication to Silvanus and the Nymphs because of her own dream (somnio monita).  

The last task of sacerdotes I will discuss is speaking in front of an audience and praying. According to Ward, it is likely that during processions and other public cult observances, priestesses had to speak in public. The priest – and likely, the priestess as well – had to declare that the offering had been accepted by the god after it was killed. Generally, all sacrifices were accompanied by prayers that were – on official occasions – uttered by magistrates or priests. The Romans did not have collective prayers; usually a single person addressed the deity, while the audience watched silently. Hickson Hahn thinks that the system of public prayer served the elite. ‘Significantly, the wording of public prayers typically employs the first person singular of verbs of prayer. (…) The highly visible roles of the elite in public ritual, in particular the recitation of prayers, served to construct and reinforce their political domination. Priests and magistrates performed as mediators between gods and citizens, and just as divine favor was necessary for continued prosperity of the state, so the religious services of the elite were represented as equally necessary.’

Obviously, this applied not only to priests but also to priestesses. Furthermore, it applied not only to prayer but to other religious acts in which priestesses played a role as well, for these acts were all meant to maintain a proper relationship with the gods. And as we have seen, the religious tasks of priestesses were manifold. This implies that those priestesses who were members of the local elites helped to strengthen the position of the other decuriales in their community and that of their own family within the elite. Those sacerdotes who did not belong to the decuriales may have used their ‘public voice’ and mediating role as a way to enhance their status.

What has been discussed so far were the various (possible) tasks of priestesses, the main religious officials. However, women can be found in a variety of other religious functions as well. Their duties were not as lofty as those of the priestesses, and were certainly not performed by members of the elite, but they were of great practical value. These tasks are the subject of the next section.

2.5: Tasks of ancillary officials

A proper temple needed a varied staff that fulfilled a wide range of functions, from assisting at ceremonies and processions to guiding visitors, from cleaning and acting as servants during banquets

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63 Cat.no.264.
to gate-keeping. Possibly, some of these staff members lived in the sanctuaries in which they served, for various temples possessed rooms ‘that have been or could be interpreted as residences for a permanent present college of priests or other attendants.’ Quite a few inscriptions record women who were members of the lower cult personnel, but often it is unclear what exactly their tasks were.

Aedituæ and magistriæ

Several women held an office as aedituæ and/or magistriæ in various cults. On an inscription from Rome, a woman is recorded as aedituæ and ministra, and another example from the same city mentions an aedituæ a Diana, a certain Doris. This woman had been serva of Asinius Gallus, as the inscription erected by her fellow-slave Antiochus shows. There is some controversy about the tasks of aedituæ. In the first place, the difference between an aeditu(um) (aedituæ) and a magister (magistra) remains obscure. Unfortunately, the tasks of magistri and magistriæ are neither fully clear to us. Stambaugh writes that an aeditu(um) tended temples on a daily basis. However, a curator aedium publicorum or curator templi was also responsible for temples, at least during the imperial period and magistri fulfilled religious duties in temples as well, so this leaves us no wiser. Rives writes that both magistri and aeditui were attendants or caretakers, which does not separate these two roles either.

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70 Roux (2009) 74.
71 Cf. Schultz (2006) 72: ‘The precise distinctions among the different categories of sacerdos, magistra, and ministra cannot be recovered.’ In the literary sources, other religious functions of women are mentioned, but it is questionable whether these were official, Plautus (Miles 3.97) mentions women as praeconrix (a woman who uttered incantations), coniectrix (a woman who interpreted dreams), hariola (inspired prophetess) and haruspica (diviner). See also Horster (2007) 338. (Male) haruspices were sometimes paid on regular basis in the city or the army, but often they acted on a more private basis, Horster (2007) 337. Festus 232-34L and Paulus 233L refer to women who were specialized in expiations and were called expiatrix, saga or simpulatrix, Schultz (2006) 28; Flemming (2007) 106. In HA Macr. 3.1-2 a vates Caeselis is mentioned. Cf. HA Pert. 4.2 – see chapter 2. See Guerra Gomez (1987) 287-303 for a discussion of prophetic priestesses in Graeco-Roman religions.
72 They were certainly not confined to the cults of Bona Dea and Ceres, as Eichenauer (1988) 47 writes. She also forgets to mention priestesses of e.g. Venus and Juno in her account of religious offices open to women.
73 Cat.no.7. The name of the son has been interpreted as a dative, but in my view it is more obvious to translate it as a nominative. As names of slaves (and accordingly, of liberti) often ended with –io (Kajanto (1982) 134), it is possible that the mother and her son were liberti. This is very plausible, because aeditui and magistri were often of slave or freed status. On CIL 6, 2212, found close to the inscription of the aedituæ et magistriæ, a man from Rome is recorded who was aeditus and magister at the same time.
74 Cat.no.6; Rüpke (2005) 1497.
75 Rives (1995) 34 asks the question whether magistri were the same as aeditui.
76 Some authors are very unspecific, for example, Ausbüttel (1982) 52, who only writes that magistri had several religious tasks. However, in some cases, more is known. Magistri ad fana delubra for example, were appointed ‘für die Organisation öffentlicher Opfer und Aufstellung von Götterpolstern’, Frateantonio (2001) 182.
77 Stambaugh (1978) 575. Varro, RR, 1.2.2 refers to the aeditumus of the temple of Tellus, that was supervised by an aedile. Horster (2007) 332 calls the aeditu(um) a kind of sacristian.
79 In the Republic: aediles, e.g. of the temple of Ceres on the Aventine, Stambaugh (1978) 574, 582.
80 Stambaugh (1978) 576.
Caput 128 of the Lex Ursonensis describes in broad terms the way in which the organisation of cults by magistri had to be arranged. Magistri had to be appointed for all shrines, but their tasks are not specified. According to several modern scholars, the most important task of magistri seems to have been a financial one. Rives thinks that possibly magistri resembled financial curators. This seems plausible, because someone had to take care of the income acquired by the temple; temples often owned property form which a rental income was extracted, various sacred funds existed and private worshippers could have had to pay a fee for the services the temple provided. Furthermore, temples acquired money and possessions from donations and votive offerings.

North supposes that magistri were responsible for administration, mainly financial, while priests were responsible for religious matters. That non-priestly figures had a say in religious financial matters can be read in colonial charters. The Lex Irnitana (caput 77, De impensis in sacra ludos cenasque faciendas) states that the ‘duumviri who are in charge of the administration of justice in that municipium are to raise with the decurions or conscripti on the earliest possible moment how much should be spent for expenses on religious observances (…).’ Obviously, the public money referred to here is not that which belonged to the temple, but money belonging to the municipium. In any case, it is clear that most modern scholars think that a financial task was reserved for magistri.

In my opinion, it is likely that the duties of magistrae were comparable to those of magistri and that they also had a financial character. But it may not have been as simple as that, as some inscriptions and speculations by modern authors show. Spickermann writes that magistrae, who were often libertae, took care of temples, sacrifices and banquets for gods. Lundeen on the other hand, thinks that magistrae were responsible for the daily administration of a cult, together with ministrae.

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85 This ‘religious money’ did not belong to the priests, who did not make a gain from their office, Horster (2007) 331. Cf. Grannino Cerere (2009) 42-43: pecunia sacra, or better: all movable goods dedicated to the gods, were not taken care of by the priests, but instead by civic magistrates and sometimes by local religious associations. Cf. Castrén (1975) 68.
86 Tertullian, Apolog. 13.6 and 42.8; Chapter 72 of the Lex Ursonensis; Rives (2007) 116; Rous (2009) 74; Raggi (2011) 341. The money acquired by votive offerings could be used for decorating the temple, as the example of a mosaic in the temple of Nodens in Lydney Park in Britain shows; it was paid for ex stipibus, Henig (1984) 135.
89 Gonzalez and Crawford (1986) 148, 200. Duumviri, qui in eo municipio iure dicando praerunt/ primo quoque tempore ad decurions conscriptosque / referanto quantum impenses sacrorum, transl. by Crawford. Cf. Wooff (1998) 220, who writes that 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.
90 Cf. Schultz (2006) 73. She also writes that magistrae (and ministrae) interacted with the worshippers who visited the sanctuary.
91 Spickermann (1994a) 294; Spickermann (1994b) 239.
92 Lundeen (2006) 46. Some magistrae (and ministrae) were active in a collegium. Clark (2011) 352 writes that nothing suggests that collegia bearing the name of the gods had more intimate relationships with these gods than others without name of deity in their title, as all collegia had a tutelary deity. Some colleges made these deities part of the name of their group, p. 349. Accordingly, she thinks that the magistrae ‘of a god’ (i.e. those with a
However, Lundeen also writes that magistriæ could be termed as ‘female chief or superintendent; high priestess; female expert or teacher’. In my opinion, there is no convincing evidence for this last statement and I think that in many cases claiming magistriæ to be ‘high’ priestesses is overestimating their role, because the magistriæ were generally from lower social rank than the sacerdotes in the catalogue (cf. chapter 5, section 3.1). Consequently, it is rather strange to maintain they were higher religious officials than ‘ordinary’ sacerdotes.

That magistriæ in some cases could have been the main officials of a temple and cult is not unlikely though. In the Lex Urosenensis nothing is said about priests of individual gods (only pontiffs and augurs are mentioned), so it is possible that magistri – and in analogy: magistriæ – were not supervised by sacerdotes and were indeed the main officials involved in specific cults or attached to specific temples (until or unless a special priest(ess) was appointed). This seems to be backed by the fact that most magistriæ included in the catalogue lived in towns where no sacerdotes (male or female) of the deities they (probably) served are attested, though the evidence is rather patchy.

