

Priestess or housewife?

Statues of *Vestales* and *matronae* from the second and third centuries AD at Rome and their gender-related implications.



Claire van Driel

Cover image: *Vestal Virgin before a burning altar*, painting by Jean François Sablet from 1781 (source: http://www.artnet.com/artists/LotDetailPage.aspx?lot_id=ECAD62ED161A719090126EEF436E27A9)

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Virgo Vestalis scripsit hunc versum: Felices nuptae! Moriar nisi nubere dulce est. Rea est incesti.

“A *Vestalis* wrote this verse: ‘How happy married women are! I may die if marriage is not sweet.’”

(Sen. *Contr.* VI.8)

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Preface

Just having started both Archaeology and Classics in 2006, I principally envisaged to finish in four years or maybe five. However, I do not have a single regret about doing many other things (such as extracurricular courses and jobs) that I loved, which ultimately resulted in my studying at the Leiden University for six years.

The last year, I have enjoyed the privilege of staying a few weeks at the Dutch Royal Institute at Rome (KNIR) to do research for this thesis. Therefore, my gratitude goes out to the scholars in this institute who offered me the chance to look at the statues of the Vestal virgins up close, and allowed me to use the extensive collection of books available in its library. It has been very productive as well as soothing to be able to sit in a large, old-fashioned room filled with books till even after midnight.

Furthermore, my gratitude extends equally to my thesis supervisor, prof. N. Sojc. Notwithstanding some initial misunderstandings on my part, I am very glad to have been supervised by prof. Sojc. I can honestly say that, despite both of our tight schedules and long-distance questions and answers, I feel that prof. Sojc has been helpful to an immense extent. She has motivated me, pointed out the common theme in my literature notes that I had not noticed but which ultimately led to the main question and the whole text, and has given me advice on all content-related issues.

Next to that, I would like to take the opportunity to show my appreciation to Leontine en Martijn van Eersel, my parents and Saskia van Driel, who have kept me at work, supported me and given advice and deadlines when I needed it. And of course I thank Sander Brabander for always putting up with me, discussing my research problems, reading my thesis, and giving all the help he could while he was writing and correcting his thesis as well.

Finally, I thank all the others (especially Andrea Raat, whom I have had multiple border-crossing adventures with, who has always been keen to provide me with information concerning conferences, and who has proven to be a great ‘Roman-women-thesis-friend’) who have taken interest in me and helped me when I was too buried in courses, theses and other matters to meet and talk.

Leiden, 8 June 2012

1 Introduction

1.1 *Vestales* in Roman society

Nowadays, Roman women are a much-discussed subject in literature of archaeological and classical studies. Under influence of feminism and gender studies, a lot of books concerning the women's role in Roman society and art have been published (see, for instance, works by E. D'Ambra (2007), S. Dixon (2001), E. Fantham *et al.* (1994), R. Hawley and B. Levick (1995), D. Kleiner and S. Matheson (1996, 2000), M. Lefkowitz and M. Fant (1982), and S. Pomeroy (1975)). As part of this general topic, a growing interest is directed to the Vestal virgins, the priestesses that served the goddess Vesta.

These *Vestales*¹, a selected group of six girls with an age between six and ten years old and coming from leading political families, were supposed to serve the goddess for a minimum of thirty years during which they had to perform a number of tasks while being obliged to remain unmarried and chaste (this exact information is mainly based on the texts of Plutarch (*Vita Numa Pompilii* 9-10, in *Bíoi Paráλληλλοι*) and Aulus Gellius (*Noctes Atticae* 1.12), a Greek historian and Roman grammarian respectively from the first and second centuries AD). According to Plutarch, the institution of the cult was attributed to Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome in the seventh and sixth centuries BC.