That the role of magistriæ in some cases could be very practical, is illustrated by an inscription from Vibo Valentia (region 3), in which is referred to two magistriæ, a certain Helvia and Orbia. During their time of office, two local magistrates saw that a statue of Proserpina was repaired and erected and that the altars were repaired. If there had been a sacerdos present, likely his or her name would have been recorded, instead of those of his or her subordinates. The same can be said about Renatia Maxima and her joint-magistra Pompeia who erected an altar to cleanse the sacred grove of Bona Dea, and about Italia, a magistra of the same goddess, who organised a banquet on the occasion of a dedication (see above and chapter 5).

The last inscription in the catalogue that offers information about the tasks of magistriæ stems from Nepet (region 7), and was erected in AD 18. This dedication to Ceres Augusta mater agrorum
deity in their title) and other magistriæ had the same tasks, or at least, that nothing suggest that the name of the deity ‘had any bearing on the difference’, 355. Nevertheless, I have decided only to include the magistriæ (and ministriæ) in the catalogue in whose inscription the name of a deity is recorded. I think that magistriæ and ministriæ did not necessarily all act in the collegia meant by Clark, but could also be ancillary personnel of a priestess. The ministra sacrorum publicorum from Teumum Sidicinum (see chapter 2) is a good example: she served Juno Populonia, who was also served by sacerdotes. Besides, the magistri mentioned in the Lex Urosenensis seem to have been attached to shrines, not to the collegia Clark discusses. Obviously, this does not imply that the tasks of these different magistriæ were not similar.

95 Reliefs that belong to the inscriptions of other magistriæ are not really useful for tracing their tasks; they usually depict pateræ and other sacrificial instruments. There is only one inscription from Baden-Baden in Germany (cat.no.263) which shows more interesting carvings, although these were linked to the deity to whom the dedication was made, and not to the tasks of the magistra making the dedication. This relief shows a sitting woman with a basket with fruit (?) on her lap. Probably because of this relief, it has been suggested by Spickermann that the woman was magistra of a native mother-goddess, which is not unlikely; Spickermann (1994a) 294; Spickermann (1994b) 239 nr. 17. Cf. dedications to Nehalennia, depicting the goddess as a sitting woman with a bowl of fruit on her lap, Stuart and Bogaers (2001) 1.21. At the sides of Nehalennia altars, often figures are carved. According to Stuart and Bogaers (2001) 23, these were worshippers of the goddess. In several cases, the figures carry objects.
states that the *magister pagi* Lucius Bennius Primus and the *magistra* Bennia Primigenia, likely either the daughter of the *magister* or freed by the same master, celebrated the *Cerialia* on April 19th. Taylor writes that on the stone reliefs are cut that depict attributes related to the cult of Ceres, like corn ears, torches and a victim. As I have already remarked, what the *magister* and *magistra* exactly had to do during this festival in honour of Ceres is not mentioned.

**Ministrae**

Generally, the tasks of *ministrae* are supposed to have been assisting. The inscriptions in my database that record *ministrae* say little about their tasks. However, there is proof of a very practical way of caring for individual *worshippers* by a *ministra*. Cannia Fortunata was *ministra* of Bona Dea in Rome and assisted someone who suffered from problems with his eyes:

*Felix publicus / Asinianus pontific(um) / Bonae Deae agresti Felicula(/ae?) / votum solvit iunicem alba(m) / libens animo ob luminibus / restituitis derelictus a medicis post / menses decem beneficio(!) dominae(!) medicinis sanatus per / eam restituta omnia ministerio Canniae Fortunatae*

“Felix Asinianus, public slave of the *pontifices*, fulfilled his vow to Bona Dea Agrestis Felicula willingly and with good cause, (sacrificing) a white heifer on account of his eyesight having been restored. Abandoned by doctors, he recovered after ten months by taking medicines, by the aid of the Mistress. Through her, all things were restored during Cannia Fortunata’s tenure as *ministra*.”

Unfortunately, it is not explicitly mentioned what Cannia Fortunata did, but it is likely that she assisted Felix Asinianus with his sacrifice and possibly also with taking his medicines (who these medicines had prescribed remains obscure, for the man was abandoned by his doctors). In any case, it seems that *ministrae* could have been involved in the practical assistance of the visitors of a sanctuary.

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96 Clark (2011) 360 seems to think that the *magistra* did not celebrate the *Cerialia* herself.

97 Cat.no.85; Taylor (1923) 99, 243; Chirassi Colombo (1981) 427. Castrén (1975) 72, writes that *magistri pagi* were people who, because of a low birth, could not become ordinary magistrates or priests, but nevertheless had great personal authority, e.g., asresult of their wealth and generosity or of the *auctoritas* of the *gens* that had freed them. They were sometimes freeborn, but usually freed. *Magistri pagi* were assisted by *ministri*, who were slaves or freed. I would not classify *magistri pagi* as religious officials, although they certainly had religious tasks. The *magistra* Bennia is not recorded as *magista pagi*, and therefore I have included her inscription in the catalogue.

98 Taylor (1923) 99.

99 The little we know about the *Cerialia* in Rome does not help either: during this festival foxes were released, with burning torches attached to their tails, Boyd (1960) 148.

100 See e.g. Lundeen (2006) 46 footnote 59.

I think this can be explained by the fact that these women were more accessible than priestesses, for their rank and standing was less high than that of most priestesses.

Apart from the inscription of Cannia Fortunata, no other inscriptions in the catalogue – or accompanying carvings – inform us about the tasks of ministrae. However, as can be concluded from several reliefs studied by Fless, ministrae had many different tasks.\textsuperscript{102} A minister or ministra is often depicted with jugs and plates used for the ritual purification of the persons sacrificing. They also carry boxes with incense, keys, baskets, objects for sacrifices, garlands and twigs, torches and various other ritual materials. They acted as heralds and led in prayers (though praying was also a priestly duty, see above).\textsuperscript{103} In sum, according to Fless ministrae assisted their ritual superiors. These superiors may have been magistrae or sacerdotes.\textsuperscript{104} The catalogue contains only one example of a ministra who – possibly – assisted a sacerdos.\textsuperscript{105}

Vitelliae / Virgiliae / Felsiae / [m]inistri[a]e sa[crorum pu[bl]]((icorum]) / [p]raesidis Iu[n]o/nis Populo[n(ae)] / Virgilia Fl[3]A / [m]a[tel]r (ocus) d(atus) d(ecreto) [d(ecurionum)]

“To Vitellia Virgilia Felsia, ministra of the public rites of the protectress Juno Populona. Virgilia ? her mother [made this]. The place is given by decree of the decurions.”

This large stone statue base was erected in Teanum Sidicinum (region 1). In this same town, Nonia Prisca and Flavia Coelia Annia Argiva had both been sacerdos Iunonis Populonae.\textsuperscript{106} Therefore, the ministra may have assisted two sacerdotes, but as the relevant inscriptions cannot be dated, it is impossible to tell when both sacerdotes and the ministra lived. From the high social status of both Nonia Prisca and Flavia Coelia and the fact that they were granted a public burial place, it can be deduced that the cult of Juno Populona was held in high esteem in Teanum Sidicinum. Therefore, it is not as surprising as it may seem at first sight that the ministra Vitellia Virgilia Felsia, who after all held a relatively low office, was granted a place for the erection of her statue by decree of the ordo.

I think the most important thing that can be concluded from the inscription from Teanum and the other evidence discussed in this section, is that ministrae (and, in fact, magistrae as well) cannot

\textsuperscript{102} She writes that minister or ministra is a better term for what has often been called a camillus or camilla. These religious officials were usually depicted as young males, although there were differences in the iconography, Fless (1995) 16, 43. The term camillus/camilla was probably unusual in the imperial period, and is used in the literary sources only to indicate the servants of the flamen and flaminica Dialis; Fless (1995) 47, 100. These camilli/camillae were in general freeborn ingenui/ae, sometimes even from high descent; Fless (1995) 45-46.

\textsuperscript{103} Fless (1995) 15-17, 19, 20, 22, 26, 31.

\textsuperscript{104} There was no fixed rule that priestesses were only served by ministrae; for both boys and girls served the Vestals, Fless (1995) 40-41 and male tibicines assisted the female sacerdotes Magnae Matris recorded in CIL 13, 1754 and CIL 14, 408. An inscription from Tridentum (CIL 5, 5026) records four magistrae, their names followed by four other women who were ministrae. Their relationship is not elucidated and it is unknown whether they were religious officials; therefore the inscription is not included in the catalogue.

\textsuperscript{105} Cat.no.130; Savunen (1997) 143. Connelly (2007) 217-218, writes that in Greece, priestesses had a say in the choice of members of the lower cult personnel.