The *Vestales*' most important task was to tend the sacred fire in the temple of Vesta in the Roman Forum. Because of their virginity, the Vestals, as an 'order', were able to serve the collective Roman people (Pomeroy 1975, 210). Equally, the continuation of the fire was thought to be connected to the continuation of the city of Rome: on pain of death, the *Vestales* were obliged to keep the fire blazing in order to ensure Rome's existence. The goddess Vesta and her cult were important for the Romans because she was associated with the hearth, which had a central position in every domestic context (see, for further information, Parker 2004, 563-601). *Vestales* were also part of several rites, which are described in Ovid's *Fasti*, a calendar that sums up all the annual rites (see Finley 2002, 154; Takács 2008, 25-59; Wildfang 2002, *pass.*). According to R.L. Wildfang's analysis, all of these rites "concern rituals that have to do with purificatory matters" or with "what might best be termed as a 'stores-function', that is a concern with the manufacture, preservation and distribution of religious substances" (Wildfang 2002, 254). Thus, the character of these rituals may define what role the

¹ I have decided to use the Latin terms for Vestal virgin and matron throughout the whole text, as this is more accurate in my opinion: the translations do not reflect entirely the meaning of the Latin words. As opposed to *matrona*, *Vestalis* has been written with a capital letter, because it refers to the goddess Vesta, whereas *matrona* is associated with the Latin word for mother, *mater*.

Vestales played in Roman society. They have been generally seen as fertility priestesses (Pomeroy 1975, 211; Staples 1998, 47; Takács 2008, 36; Wildfang 2002, 224 and 2006, 4), mainly in the sense of agricultural welfare, which is, of course, what the continuation of the empire depended upon.

However, these functions do not define in what way the *Vestales* fit into society as women: ascribing a *solely* religious function to them does not reflect their identity. As a matter of fact, *Vestales* had many privileges in comparison to most other women. A few of them include exemption from tutelage, male guardianship (which had also been permitted to Livia and Octavia, the wife and daughter of emperor Augustus), which automatically gave them the right to buy or sell property and to write their own will (Freisenbruch 2011, 52-3; Wildfang 2006, 64), as well as permission to sit on the best seats in the theatre (which was also allowed to women of the imperial family) (Hemelrijk 1999, 46; Mekacher 2006, 30-1), and permission to give testimony in judicial matters (Mekacher 2006, 28; Wildfang 2006, 67).

Because of these non-womanlike privileges, several authors have stressed the similarities between *Vestales* and men (see Beard 1980, 17-8; Pomeroy 1975, 213; Versnel 1993, 266). Although sometimes the freedom of tutelage was not seen as a privilege but as a disadvantage (because a *Vestalis* also lost the right to inherit property from her family), it still provided her with more responsibility and self-control.

On the other hand, while seemingly in contradiction with the former statement, the rite of *captio*, a modern construct of an ancient act, is seen as a means of comparison between *Vestales* and maiden girls (Mekacher 2006, 26-7; Versnel 1993, 269; Wildfang 2006, 37-50). *Vestales* were taken away as young girls from their father's tutelage, and came to stand under the authority of the *pontifex maximus*. Leaving the one symbolic stage and entering the other, the rite of passage of *captio* (which also involved a physical move from her own house to the Atrium Vestae in the Roman Forum) is often identified with a wedding, during which a maiden became a *matrona* and went from her father's guardianship to her husband's.

Next to these two views, a third theory compares *Vestales* to *matronae* or stresses that they have a place in society that falls between categories of *matronae*, priests, and maidens (Beard 1995, 167; Takács 2008, 80-6; Versnel 1993, 270; Wildfang 2006, 7). A *matrona* is a freeborn, married woman, recognisable because of specific clothing, and she is part of the unofficial *ordo matronarum*, the social class of *matronae* (see, for more information, Hemelrijk 1999, 9-16; Olson 2008, 25-41; Schultz 2006, 158n.7). As a wife of a Roman citizen, she was supposed to have children and to supervise the household. She had an important social status within the *familia* and was expected to be virtuous in

many ways (for instance, *pietas*, *modestia*, and *pudicitia* are some of the qualities ascribed to a *matrona*) in order to be a good wife and an example for her children (Hemelrijk 1999, 60-1; Luschnig *et al.* 2005, 61-3). Her duties included the overseeing of the staff, such as cooks, cleaners, maids, the children's nurses and tutors, and keepers of jewellery and garments, but she also acted as a hostess at thrown parties (Luschnig *et al.* 2005, 129). Imperial *matronae*, such as empresses, also functioned as patronesses within a more public sphere than other *matronae*. Over all, *matronae* had a supervising role that consisted of specific duties, mainly in order to maintain the system of the domestic activities.

Vestales are associated with *matronae* because of several reasons. First, some of the privileges granted to *Vestales* were, very exceptionally, also given to *matronae*: members of the imperial family were allowed to occupy seats near the emperor, and Livia and Octavia were given exemption of tutelage.

Secondly, the *Vestales*' chastity could be associated with the somewhat more abstract idea of chastity that fitted the *matrona*. This opinion has been voiced by, for instance, M. Beard (see below) and assumes that actual virginity can be compared to the social moral concept of chastity. Although, the *matrona* was usually a mother, both were supposed to be pure and virtuous.

Besides, all of them had the same household duties, and, according to Cicero, an important exemplary function to the lower-class women:

Quomque Vesta quasi focum urbis, ut Graeco nomine est appellata — quod nos prope idem <ac> Graecum, <non> interpretatum nomen tenemus —, complexa sit, ei colendae <VI> virgines praesint, ut advigiletur facilius ad custodiam ignis, et sentiant mulieres <in> naturam feminarum omnem castitatem pati.

As Vesta, as she is called by the Greek name – which we [the Romans] have stayed close to and do not use a translated name – lays a hold of, as it were, the hearth of the city, six virgins who have to take care of this are in charge of this, so that the fire is watched over more easily in its safekeeping, and so that women realise that every chastity exists in the woman's nature.²

Cic. *De Leg.* II.12.29

Finally, many studies have discussed the similarities in clothing and hairstyle of both *Vestales* and *matronae* (Beard 1980, 16; Beard 1995, 167; Olson 2008, 23; Luschnig *et al.* 2005, 38; Takács 2008, 83; Versnel 1993, 270; Wildfang 2006, 11-3). Important in this case is the fact that all the available information is based on sources that provide representations of people (such as sculpture and literature), not characteristics of real people. I will return to this issue later on.

² All translations are my own.

The hair of the *Vestales* was worn in the same style as brides, who were about to become *matronae*. In combination with this they wore *vittae*³, bands of cloth or wool that were tied into the hair, which were also worn by *matronae*.

Next to that, the *stola*, a ground-reaching garment that was worn over a tunic, was also a symbol of status: only the classes of *matronae* and *Vestales* were allowed to wear it. All these garments have been thought to be associated with the chastity and modesty of the women who wore them. Therefore, if *Vestales* could be compared to *matronae*, Beard states, “maybe then their virginity was to be interpreted not so much as literal virginity, but as the more general, moral, *pudicitia* of the Roman matron.” (Beard 1995, 167). An interpretation like this might be rather far-fetched, but it shows that much interest has been taken in research concerning the comparison between *Vestales* and *matronae*.

However, there is still an ongoing discussion whether *Vestales* did actually wear the *stola*, because determining if *Vestales* in sculptural representations are actually wearing a *stola* is difficult (see Olson 2008, 27; Staples 1998, 146-7). Therefore, it is important to take this assumed association of *Vestales* with *matronae* into question.

Many remarks about hairstyle and clothing are partially based on statements of classical Roman authors like Festus, Plautus, and Ovid. Next to these sources, sculptures of *Vestales* have been examined in order to acquire a better idea of their identity and social role.

What has not been done so far is closely research the similarities and differences between *Vestales* and *matronae* in sculpture, which is what I intend to do in this thesis. Did the Romans perceive Vestal statues as different from *matronae* or not? Is the archaeological literature, that sees *Vestales* as a kind of *matronae*, doing so correctly or are these authors influenced by modern theories of gender? I have reason to suspect the latter, since the social role of *Vestales* has been tried to be determined in relation to other women. Interestingly, throughout history people have ascribed matters from their own times to those of other periods, as can be seen from the front image from 1781 by Jean François Sablet, for instance. The sort of clothing that a *Vestalis* wore changes as it is depending on the period the scholar or in this case, a painter, lived in.