\textsuperscript{106} Cat.no. 128; 129.
easily be fitted into one category: their tasks appear to have been manifold, and their standing depended not only on their office, but also on the cult in which they served and possibly the place where they lived.107

Women with other ancillary religious functions

Musicians and dancers

Many people with religious offices were in one way or another involved in music or dance, which were vital elements of Roman religious rituals.108 In the Lex Ursonensis tibicenes (flute players) are assigned to magistrates as attendants.109 They played the double flute during sacrifices, and were organised in a collegium.110 According to Festus 482, the tibicines sacrorum publicorum populi Romani were considered to be priests (sacerdotes viri speciosi),111 but this has apparently more to do with his definition of priest than with reality. Pliny the Elder (NH 28.3) writes that the function of the flute-player was to drown out the disturbing noises, like a herald. A tibicen did not play during the whole ceremony.112 I have found only one woman recorded as tibicen; this freedwoman lived in Rome and died at the age of fifteen.113

Apart from fluteplayers, cymbalistriæ and tympanistriæ had to add musical lustre to religious ceremonies,114 but as these were generally connected to the cult of Magna Mater, I have not included them in the catalogue and will not discuss them here.115 Other female musicians are not attested on the inscriptions, and only one dancer is – though we know that religious dancing by the Salian virgins was an ancient habit in Rome, and likely in various cities outside the Urbs as well.116 On her epitaph that was found in Rome, the little girl Flavia Vera, who did not reach her seventh year, is called præsula sacerdoti Tusculanorum.117 Wissowa thinks that this girl, who may have been related to the Flavia Vera recorded in CIL 14.2617, was in fact a Salian virgin. He argues that the words sodales and sacerdotes are mixed up in the inscription, because the sacerdotes Tusculanorum originated from the equestrian order, while the girl Flavia Vera belonged to the middle classes. As the Salian virgins from Rome were also members of the middle classes, it is plausible to suppose that Flavia Vera was a

107 Cf. Brouwer (1989) 275–276: the title of magistra was not confined to slaves.
110 Fless (1995) 80, 83. Other religious musicians also had their own collegia, e.g. the fidicines (luteplayers). A collegium fidicum is attested in Praeneste: CIL 1, 3063. In Rome, citizens, including people of high rank, were members of these collegia, Fless (1995) 85; Fless and Moede (2007) 252. No women have been attested as members of these collegia.
113 Cat.no.12. This male word was usually also used to indicate women, Eichenauer (1988) 52.
114 Cymbalistriæ also played at non-religious occasions, see: Cicero, Cont. Pis. 9.20 and Petronius, Sat. 22.
115 Cf. Apuleius, Met. 8.30. See also Henig (1984) 138. Two exceptions that are included are cat.no. 41 and 44 from Beneventum, as they served not only Magna Mater, but also Minerva Paracentia.
117 Cat.no.3. Latte (1960) 406 writes that the girl’s parents paid for the costs of her office – which is likely.
Salia.118 Praesula is the feminine form of the word used to indicate the lead dancer of the male Salii. This implies a hierarchy that is parallel to that of the Salii.119 However, as the organisation of religious dancers (both men and women) in general is not very clear, nothing more can be said about this young girl and her possible colleagues.120

Basket carriers
During rituals, incense, fruit, grain and dairy offerings were carried by assistants in baskets, jugs and boxes.121 There is some epigraphic evidence that attests to women who had to carry baskets at religious rituals.122 They were usually called canistrariae, and the baskets they carried presumably contained offerings or sacred objects.123 The inscription from Rome lists various women who served Caelus: Flavia Epicharidis was sacerdos deae Virginis Caelestis, and others were sacratae and canistrariae.124 All other canistrariae I have found lived in North Africa, where also some reliefs with depictions of basket carriers were found. Most of these reliefs are not included in the catalogue, but as I think they provide interesting evidence for the variety of cults in which women served as basket-carriers, I will discuss them here as well.

One of the reliefs belongs to the inscription Ofisia Cattula from Mididi; she was sacerda, probably in the Ceres cult. At the left side of her short epitaph a woman is depicted who is holding a basket. On the right side a woman with a basket in her hand and another on her head is carved.125 Three other reliefs that depict canistrariae stem from Mauretania and Numidia; they accompany dedications to Saturn. Two are erected by male sacerdotes and the third by a man of whom only his name is known.126 Figure 7 shows the richly decorated dedication of one of the priests, a certain Caius Pomponius Felicus, sacerdos Saturni Augusti, who had solved his vow (ILAlg 1. 3472). The right figure is a close-up of the lower part of the stone that includes the inscription; here three rudely carved women can be detected, each with a large, filled basket at her head. What the baskets contain is unclear. The women seem to stand near, or approach, an altar behind which two people stand, one holding a jug in his right hand. Two bulls, supposedly the victims, are also depicted.

119 Glinister (2011) 112. If indeed a hierarchy within the group of Saliae existed, it is possible that a magistra and vates (prophetess) were also a part of this hierarchy, Glinister (2011) 112.
122 In addition to baskets, other sacred objects could be carried as well during processions (see above). The epigraphic evidence mentions women as matres of collegia of dendrophores (‘tree-bearers’) and pastophores. Pastophores were active in the cult of Isis; dendrophores served Magna Mater. Therefore, they are not included in the catalogue. Van Nijf (1997) 195-197 about dendrophori taking part in civic processions.
123 Cf. Apuleius, Metamorphoses, 11.11.
124 Cat.no.13. The difference between the sacerdos and the sacratae backs the view (implicitly stated in Rives (1995) 161 where he mentions sacratae of Ceres) that sacratae were different from priestesses. See also chapter 2.
125 Cat.no.197.
126 CIL 8, 9022 (Auzia, Mauretania); ILAlg 1, 2926 (Altabia, Numidia); ILAlg 1, 3472 (Gunifida, near Theveste, Numidia) – not included in the catalogue.
This relief confirms again the fact that women could perform religious tasks in the cults of male deities, but the main point is that carrying baskets was obviously seen – at least in Africa – as important enough to be depicted on stone.

This importance is also shown by the fact that no less than six inscriptions mention the names of African women acting as *canistrariae*. All inscriptions except one are dedicatory. Three of these dedications were erected in honour of Ceres, which makes it possible that the other three *canistrariae* may also have been active in the cult of this goddess. That one of these last three *canistrariae* lived in Carthage where the Ceres cult was very important, may also point to a religious office in the cult of this goddess.¹²⁷ This is, however, by no means certain regarding the relief of Caius Pomponius Felicus’ inscription discussed above and the fact that another group of *canistrariae* attested epigraphically served Virtus. These *canistrariae* of Virtus are recorded on an inscription from Madauros.¹²⁸ The inscription lists the names and offices of the *cistiferi deae Virtutis*.¹²⁹ It starts with the names of several priests, followed by that of the *canistraria* Terentia Bonifatia. The second part of the inscription lists some men (seemingly without religious office) and ends with three other *canistrariae*, Antonia Matrona, Manilia Honorata and Iulia Lucilla.¹³⁰ What is noteworthy in the first

¹²⁷ Cat.no.163. The other two were erected in Caesarea in Mauretania.
¹²⁸ Not included in the catalogue, for the goddess Virtus may have been the same as the Cappadocian Bellona.
¹²⁹ Elsewhere in Africa, other *cistiferi* – who carried chests during ceremonies – have been attested, for example CIL 8, 10627 = CIL 8, 16532 = ILAlg 1, 2996 = ILS 5432; AE 1965, 230: a *cistifer*, possibly of Virtus; CIL 8,16532 of Bellona.
¹³⁰ ILAlg 1, 2071: [Nomina c]istiferorum deae Virtutis / [---] duas dextra sinistra et gradus d(e) s(uo) f(ecerunt) / [---] Victor il(amen) p(eripus) sac(erdos) / [---]s Madaurius sac(erdos) / [---] P(rimianus) sac(erdos) / [---]ius Sabinus fanas / [---] Vibius Servilius sac(erdos) / [---] Domitius Numidius / Q(uintus) Cluvius Cremensius / Terentia Bonifatia / canistraria // T(itus) Flavius Natalis / C(aius) Valerius Sabinus / L(ucius) Avianus Felix /
place, is that *cisthiëri* were not synonymous to *canistrariae*. Instead, the term *cisthiër* seems to have had a broader meaning. Secondly, the men who held a religious function were all *sacerdotes*, while the women were *canistrariae* – and therefore of lower religious rank. This hierarchical difference between men and women within the same cult is also seen on inscriptions recording religious officials in the cult of Magna Mater.  

*Others*

Apart from being musicians, dancers or basket carriers, women could fulfil several other religious tasks, for example that of *sacrarìa*. According to Taylor this title ‘should denote the keeper of the *sacrarìum*, the room where the sacred *instrumenta* of a temple were stored.’ On an inscription from Verona, a slave woman named Salvia is recorded as *sacrarìa*. It is possible that the office of *ostiariâ* (door-keeper), only once attested on an inscription from Rome, was largely comparable to that of *sacrarìa*. Horster writes that a male *ostiarius* was a kind of janitor who kept the keys of the sanctuary. As it is equally possible that an *ostiaria* or *ostiarius* was janitor of the private home of a family, as Mazzoleni *et al.* maintain, and there is nothing in the inscription recording the *ostiariâ* that points to a religious character, it is not included in the catalogue.  

Another group of inscriptions that are neither included in the catalogue, record *ornatrixes*. Supposedly, they were active in the cult of Isis and tended to the statue of the goddess – that is: those who held a religious office, for *ornatrix* could also mean hairdresser. Nevertheless, the religious office of *ornatrix* needs to be mentioned here, because I think it is likely that the statues of other deities were tended in a similar way. According to Seneca, in Rome Juno and Minerva were tended

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*(a)ius* Flavius Domit[i]us / *T(itus) Flavius Maximus / Q(uintus) Agrius Vitalis / nomina canistrari(a)e / Antonia Matrona / Manilia Honorata / Julia Lucilla.


132 Taylor (1923) 71. Taylor thinks that the office of *sacrarìus/sacrarìa* was the same as that of *aeditius*, which would imply that the tasks of a *sacrarìus/sacrarìa* were wider than guarding the keys of a temple room. This is also suggested by the title of a male *sacrarìus* from Falerii, who was officially called *pontifex sacrarìus Iunonis Curriti*, and was, according to Taylor ‘perhaps the chief religious officer of the colony’, Taylor (1923) 64-65. Cf. the *pontifex Volcani et aedium sacrarum* from Ostia, *CIL* 14, 72 = *ILS* 5451 and *CIL* 14, 4443, Taylor (1923) 71.

133 *CIL* 6, 6326 = *ILS* 7438: Optata Pasaes / ostiaria fecerunt / amici.