After explaining the concept of gender and in what ways it has been applied to archaeology, I will discuss several statues from a specific core group of *Vestales* by providing detailed descriptions and analyzing the Latin literature about them. This group of *Vestales* that will be at the heart of this research consists of five statues from the Atrium Vestae in the Roman Forum, dating to the second and third centuries AD.

³ A list of Latin terms and definitions concerning clothing and hairstyle can be found in the glossary at the end of the thesis.

Subsequently, I will compare the results thereof with those of the analysis of five statues of *matronae*. Thus, I hope to be able to give a well-informed view on the similarities and differences between the ideas on the relationship between *Vestales* and *matronae* in archaeological literature on the one hand and the analyses of actual statues of both of them and the Latin literature about them on the other hand. Examining this relationship between *Vestales* and specifically *matronae* is interesting because the ambiguous position that the *Vestales* have is best shown and investigated in their supposed relationship with the *matronae*: the link between *Vestales* and maidens is obvious, and the link between *Vestales* and men is very difficult to find concrete, iconographic evidence of. Therefore, my research will at least clarify the link between *Vestales* and *matronae*, and maybe even strengthen or diminish the current ideas about it. Hopefully, I will be able to say that either the statues of *Vestales* were perceived by the Romans as indistinguishable from maidens and *matronae*, or that the *Vestales* were recognised as such, a separate type that differs from other women.

One final matter needs to be discussed here: how do statues correlate with real people, or how can information about the social role of the real *Vestales* be distilled from statue analyses? I believe a relationship between reality and art does exist. However, art (both statues and Latin literature, for that matter) is subjective: statues and texts are influenced by political-economic circumstances. With this in mind, information about *Vestales* in the Roman society can still be drawn from their statues, especially because real issues are reflected in art. For instance, if Augustus has himself depicted as *pontifex maximus*, this says something about his political wish to be portrayed as a religious figure.

Therefore, by researching statues of *Vestales* and those of *matronae* (and the Latin literature concerning these), it may not be possible to provide information about their real individual identities or lives, but it may clarify somewhat the general interrelationship between both of these classes because of typological similarities and differences that reflect the social status in reality.

1.2 The concept of gender

*sculpsit ebur formamque dedit, qua femina nasci
nulla potest, operisque sui concepit amorem.
250 virginis est verae facies, quam vivere credas,
et, si non obstet reverentia, velle moveri:
ars adeo latet arte sua.*

He sculpted ivory and gave it such beauty with which a woman could not be born, and with his own work he fell in love. Her face is of a real virgin, whom you would believe to live, wanting to be moved, if modesty did not prevent: thus, his art conceals his art.

Ov. *Met.* X. 248-52

modo grata puellis

260 *munera fert illi conchas teretesque lapillos*
et parvas volucres et flores mille colorum
liliaque pictasque pilas et ab arbore lapsas
Heliadum lacrimas; ornat quoque vestibus artus,
dat digitis gemmas, dat longa monilia collo,
 265 *aure leves baccae, redimicula pectore*
pendent: cuncta decent; nec nuda minus formosa
videtur.

Now he brings it gifts that are pleasing to girls, shells and smooth pebbles and small birds and flowers of a thousand colours and lilies and coloured balls and tears of the Heliades that drop down from trees; he also drapes its limbs with clothing, gives gems around the fingers, gives long necklaces for the neck, polished pearls hang from the ears, collars on her breast: all things adorn it; but it seems no less beautiful naked.

Ov. *Met.* X. 259-66

These passages, both taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and concerning the story of Pygmalion who fell in love with the female statue he had sculpted, provide us with some information on the concepts of identity and gender. First of all, it shows the differences between the viewer and the statue: Pygmalion made the statue and therefore had the control to shape it in whatever way he liked. But once the sculpture is finished, it gets a hold over him: the sculptor himself, as a viewer, is influenced by the sculpture. The statue awakens desire in Pygmalion, which results in him taking up a certain social role, that of the wooing man.

The fact that a statue can convey a message, or plant emotions into a person makes us aware of the possibility that a sculptor meant for this to happen. A problem with this is that we do not know who the viewers were in Roman times. As to the statues of *Vestales* specifically, they have all been found within the Atrium Vestae, their house. Its accession was perhaps usually only allowed to the *Vestales* and the *pontifices* (Mekacher 2006, 102). Yet M. Lindner states that it was a public building which many people could access, although the exact original locations of the statues are uncertain (Lindner 1996, 130). Whichever the case, the possibility that only female viewers have been looking at the statues must be taken into account, which is an important thing to keep in mind as otherwise the statues might have looked differently (see, for more information on viewer and statue in relation to gender, Kampen 1996, 20-2).

Secondly, in both text passages a social role is ascribed to Pygmalion and his statue: she is a virgin (which is supposed to be the ideal situation) and she 'must' be spoiled with gifts. Both passages reflect proper behaviour, according to Roman conventions, for a man who is trying to win a girl's love. Also, specific gifts are suitable for girls: flowers, gems or even birds were only presents for women. Therefore, the social roles ascribed to both Pygmalion and his statue are gender-related: certain behaviour suits either a man or a woman. The idea that something is specifically labelled male or female is what forms the base of gender studies. Since the role of women in ancient societies became of more scholarly interest, gender studies have been developed in many different

directions (one of the books that stresses the need that women must be paid attention to is Pomeroy 1975). I will not go further into all the varied views and theories that exist today (such as the feminist views that are interwoven with gender theory), but only explain the basic idea of gender before focusing on its relation with *Vestales* and why it is of use in this research (for further reading, see Butler 2006, 10-7; 22-34; Brumfiel 2007, 1-28; Stig Sørensen 2007, 87-90).

Masculinity and femininity have an important place in all societies. To gender, the difference between biological differences amongst men and women on the one side and their social constructions on the other is of interest. Often, specific tasks have been ascribed to men and women, such as hunting to men and gathering to women (prehistoric societies) or politics to men and the household to women (Roman society). However, this is a very narrow view. Since the 1970s, gender studies have been trying to broaden this view by showing that these firm gender roles sometimes shift or even overlap (Johnson 1999, 116-31; Nelson 2005, 127-33; Renfrew and Bahn 2004, 224-28). Of course, in some cases biological differences naturally cause that some activities are done by men or women, and in some cases the 'expected' division of roles is simply the truth. In Roman society, men were dominant, and women were supposed to take care of the household. Next to practical prohibitions like not being an official citizen or the fact that they were subjected to tutelage, they were believed to be more irrational and less capable of good judgment than men (Hemelrijk 1999, 91). This is why *Vestales* are seen as not 'wholly' male or female: people have a specific view of what they should be like.

In this respect, it seems quite obvious why gender is a suitable framework for this research: the scholars that have discussed the status and the social identity of *Vestales* all assume that there is a specific role that *Vestales* have to fit in. However, maybe they have a social role that is not at all comparable to the roles of men, maidens, or *matronae*. Beard rightfully states that the religion actively constitutes what certain social roles are (Beard 1995, 169), so there might be a specific social role for all the people that are concerned with the religious sphere. That priestesses of Vesta had a special role in Roman society which brought certain disadvantages and privileges along with it, is a fact. However, scholars seem to keep on comparing the *Vestales'* status with that of other people in Roman society, as I have already shown. These sheer comparisons indicate that the authors are biased towards a gender-related view: why is the *Vestalis* not seen as an entity within Roman society? Why does one not investigate her religious role rather than her social role? Surely, the *Vestales'* activities and participation in rituals are discussed, but these are always assumed to be examples of their special status and connected to the privileges they had. Yet the fact that they were free from tutelage did not mean that they

did not stand under the authority of *pontifex maximus*, but it did deny them inheritance from their family. Also, whereas they did indeed have the privilege of having the best seats in the theatre, on the other hand they were severely punished when they were proved to have been unchaste (they were buried alive). How special was the *Vestales*' status? E. Brumfiel seems to support this view: "individuals may be offered higher standing in some areas of life (e.g., prestige) at the cost of low standing in other areas of life (e.g., autonomy)" (Brumfiel 2007, 3). According to her, "archaeologists should investigate the various dimensions of social well-being and what is gained and what is lost at each step of social change" (Brumfiel 2007, 4).