134 Horster (2007) 332. On an inscription from Rome a (male) *ostiarius* and a *ministra* are recorded (*AE* 2006, 234) so Horster may be wrong in classifying the *ostiarius* as a *minister*. This inscription is not included in the catalogue, for the same reasons as that of the *ostiaria* Optata, see above.


136 An *ornatrix* was the equivalent of a Greek *stolistes* or *hierostolos*. She was responsible for the clothing and make-up of the image of the goddess. Cf. Apuleius, *Met.* 11.20. Turcan (1997) 109; Spickermann (1994a) 106; Spickermann (1994b) 238-239.

137 Cf. Apuleius, *Met.* 4.29 who writes about the worship of Aphrodite on Cythera. The statues of the goddess were normally garlanded. Although Apuleius refers to a practice from the eastern part of the Empire, I think it is likely that it also existed in the West.
by female hairdressers, though these women did not directly touch the statue. Possibly in other cults, taking care of the cult statue was carried out by *magistrae.*

Apart from tending the statue, the sacrificial animals had to be cared for. This could range from keeping (and probably also breeding) the animals to killing them. Concerning pigs, the first could be done by *porcarii porcariae.* In Pompeii a certain Clodia had been *porcaria publica* and probably kept the pigs, bred as sacrificial animals for Ceres. I have found no other evidence for female *porcariae.* The killing of the victim was done by the *victimarius* or *popa,* as has been discussed above.

Another category of women with religious tasks were the *servae* of various deities. As there is no convincing evidence to support the view that (all) religious slaves were involved in sacred prostitution (see also section 2.2), we should follow the view offered by Fless. She writes that *servi publici* – and in my opinion also *servae publicae* – took care of a sanctuary. These ‘public slaves’ were not only ‘real’ slaves (i.e. unfree), but also free or freeborn (wo)men. Although there is epigraphic evidence for religious slaves in the cults of Mars, Mercurius and Ceres, the other evidence is mostly limited to the Venus cult.

Cicero mentions a certain Agonis, a wealthy *liberta Veneris* from Lilybaeum and a Banobalis, male slave of Venus. I have not found much epigraphic evidence of religious *servae,* but there is some from North Africa and – probably – from Gades in Spain. The Spanish inscriptions are the epitaphs of two women, Maria and Domitia. Their names are followed by the word *Veneris,* and

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139 Seneca in Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* 6.10: Sunt quae Lunoni ac Mercurriae capillos disponant (longe a templo, non tantum a simulacro stantes digitos mouent omantium modo), sunt quae speculum teneant – ‘Juno and Minerva have special women hairdressers, who operate some distance away, not just from the statue but from the temple.’ Special (male) attendants bathed and oiled the statue of Jupiter – that is: they mimed the movements with their hands.

140 Van Andringa (2009) 84.

141 ILLRP 106b from Palestrina possibly records a *collegium porcarum* and *CIL* 3, 14370 = *ILS* 9243 from Augusta Vindelicorum (modern Augsburg) in Raetia mentions a *porcarius.* There is no link to the cult of Ceres or to that of another divinity in these inscriptions.

142 Fless (1995) 54. Cf. Budin (2009) 215. See also the *lex Irmitana* and the *lex Ursonensis* in which public slaves are assigned to the *aediles* who were in responsible for the maintenance of temples, Raggi (2011) 336.

143 Fless (1995) 54.

144 From Cularo (Gallia Narbonensis) stems an inscription that attests to a male slave of Mercurius and Ceres, *CIL* 12, 2318 = *ILN* 5.2, 459: *Apollini ex voto / Iustus Mercurii / et Cereros ser(vus) – ‘To Apollo according to the vow, Iustus, slave of Mercurius and Ceres.’ Surely he had nothing to do with religious prostitution. Cf. Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 15.43 in which he compares *Venerii* to *Martiales,* who are called *ministri publici.*


146 Schindler (1998) 194) lists *collegia* of slaves of Venus. Besides, in Patrae in Greece, a (young?!) woman or girl lived, who had been *polos Cereris* (*CIL* 3, 498; not included in the catalogue). The title *polos* was often used in a religious context, as is stated in *Patras,* especially regarding girls consecrated to Demeter and Kore. It was also used in Egypt, where the cult of Demeter was linked to that of Isis. Perhaps a *polos* was comparable to a religious slave, for how else do we have to understand ‘being consecrated’ to a deity?
therefore it has been suggested in the *Inscripciónes Romanas de la Provincia de Cadiz* that they were *Veneris servae*.147

The African evidence for religious slaves of Venus is less uncertain than that from Spain. Two inscriptions, both from Sicca Veneria (Africa Proconsularis), record (former) slaves of Venus. Baricca, daughter of Rogatus lived twenty-five years and died as *Veneris serva*.148 The other inscription from Sicca Veneria mentions Caius Iulius Optatus, who had been freedman of Venus (*Veneris libertus*) and died when he was forty.149 This inscription shows that men – at least in Sicca Veneria – could also be slaves of Venus. This is not really surprising, for in the same town two male *sacerdotes Veneris* have been attested,150 and a male *actor* of Venus.151 Furthermore, the inscription also shows that religious slaves could be freed, which we also know from other sources.

A last inscription stems from Castellum Biracsaccarensium in Africa Proconsularis. It is the funerary inscription of a girl who may have been slave of Juno. As the name of the goddess is abbreviated this is rather dubious.152

\[Extricata I(unonis?) M(agnae?) / R(eginae?) ser(va) Felicis S/altuari i(lia) pia vi/xit annis III hic sita\]

“Extricata, slave of Juno Magna Regina?, daughter of Felix Salutarius, lived piously three years. She [is] buried here.”

This epitaph shows that – if indeed this young Extricata had been slave of the goddess – children could be given as ‘religious slaves’ by their parents when they were very young (from which follows the question what these slaves had to and *could* do!). Furthermore, it confirms that religious slaves were not necessarily of unfree status, for otherwise the name of the girl’s father would not have been inscribed.

What can be concluded from the evidence discussed so far is that women could hold a great variety of religious offices and had a wide range of tasks to fulfil. From the noble *sacerdos* to the humble servant and from supervising public sacrifices to carrying baskets – the offices and tasks open to women were largely comparable to those of men. There is however, one important religious task for which there is no evidence whatsoever which shows that women had their share in it: debating points of ritual. This

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147 Cat.no.287 and 288.
148 Cat.no.208.
149 *CIL* 8, 27580.
150 *CIL* 8,15879 and 15882.
151 *CIL* 8, 15894. Rives (1994b, 301) writes: ‘The cult of Venus was clearly one of the most important *sacra publica* in Sicca.’ Apart from the servants of Venus mentioned here, in the same town a group *Venerii* has been attested, *ILS* 5505.
152 Cat.no.279.
seems to have been reserved for men. In Rome the pontiffs sat as a court and decided how to handle
incestum committed by a Vestal, and the Acta Arvalium provides us with the protocols of the Arval
Brethren.\textsuperscript{153} Admittedly, this evidence for debating male religious officials stems from the City, while
there is not much comparable evidence from the provinces, as far as I know.\textsuperscript{154} This could simply be a
matter of coincidence, or point to a slightly different role of priests in the provinces, which I think is
possible. Colonial charters attest to an important role of the decurions in local religion, so possibly the
task of debating about ritual problems was, at least partly, taken over by them. However that may be,
women seem to have been excluded from it.

2: Priestesses as embodiment of ritual

Above, I have discussed what women who held religious offices had to do. Now I turn to the persona
of the priestess. Several priests and priestesses in Rome had to live a ritualized life, regulated by a
great variety of prescriptions, in order to be able to embody the divine. The Vestals are the most
famous example, but the regulations to which the flamen and flaminica Dialis were subjected are no
less appealing to the imagination.\textsuperscript{155} In this section I will investigate if comparable rules regulated the
lives of female religious officials in the provinces. In order to do so, I shall deal with questions
concerning the presentation, required age and prescribed behaviour of the women. Some of these
issues highlight ritualized ways of being and acting, meant to let the divine be embodied in the
priestesses; others relate more to the way priestesses publicly performed their religious roles. I will
start with an examination of the epigraphic evidence that provides information about the number of
years priestesses served and the age when religious officials acquired their position. This is followed
by a discussion of the supposed chastity of the sacerdotes Cereris. Sacred prostitution, which forms an
interesting contrast to chastity, will be the rather controversial topic of the following section. Finally, I
will discuss the clothes a priestess wore, in order to recover whether she was recognizable as a
religious official.

2.1: Age and years of service

Apart from the Roman Vestals,\textsuperscript{156} little is known of the age at which women or girls entered their
priesthood and of the number of years they had to serve. According to the Lex Ursonensis, the

\textsuperscript{153} I would like to thank Professor Greg Woolf for bringing this difference to my notice.
\textsuperscript{154} There may be some comparable evidence from the imperial cult: the provincial priest was chairman of the
provincial concilium and it is likely that this council also discussed religious matters. However, this council was
not made up of priests, and had close links to the local ordo, which may underline the important role of
decurions in provincial religion. See Fishwick (2004) 211 for the link between concilium, provincial priest and
local ordo.
\textsuperscript{155} See e.g. Boëls (1973); Beard (1980) and (1995); Scheid (1986).
\textsuperscript{156} Aulus Gellius 1.12; Wildfang (2006) 44.
pontifices and augures were chosen annually, but the question can be asked whether the same was true for the priesthoods of individual gods in the provinces in general and for those held by women in particular.\textsuperscript{157} The cult of Ceres may shed some light on this matter, although it is by no means certain that we can generalize within this cult or to other priesthoods. Fortunately, there is some – though very little – evidence from other cults available as well.

While priests like the pontifices and augures had to be of a minimum age when they entered their priesthood, such a prescription does not seem to have been required of all priests and priestesses or other religious officials. The catalogue provides us with some evidence of young girls who held religious offices; this will be the topic of the section following the discussion of the number of years served. In contrast to girls holding priesthoods, some priestesses may have been of a ripe old age: the female sacerdotes of Ceres were supposed to be elderly ladies. In the last section of this part of the chapter, I will investigate whether this supposition is correct.

Years of service
From three inscriptions – all funerary – it can be concluded that at least some priestesses and other female religious officials served more than one year. These inscriptions record how many years the three women had served, although unfortunately, of one inscription the number is unreadable. Furthermore, it can be deduced at what age these women had acquired their offices. Two inscriptions were erected in North Africa and one in Italy. This Italian inscription is the epitaph of a ministra of Salus, who lived in Amitemum in the beginning of the first century AD:\textsuperscript{158}

\textit{Dis Man(ibus) / sacrum / Plaetorae / Secundae / ministrae Salutis / ann(os) XIII vixit XXX}

“Dedicated to the spirits of the deceased Plaetoria Secunda, ministra of Salus for thirteen years; she lived thirty [years].”

Likely, this woman entered her office when she was seventeen years old, which was not extremely young for a member of the lower cult personnel (see below).\textsuperscript{159} As it was thought worth recording how many years Plaetoria Secunda had served, it seems that thirteen years was supposed to be a considerable time. The inscription recording Aemilia Amotmicar from the Gens Bacchuiiana in Africa Proconsularis is an example of a woman, this time a sacerdos, who had served even longer than Plaetoria Secunda. Aemilia had been priestess of the Cereres and had held her office for thirty-five

\textsuperscript{157} Many priests in Rome were appointed for life, Szemler (1986) 2325. Delgado Delgado (1998) 148-149, stresses the existence of local differences and the complexity of the matter.
\textsuperscript{158} Cat.no.23. See also Schultz (2006) 71.
\textsuperscript{159} A common parallel expression from the military; \textit{militavit annos} (number) \textit{vixit annos} (number) and vice versa, see e.g., \textit{AE} 1897, 132; \textit{AE} 1905, 201; \textit{AE} 1995, 1724; \textit{CIL} 8, 24682.
years.\footnote{160} She died when she was seventy five, which means that she was forty when she acquired her priesthood.\footnote{161}

\textit{Aemilia Amot/micar sacerdos / Cererum p(ia) vix(it) an(nis) LXXV / consecravit an(nis) XXXV}

“Aemilia Amotmicar, pious priestess of the Cereres, lived seventy-five years; she has dedicated [herself] thirty five years.”

The other African inscription in which is referred to a specified period in service was erected in Saldae in Mauretania. Again it is an epitaph of a \textit{sacerdos} who served Ceres. Unfortunately, the actual number of years is unreadable:\footnote{162}

\textit{Maesolaev<m> Heren/nia M(arci) f(ilia) Tertulla / sacerdos Cere/ris vixit a(nnis) ? / sacerdotium gessit a(nnis)}

“Maesolaem? Herennia Tertulla, daughter of Marcus, priestess of Ceres lived ? years; she held her priesthood for ? years”

It is not certain whether after the words \textit{sacerdotium gessit} a number of years was inscribed, though it is likely, for the \textit{a of annis} or \textit{annos} can be read, after which a number could have been carved. An inscription from Zattara in Africa Proconsularis provides an analogy with the same words \textit{sacerdotium gessit}. Caius Aquilius Telesinus died when he was 103 after he had been priest of the \textit{Genius Patriae} for forty-eight years.\footnote{163} On the other hand, it is also possible to read \textit{anno} instead of \textit{annis}, which would imply that Herennia took up her office during a certain year.\footnote{164} This last option would be an interesting parallel to the male priests of Ceres in Carthage whose priesthood was linked to a year of the religious era (see chapter 3, section 3.5). However, the male Carthaginian \textit{sacerdotes} seem to have served in a cult that was different from the other North African Ceres cults, which makes it plausible

\footnote{160} This was even longer than the mean length of office-holding of the Roman Vestals (26.6 years), and certainly much longer than other Roman priesthoods that were not annual, see: Rüpke (2011) 32-33. In Rome, the more prestigious priesthoods were held for a longer time than less prestigious ones, Rüpke (2011) 33. Guerra Gomez (1987) 62 erroneously writes that Aemilia held the priesthood for 25 years.
\footnote{161} Cat.no.176.
\footnote{162} Cat.no.203. About this woman, see also Delgado Degado (1998) 32.
\footnote{163} ILAlg 1, 540 = AE 1897, 30: D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / C(aius) Aquil/i/us Tele/sinus vix(it) / annis CIII / ex i(i)s sacer/dotium ges(sit) / Geni(i) pat(rae) an(nos) / XXXXXIX / h(ic) s(itus) / e(st) // Casta Satu/ra uxor s(upra) s(cripti) / vix(it) annis / LXX h(ic) s(itae) / est.
\footnote{164} Delgado Degado (1998) 33, writes that Herennia Tertulla served more than one year.
to suppose that the fact that they held their priesthood for only one year was not the norm.\textsuperscript{165} In addition, the other evidence I mentioned here seems to indicate that priestesses could serve for a longer period. Therefore, I think the first option is more convincing, although one cannot exclude the possibility of local differences in the required minimum or maximum number of years a \textit{sacerdos} had to serve.

\textit{Children holding religious offices}

We have seen that Plaetoria Secunda, the \textit{ministra} of Salus, acquired her office when she was seventeen. There is some, though little, epigraphic evidence that attests to much younger women – or rather girls – who held religious offices.\textsuperscript{166} In some cases these offices must have been purely honorific. To be appointed as priestess when one was very young required a high social standing, as generally the importance of a priesthood did not fit with young age, which therefore had to be compensated by something else. Gaia Nummia, who had been public priestess in Beneventum, is a good example. On her inscription she is addressed as \textit{clarissima puella} which suggests that she was young, but also descended from a senatorial family. And indeed, as I will indicate in the next chapter, the \textit{gens Nummia} was quite prestigious.

Regarding the honorific character of religious offices held by young girls, it seems that when a priestess was praised for her ‘indefatigable piety’ \textit{(ob infatigabili pietatem eius)} as in the following inscription, I think we should not interpret this as a religious qualification. Rather, we should see it as a more general positive characteristic that can better be translated as ‘dutiful’ or ‘devoted’, or as an expression of motherly sorrow over losing a lovely daughter:\textsuperscript{167}

\begin{quote}
\textit{D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / Petiliae Q(uinti) f(iliae) Secundinae / sacerdoti Minervae vix(it) / ann(os) VIII m(enses) VII d(ies) XVIII ob infa/tigabili pietat(em) eius Messi/a Dorcas mat(er) infel(icitissima) fil(iae) d(ulcissimae) b(ene) m(erenti) f(ecit)}
\end{quote}

“Dedicated to the spirits of the deceased. To Petilia Secundina, daughter of Quintus, priestess of Minerva. She lived nine years, seven months and eighteen days. Because of her indefatigable piety/devotion, her most unhappy mother Messia Dorcas made this for her very sweet daughter, who deserved well.”

\textsuperscript{165} In contrast to for example the priestesses of Artemis in Cyrenaica who seem to have held their office for one year, after which they joined together in a group, Reynolds (2011) 501.

\textsuperscript{166} In addition, there are statues of young priestesses, for instance that of a \textit{sacerdos Isidis} from Taormina, Palermo, Museo Archeologico Regionale „Antonio Salinas“, Inv. Nr. 704. Children holding religious offices were not uncommon, especially in the third and fourth century, Brouwer (1989) 385. In Rome, the \textit{Saliae} were not older than teenagers, Ginster (2011) 121

\textsuperscript{167} Cat.no.49. Saller and Shaw (1984) 126: especially when children died, affection played a role in the erection of epitaphs. Schultz (2006) 70, also thinks that this priestess probably held a purely honorific office.
Petilia Secundina, whose epitaph was found in Butuntum (region 2), was only nine years old, but that is nothing compared to Extrimicata, the three year old girl who may have been a *serva Iunonis* (see above). The young woman who was *tibicen* was much older (fifteen), though she too was relatively young, compared to the other women in the catalogue. At her fifteenth, this Fulvia Copiola was not only religious flute player, but she was freed as well. Flavia Vera, the *praesula* (lead dancer) from Rome was nearly seven when she died (both also mentioned above).

It seems that like their mothers, children could act in a variety of cults and in many different religious offices, both as priestesses and assistants. The difference between the two must have been that some young assistants could probably really perform their tasks (e.g., dancing and flute playing can very well be done by children) while the child-priestesses may have had only a ceremonial function (and pay their *summa honoraria*, see chapter 5, section 2.3).

**The (supposed) old age of the African sacerdotes Cereris**

In Greco-Roman religion elderly women and widows seem to have played an important role. Apart from many priestesses in Greece who were of an advanced age, the fictive priestess of Juno mentioned by Vergil, that of Venus in Plautus’ *Rudens*, the *alma sacerdos* of Bona Dea described in Propertius’ *Elegies* and the elderly women who acted as priestesses of Liber during the *Liberalia*, we encounter old women in the cult of Ceres. Cicero writes that the *sacerdotes* and *antistitae* of Ceres in Catena on Sicily were ‘of great age’ (*maiores nati*). Most striking though, are the many North African epitaphs of priestesses of Ceres who grew remarkably old. The most extreme ones belong to Numidian *sacerdotes magnae*. Claudia Rufina from Thagaste reached a 103 years, while Iulia Urbana and Aria Anulla died when they were both 101. Firmidia Impetrata from Saddar passed away at the respectable age of 100. In general, most African priestesses of Ceres died when they were older than fifty-five. As of only one Italian *sacerdos Cereris* the age when she died is preserved on stone, we cannot compare the age of the African priestesses to that of their Italian colleagues. However, the one exception, a woman from Puteoli whose name has been lost, also passed away at an advanced age; she died when she was ninety-three.

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168 Cf. Drine (1994) 180-1, who writes that in religion older women played an important role, because of their supposed wisdom and maternal qualities.

166 Connelly (2007) 43.

170 *Aen.* 7.419.

171 *Rudens* 406.


174 Cicero *Verr.* 2.4.99.

175 Drine (1994) 177.

176 Although Quarta died at 59, cat.no.175.

177 Cat.no.218.

178 Cat.no.212 and 154 respectively.

179 Cat.no.201.

180 Cat.no.112.
A more fruitful comparison can be made between the African priestesses of Ceres and their male colleagues. With two exceptions, the male sacerdotes of Ceres (or the Cereres) also died at a considerable age: Marcus Clodius ? Caecilianus from Carthage expired at seventy-two but Publius Valerius Alexa from the same city passed away when he was 105. Even the only priest of Ceres who died outside Africa grew reasonably old: Marcus Nonius Metrodorus, the freedman who had served in the annual Carthaginian cult but whose epitaph was erected in Massilia (see chapter 3) died when he was eighty. One of the two Numidian male sacerdotes Cererum whose age is known, died at ninety-five; he lived in Sadder like Firmidia Impertrata, the sacerdos magna who deceased when five years older. Sittius Ianarius from Tiddis (Numidia) passed away when he was 100 years old.

It is well-known that many African epitaphs attest to people (including most female sacerdotes of other cults) who died at a very old age compared to other regions of the Empire, so we have to be careful not to attach too much value to the high ages of the sacerdotes of Ceres mentioned here. Furthermore, the age at which they died does not tell us anything about the age when the priestesses acquired their priesthood. Maybe they were appointed as priestesses when they were much younger and held their office for a large number of years (cf. above)? Or maybe they held their priesthood during a limited period but were still called priestess after their deaths because it enhanced their prestige? Unfortunately, these questions cannot be solved with the available inscriptions.

However, we should not too readily dismiss the epigraphic evidence. First we have to discuss a statement of Tertullian that has been put forward by modern scholars to show that the sacerdotes serving Ceres in North Africa were indeed exceptional with respect to their age. In De Exhortatione Castitatis 13.2 Tertullian mentions women, dedicated to Ceres Africana, who spontaneously abdicate matrimony, and so live to old age (feminas uero Cereri Africanae, cui etiam sponte abdicato matrimonio assenescent). In my opinion, this quotation does not say that the women were already of advanced age when they gave up their marriage and entered the service of the goddess. Besides, as Tertullian’s observation focuses on (temporary) chastity – see below – and not on age, I think the word assenescent should be interpreted as a way to stress the – in Tertullian’s eyes – positive sacrifice of the abdication of marriage, which the women endured for a long time, and not reaching old age per se. In

181 Cnæus Cornelius Datus from Mustis died when he was only fifty-two (CIL 8, 15585). The most important exception is a certain Aulus (his nomen and cognomen are mostly unreadable); this priest of Ceres died when he was only twenty (ILAlb 383; Cadotte nr. 191).
182 AE 1909, 164.
183 ILTun, 1063 = AE 1924, 33 = ILPBardo-A, 41.
186 CIL 8, 6709 = ILAlq 2, 3618.
187 Hopkins (1966) 247-249; Duncan Jones (1977) 334. In addition, age-awareness of women was generally less than that of men, Duncan-Jones (1977) 339. Furthermore, recording one’s age was almost universal on African epitaphs, Duncan-Jones (1977) 342. Cf. Saller and Shaw (1984) 130 about the high number of elderly people in rural North Africa.
188 Transl. by S. Thelwall. Cf. Ad Ux. 1.6.4. See the next section.
his *De Monogamia*, Tertullian mentions to the same women (then called *sacerdotes*) who live separated from their husbands; there is no reference whatsoever to the age of the priestesses: ¹⁸⁹

*Cereris sacerdotes viventibus etiam viris et consentientibus amica separatione viduarent.*

“The priestesses of Ceres, even during the lifetime and with the consent of their husbands, are widowed by amicable separation.”

In sum, it seems that neither these passages from Tertullian, nor the epigraphic evidence discussed above is sufficient proof for the supposition that the African priestesses of Ceres were all elderly women. In the next section, the same women will figure, and the same quotations of Tertullian will be used in a discussion of what by Drine has been called one of the main characteristics of the African priestesses of Ceres/ the *Cereres*: their chastity. ¹⁹⁰

### 2.2: Chastity and Prostitution

**Chastity**

Chastity was a common feature in many Greco-Roman cults. ¹⁹¹ The most famous examples are of course the Vestals, ¹⁹² but many others can be found; for instance, during the festival of the *Vestalia*, the *flamen Dialis* and *flaminica* had to withhold from sex. ¹⁹³ Livy (39.9.4) mentions continence in relation to the *Bacchanalia*, while Soranus (*Gyn.* 1.32) mentions women who live in religious celibacy, unfortunately without giving any further details. In her book on women’s religious activity in Republican Rome, Schultz writes that that priestesses had to be either matrons (like the *flaminica Dialis* or the *regina sacrorum*), or the opposite: unmarried virgins like the Vestals. ¹⁹⁴ However, it is not certain whether the *sacerdotes* of Ceres of the city of Rome were married or not. ¹⁹⁵

It seems that not one norm existed regarding the sexual status of priestesses in Italy and the provinces, for many *sacerdotes* were married and/or had children, while of others no family members at all are attested. I think is likely that most priestesses were or had been married, as this was generally expected from Roman women (see chapter 1). However, there is some controversy about the married status of the priestesses of Ceres – mainly the African ones – and it has often been supposed that these

¹⁸⁹ *De Monog.* 17.4, transl. by Thelwall.

¹⁹⁰ Drine (1994) 177. According to Drine, the other main characteristic is their old age, discussed above.

¹⁹¹ In Greece, *permanent* chastity seems to have been limited to older priestesses; most priestesses were married, Connelly (2007) 29, 41. In Greece, chastity could also be required of male priests, Osborne (1993) 393.

¹⁹² See e.g., Parker (2004); Wildfang (2006) chapter 4. *Controversia* 1.2 of Seneca deals with a priestess who had to be chaste and pure and born of chaste and pure parents, and had otherwise many similarities to the Vestals.

¹⁹³ Boeis (1973) 97.


women were either widows, or that they had to live apart from their husbands or at least remain abstinent from sex during their term of office.

That *sacerdotes Ceres* could be married is shown by several inscriptions, mostly from Africa. These inscriptions also show that even if the priestesses had to live apart from their husbands, they still perceived themselves as married or were perceived as such by their husbands and children. A good example is the epitaph erected by Baburia Iunaria, who lived in Ammaedara around the turn of the second century AD. As was common for a loving spouse and dutiful mother, this woman took care of the funerary monument of her husband and their daughter. In the epitaph of Quarta, *sacerdos magna* in Gales in Africa Proconsularis, it is explicitly mentioned that she was married to a man named Celer (*uxor Celeris*), with whom she probably had a son called Valens. So it seems that at least some African priestesses of Ceres still had close ties to their families after they had acquired their office. Of course, it remains possible that they had to live in celibacy during the period they held their priesthood but nothing in the inscription suggests this.

The evidence generally used by modern scholars as proof of a (temporary) chastity of *sacerdotes Ceres* is a reference in Ovid and three references by Tertullian, two of which are mentioned above. Ovid writes that in Rome during the yearly festival of Ceres white-clothed matrons (*matres*) had to stay abstinent from sex for nine days (*perque novem noctes venerem tactusque viriles in vetitis numerant*). As may be clear, Ovid does not speak of priestesses, so in my view this cannot be used as sufficient evidence for the (supposed) chastity of *sacerdotes Ceres*. The passages of Tertullian are more convincing. In *Ad Uxorem* where he discusses remarriage, he mentions African women who served Ceres as examples of pagan chastity in order to show that even pagan women could live a life of celibacy, which he preferred over remarriage. These African women need not be virgins, but had to stay abstinent from sex and their marriage, at least during the period they served the goddess, but possibly even for the rest of their life (which may be identical).

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196 See e.g., cat.no.209; the priestess recorded here probably also served Ceres.
197 Cat.no.149.
198 Cat.no.175.
199 Therefore, in my view Schultz’s statement that it is *rightly* accepted that the priestesses remained celibate during their time of office, is exaggerated, Schultz (2007) 15.
201 Contra Cadotte (2007) 360, who writes that the chastity of the African Ceres priestesses had a Roman origin.
202 Apart from the priestesses of Ceres, Tertullian, *De Exhort. Cast.* 13.2 also mentions *virgines* of Minerva and Diana in several places (*quibusdam locis*). It is noteworthy that the *sacerdos* of Minerva, cat.no.49, was only nine years old, and accordingly must have been a virgin.
203 There is evidence for a (temporary) chastity of the Greek priestesses of Demeter Thesmophoros (Lucianus, *Timon* 17) and we have seen in chapter 3 that the African Ceres cult had Greek roots. Remarkably, Heyob (1975) 126, thinks the Tertullian actually meant devotees of Isis. She does not give any convincing arguments to prove her view that *Ceres Africana* was the same deity as Isis, so we can dismiss this statement as unfounded.
204 *Ad Uxorem* 1.6.4. Cf. *De Exhort. Cast.* 13.2 and *De Monog.* 17.4, where the women are called *sacerdotes*. 
**Ceterum uiduas Africanae Cerei adsistere scimus, durissima quidem obliuione a matrimonio affectas. Nam manentibus in uita uiris non modo toro decedunt, sed et alias eis, utique ridentibus, loco suo insinuant; adempto omni contactu, usque ad osculum filiorum et tamen, durante usu, perseverant in tali uiduitatis disciplina, quae pietatis etiam sancta solacia excludit.**

“Moreover, we know that widows minister to the African Ceres; enticed away, indeed, from matrimony by a most stern oblivion: for not only do they withdraw from their still living husbands, but they even introduce other wives to them in their own room----the husbands, of course, smiling on it----all contact (with males), even as far as the kiss of their sons, being forbidden them; and yet, with enduring practice, they persevere in such a discipline of widowhood, which excludes the solace even of holy affection.”

As Tertullian chose this example of pagan chastity likely because the priestesses of Ceres were well-known in northern Africa in the time he lived (around AD 200), we may assume that there were indeed some rules governing the sexual life of these women – though it is by no means certain that we have to take everything he writes literally. He may have exaggerated the strictness of the rules for his own purpose, and have come up with the story that the priestesses introduced other women to their husbands to show the perversity of the heathens. Nevertheless, that the priestesses had to stay abstinent from sex during a certain period seems likely.

Still, it is dubious whether this quote of Tertullian is simply applicable to the situation in Rome or Italy. Even though she has noted this problem, Schultz writes that the Italian priestesses seem to have been widows or old and never married at all. Lundeen holds the same view and suggests that it is possible that the priestesses, both in Italy and Africa, did not have children and husbands or were only loosely attached to these, for most inscriptions do not record children or husbands. She also writes that possibly because the priestesses had to be chaste and leave their families, only single women were appointed as priestesses, which in its turn could explain the absence of commemorators on the epitaphs. It may be clear that this is circular reasoning.

Furthermore, many other priestesses who did not serve Ceres, both from Italy and Africa, are also recorded on simple epitaphs without names of husband and children. In addition, there are several inscriptions of Italian priestesses of Ceres that do record family members, including husbands. Schultz writes that these inscriptions could be the result of a chronological or geographical deviation,

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205 Transl. by S. Thelwall.
209 And not only of priestesses. The epitaphs of the local Pompeian elite, for instance, rarely record other persons than the deceased and sometimes a dedicatory, Mouritsen (2005) 47. Saller and Shaw (1984) 130, 132, 133, have noticed cultural differences in commemorating and write that the percentage of inscriptions that do not mention commemorators varies between areas.
but in my opinion this is rather unconvincing. A much easier explanation is to conclude what I have already stated above: there was no single norm: priestesses could be married and have children, but they could equally well be unmarried or widowed.

Remarkably, the last piece of evidence that could show that a temporary chastity was part of the Italian Ceres cult, is not mentioned by the scholars who have propagated the view that sacerdotes Cereris had to be chaste and live apart from their husbands. It is the epitaph of the priestess Prima Pettiedia from Corfinium (first century BC; see also chapter 3). Peruzzi translates the first lines of this inscription as follows:

‘Near the place of Persephone lies the priestess Prima Pettiedia, called Vibidia during the time she lived without husband…’

If indeed Peruzzi is correct, this temporary divorce from her husband could possibly be linked to Prima Pettiedia’s priesthood of Ceres. This would imply that temporary chastity was a requirement of Ceres priestesses in the Republican period (at least of those in Corfinium). As the translation of this inscription is controversial, and as it is uncertain if the time Prima Pettiedia lived without husband was indeed required by her religious office, I think this epitaph can not be seen as proof of a temporary chastity of sacerdotes Cereris. Furthermore, it is problematic to use an inscription dating from the first century BC as evidence for practices in the time of Tertullian. In sum, the evidence for (temporary) chastity and voluntary divorce of sacerdotes Cereris is not conclusive, though it was likely a part of the Ceres cult in northern Africa.

Sacred prostitution
Another controversial subject related to female priesthodds is sacred prostitution. Several literary sources mention sacred prostitution in various parts of the Graeco-Roman world, and many modern scholars have discussed the topic. A town they have paid much attention to, is Sicca Veneria in North Africa, where the goddess Venus was worshipped. Members of her religious personnel are often supposed to have acted as sacred prostitutes. This is of particular interest for this thesis, because we have seen above that there is epigraphic evidence of various people – both men and women – active in the Venus cult of Sicca, including religious slaves.

211 Peruzzi (1995) 13, 15. For the text, see the appendix.
212 See Budin (2008) for references. Rituals involving sexual acts have attracted much attention, see e.g. Rousselle (1988) 107-112, who writes that a certain sexually slanted religious festival during which men had to take hold of women in the dark, ‘doubtless’ became a part of the cult of the African Cereres. Besides, she thinks that nudity was ‘in any case’ part of some of the rituals of Ceres in Africa. As the evidence she uses to back those two views is rather meagre and unconvincing, and because Ceres was generally viewed as a chaste goddess, I think we can dismiss these views as speculation.
Rives thinks, based on a statement of Valerius Maximus, quoted below, that Punic women acted as temple prostitutes. This would imply that the cult was not imported from Rome, as some have maintained, also because temple prostitution seems to have been no part of the Venus cult in the City.\(^{213}\) Rives maintains that the ‘practice of temple prostitution strongly suggests that the cult was Semitic in origin, or at least subject to great Semitic influence.’\(^{214}\) This Semitic influence would have come from Sicily as at Eryx a comparable system of temple slaves and freedmen as in Sicca is attested, while such a system was not common in Roman cults.\(^{215}\) However, we have seen above that religious slaves of various cults are attested on inscriptions.

Although many other modern scholars also simply believe that temple prostitution existed in Sicca, Eryx and elsewhere;\(^{216}\) there is, according to Budin, nothing in the epigraphic sources – neither from Eryx, nor from Sicca – that attests to temple prostitution in those places. Only slaves in service of Venus are recorded, and there is nothing that can prove that these slaves, neither the female, nor the male, were prostitutes.\(^{217}\) Nevertheless, Cadotte writes about the inscription of Baricca, mentioned in section 1.5 of this chapter, that it might record a prostitute in service of Venus.\(^{218}\) Budin has convincingly shown that the statement of Valerius Maximus, which has led to the interpretation of the inscription of Baricca as possible proof of a sacred prostitute, is not as straightforward as it may seem. Valerius Maximus writes about the cult of Venus in Sicca Veneria:\(^{219}\)

\begin{quote}
Siccae enim fanum est Veneris, in quod se matronae conferebant atque inde procedentes ad quaeestum dotes corporis iniuria contrahebant, honesta nimiret tam inhonesto uinucle coniugia iunctae.
\end{quote}

Budin translates it as follows:

\(^{213}\) Rives (1994b) 301.
\(^{216}\) E.g., Tlalti (1978) 180; Stehle (1989) 152; Palmer (1997) 120; Schindler (1998) 120-138. Kunz (2006) 37 writes that the temple prostitution in Sicca Veneria was non-permanent because it was limited to the pre-nuptial state. Schilling (1980) 450-451, even thinks that in the sanctuary of Venus in Casinum in Italy women served as prostitutes. This is, in my opinion, not based on sound evidence (inscriptions recording several women making dedications to Venus: \textit{CIL}. 10.5166; 5167; 5165).
\(^{217}\) See also Lindner (2009) 301, 308, 318, 319. Yon believes that in Fenicia, Carthage, the occidental part of the Mediterranean and on Cyprus sacred prostitution existed, although the sources are dubious. She writes that in Carthage a ‘\textit{mt ’sirt}, a female servant of Astarte has been attested, although in my opinion, this does not automatically to point to sacred prostitution, Yon (2009) 208-9
\(^{218}\) Cat.no.208; Cadotte (2007) 209.
\(^{219}\) Val. Max. 2.6.15. Plautus, \textit{Poenulus} 930-949 is another source for modern speculations about sacred prostitution.
“For at Sicca is a temple of Venus in which the matrons used to gather and going forth from there for profit they used to acquire dowries by illicit use of the body, undoubtedly to join with such a dishonest bond honest marriages.”

The word iniuria deserves special attention, as it shows that the matrons could not have been prostitutes, because ‘[p]rofit for sex would not have been iniustus for actual prostitutes’. Besides, the word quaestus does not necessarily refer to prostitution, but only to something indecent. Budin concludes that the ‘matrons of Sicca are condemned because they publicly commit adultery and make a profit from it.’ And permitting women to commit adultery was obviously very scandalous in Roman eyes. Of course, this is not to say that the Venus cult of Sicca was not linked to selling sex — only that no sacred prostitutes were involved, or, in other words: cult personnel (slaves) attached to the temple.

In conclusion, there is no proof of women who were slaves of the temple in Sicca and sold their bodies in service of the goddess at a regular basis. The religious slaves recorded epigraphically were simply unfree persons who belonged to a deity and its temple, comparable to state slaves. This is supported by the tasks of the Eryxian slaves of Venus, as listed by Cicero; their tasks varied from keeping order to financial duties, but nowhere prostitution is mentioned. It seems the imagination of the modern scholars is running wild.

2.3: Clothing and outward appearance

The last topic of this chapter is much less controversial than the previous two. While wearing special garments was probably required of a sacerdos, her clothing has not evoked half as much speculation as the (supposed) chastity and prostitution. Nevertheless, it deserves its own section, for special clothing was linked to the religious persona of the priestess.

Distinctive clothing was often worn on religious occasions, by both priests and worshippers (i.e. usually initiates). In Rome, special religious clothing that was worn each day and was combined with a special way of living was reserved for the flaminica Dialis, the regina sacrorum, the Vestals and the Saliae. Priestesses in Italy and the provinces were probably also recognizable as

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223 Lindner (2009) 315. Additionally, if sacred prostitution existed in classical antiquity, it will probably never have taken place in a temple, considering the numerous prescriptions regulating purity that were imposed on people entering a sanctuary, as Dr. Lucinda Dirven has kindly brought to my attention.
225 In Greece, regulations concerning clothing and finery also existed, mainly in Demeter or Demeter-related cults, Osborne (1993) 398.
religious officials – but likely only on religious occasions, as full time priesthoods were rare. Croom writes that the special clothing of priestesses was often old fashioned and needed to be fastened in a special way. It was intended to make the priestess stand out from ‘ordinary’ people. Alternatively, the requirement not to wear certain garments could also be part of a religious office: Picard mentions an inscription from somewhere in modern Algeria that records a priestess who had served many years barefoot. Unfortunately, he does not give a reference to this inscription, and I have not been able to trace it and verify its contents.

Something which was certainly far more universal than serving barefoot was wearing the infula. The infula was the common sign of Roman priesthoods, mainly worn during sacrifices. An infula consisted of a beaded ribbon wrapped around the head, with its ends hanging loose about the neck or on the shoulders. Cicero writes that when he visited Enna, he was met by the priestesses of Ceres, who wore infulae and carried sacred branches (sacerdotes Ceres cum infulis ac verbenis fuerunt). They had come to him as suppliants because of the loss of the cult statue of the goddess (see chapter 3). Apart from the infula, priestesses could be recognised as religious officials by other headgear. Varro mentions the capital, a woven band fastened to the hair, worn by sacerdotulae. Crowns were worn by priests and priestesses of various cults, though mainly in the Greek East. The few reliefs of priestesses that accompany the inscriptions included in the catalogue do not depict infulae or crowns, but often these reliefs are damaged or crudely carved, so I think there is no reason to assume that the priestesses in the catalogue did not wear such head coverings during religious ceremonies.

In various cults the clothing of the priest or priestess seems to have resembled that of the deity he or she served. By their outward appearance flaminicae resembled imperial women and priestesses of Isis wore the same clothes as the goddess, although it is unclear whether this clothing was meant for daily use or for religious occasions only. Tertullian (De Pallio 4.10.2) mentions the special clothing worn by African initiates (not sacerdotes) in the cults of Ceres, Bellona and Saturn. Those who were

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227 The flamines in the provinces had to wear special (purple) clothing, Fishwick (1987) 132. Clothing of initiates of Isis: Apuleius, Met. 11.10; 11.24; Heyob (1975) 100; Wrede (1981) 40. Clothing of priests of Cybele: Apuleius, Met. 8.27. Other references to special religious clothing and hairstyle: Apuleius, Met. 2.28; 11.30
228 Croom (2000) 112, 113. Cf. Olson (2008) 11: ‘Female dress in Roman antiquity ideally marked a woman’s rank and status, sexual as well as social, and displayed the characteristics of her role in marriage and society’.
229 He also writes that in North Africa the priests of Hercules had to walk barefoot in the temple, Picard (1954) 138.
230 Festus 100.7L; Schade (2003) 101. About flaminicae, the infula and a link with the empress, sec: Hemelrijk (2006b) and Hemelrijk (2007).
232 Cicero, Verr. 4.110.
233 Varro, L.L. 5.29.130: item texta fasciola, qua capillum in capite alligarent, dictum capital a capite, quod sacerdotulae in capite etiam nunc solent habere.
initiated into the cult of Saturn wore purple and red, the adherents of Bellona wore dark clothes, and initiates of Ceres were to be clad in white, and wore a head-band and a bonnet (ob cultum omnia candidatum et ob notam uitae et privilegium galeri Cereri initiuntur).238 This white clothing mirrored that of the goddess Ceres herself,239 although white garments were also worn by priestesses of Juno in Rome, according to Ovid, so may be white was a relatively common colour for religious garments.240 This is also suggested in Plautus, Rudens 270, where a priestess of Venus tells two girls that they should have come to the temple dressed in white. Probably the same costume as that mentioned by Tertullian is meant in the Passion of Felicitas and Perpetua 18.4, where it is said that the convicted male Christians had to put on the clothing of the priests of Saturn, and the women that of those who were consecrated to Ceres (cogerentur habitum induere, uiri quidem sacerdotum Saturni, feminae uero sacrataram Cereri). It is not certain whether the garments of priestesses of Ceres are meant, for the word sacratarum is used, but this is possible because of the parallel with the priests (sacerdotes) of Saturn.241 Despite the fact that priestesses could have to wear special clothing, their statues often depict them without any priestly attributes and wearing normal clothes; only their head is covered. The statue of the Pompeian Eumachia is a good example (see figure 8). It has been stated that the covered head of statues of priestesses implied worship and female ideals of modesty and chastity.242 However, because several statues of emperors – for instance the well-known Augustus Pontifex from the Museo Nazionale Romano – depict them capite velato, I think the veiled head of priestesses as such is in the first place a reference to their priesthood, as it shows them in the key moment of the central ritual in Roman religion: the sacrifice.243 This fits with Olson’s statement that in general statues of veiled women have a religious context and often show them sacrificing.244 Varro (LL 5.29.130) provides us with literary evidence that supports this view. He writes that Roman women normally covered their

238 (…) cur istos non spectas uel illos item habitus, qui noutitatis vestitum religionem mentiuntur? Cum ob cultum omnia candidatum et ob notam uitae et privilegium galeri Cereri initiuntur; cum ob diversam affectionem tenebricæ usitis et tetrici super caput uellæris in Bellonæ montes fugantur; cum latioris purpuræ ambitio et Galatici ruboris superiectio Saturnum commendat - Or why do you not look at those other garments that in their novel dress falsely claim religion? For it is for entirely white clothing and for the sign of the head-band and the privilege of the bonnet that people are initiated into Ceres; it is for the opposite affection of dark dress and a gloomy covering upon the head, that people flee into the mountains of Bellona; and the (opportunity of) wrapping with a broader, purple tunic and of taking on a Galatic, red mantle commends Saturn (to others). Transl. by V. Hunink.
240 Am. 3.13.30.
241 Guerra Gomez (1987) 63 thinks the clothing of priestesses is meant.
243 Cf. Welch (2007) 561. Obviously, this does not mean that together with other elements, the statue of a veiled priestess did not propagate a message of chastity as well. About statues of priestesses and other women, see: Mürer, forthcoming.
244 Olson (2008) 35.
heads with a *rica* for sacrificing (*sic* *rica ab rito, quod Romano rito sacrificium feminae cum faciunt, capita velant*).\textsuperscript{245}

![Image of a statue](image)

**Figure 8: Statue of Eumachia**\textsuperscript{246}

Obviously, much more can be said about clothes worn by priestesses, for instance in relation to different styles that were fashionable during certain periods and in certain areas. However, the information given here suffices to show that priestesses did not look like ordinary women during the fulfilment of their religious tasks – instead, in some cases they resembled the immortal gods they served.

**Conclusion**

As has been stated in the introduction to this chapter, holding a religious office usually required an active attitude. It was not just a ceremonial role (apart from priesthoods held by young children) and in certain cases seems to have had implications for the personal life of a woman. Holding a priesthood was not simply a matter of being entitled to call oneself *sacerdos* and enjoy the accompanying prestige. A priestess was the representative of her community – or sometimes a special group within it – that

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\textsuperscript{245} See also Flemming (2007) 104-105. For covering the head during religious activities: Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 10.  
\textsuperscript{246} Photo taken from P. Zanker, *Pompeji. Stadtbild und Wohngeschmack* (Mainz 1995) 106 Abb. 49.
she had to embody during sacrifices which were the central acts of Roman religion, but also during processions and other rites. Her tasks were manifold and assured her a position in the public eye. Other members of the cult personnel may have had tasks that were held in less high esteem, but these tasks were still necessary to enable the worshipping of the deity they served in the proper fashion. The women and their families took enough pride in their religious roles to have them recorded on stone. Their inscriptions show the great variety of religious offices that were open to women.

But there could be more to a priesthood than performing religious tasks. The person and the behaviour of the priestesses could become a focus of ritualization. In their outward appearance, at least when they were fulfilling their religious duties, priestesses looked different from other women. This underlined the special role they had in their community. As some priestesses seem to have held their priesthood for many years – although not much is known about the time they had to serve – they will have been clearly visible during a long time of their life. Sometimes priestesses were very young when they were appointed, which shows both the value attached priesthods and the importance of the family of the girl in question.\textsuperscript{247} Others, such as the (African) \textit{sacerdotes Ceres}, may have been of a ripe age, but there are many uncertainties concerning the age when these women held their priesthods. The same priestesses of Ceres may have had to live (temporarily) separated from their husbands and remain chaste during their time of office, but again, this is controversial, certainly where it concerns the Italian \textit{sacerdotes Ceres}. Local and chronological differences cannot be excluded. Even more debatable than the age and supposed chastity of the priestesses of Ceres, is the topic of religious prostitution in the cult of Venus. In my opinion, there is no convincing evidence which shows that slave women had to act as prostitutes.

There is one thing that is certain though: priesthods and other religious offices provided women with a possibility to step aside – but not necessarily, outside! – from the general way of life open to women – that of being a wife and mother – and to step inside the public world of their communities. In the next chapter we will see that this public role could be further expanded by taking part in the system of euergetism.

\textsuperscript{247} As has been observed about honorific offices for women in the Greek East, it was the prestige they acquired that was the most important, MacMullen (1980) 215. Cf. Marshall (1975) 125.