A different point I would like to stress the importance of is the personal background of the scholars that wrote the archaeological literature concerning *Vestales* and their relationship with *matronae*. I will very shortly discuss the degree and interests of particularly Beard, S. Takács, H. Versnel, and R. Wildfang: all have well-known feminist views or are even connected to institutions like the Women's and Gender Studies Graduate Faculty at New Jersey State University. The only exception is Versnel, who has been studying inconsistencies in Greek and Roman religion and has therefore no specific interest in *Vestales*. Remarkably, he is also one of the few male authors that wrote something on this subject.

Returning to the passages of Ovid on Pygmalion, one notices that Roman virgin girls were supposed (at least according to Ovid, who probably presented an ideal situation to us) to receive gifts, wear necklaces and gems, and be "draped with clothing". It is common knowledge that Roman men, women, and children of different ages and rankings wore different and gender-specific clothing. I have already mentioned the *stola*, but there was also a difference in colours. Women were allowed to wear clothes in several colours (Olson 2008, 11), but T. Worsfold distinctively argues that all the *Vestales* wore white (Worsfold 1934, 53-8). I want to stress in relation with this point that Roman women would probably not have thought of their own clothes as gender-specific (just as, nowadays, most men do not wear skirts and do not think about this, because it is what is 'normal'). This is illustrated by Ovid's use of the word *grata*, which means 'pleasing' or 'welcome': Roman girls like gifts that are 'normally' given to them, without even expecting the chance of receiving a present like a sword. Therefore, specific gifts or clothing are associated with a specific kind of gender or social class: if a *Vestalis* wears clothes of a *matrona*, she can be associated with one. N. Kampen summarises this interaction in the following: "[...] seeing and representing are themselves social practices by which people communicate, order their lives, and structure their societies. Clothing, what spaces are occupied and how, and the making and display of

monuments, these are some of the elements that go into making gender” (Kampen 1996, 17). In the next chapters I will show to what extent *Vestales* can actually be associated with *matronae*. Is the coiffure and clothing of a *Vestalis* truly comparable to those of *matronae*, or do authors of archaeological literature project a modern (feminist) view on them in order to stress their womanhood?

1.3 *Vestales* versus *matronae* in sculpture and literature

The former chapter on gender studies has shown that the scholars who associate *Vestales* with *matronae* are biased. They are trying to define the identity of the *Vestales* by ascribing a social role to them, in this case by comparing them to *matronae*. I will investigate if this comparison is correct or even possible to make by studying statues of *Vestales* and *matronae*. The differences and similarities amongst them will be summarised and thereafter my results will be compared to the others’ conclusions, in order to see if they are identical. If so, all the sources used by the scholars in question have been interpreted correctly, and potential projected modern views have not been conflated with the factual results of their research. If not, however, my study will show that the particular scholars have not used their sources correctly, perhaps because they have a certain way of thinking: they may have projected a modern view, for instance a gender-influenced one, onto the *Vestales*’ social status.

My research focuses on statues because this comparison between *Vestales* and *matronae* has not been made before: the statues themselves and the comparison of *Vestales* to *matronae* may give information about their social status that is not found in the archaeological literature. Moreover, statues are the perfect medium to submit to a comparative study since they are concrete objects, which enable us to physically compare certain aspects. As mentioned before, of course there is a difference between people and statues of them, but I argue that a combination of researching statues and Latin literature provides a well-informed view on *Vestales* (especially since the scholars who think that *Vestales* can be compared to *matronae* did not even perform this study). Therefore, the methods I use include an iconographic analysis and an analysis of the Latin literature, particularly of the texts that the aforementioned scholars used as sources.

The iconographic analysis, by which I mean a detailed description and interpretation of an image, will be applied to five of the statues of the Atrium Vestae. All of these have been given the numbers V3 through V5 and are collected in the catalogue in the Appendix. Since it is very difficult to determine whether a statue is a *Vestalis* or not, I selected a core group and a periphery. The first consists of V1 and V2 (Lindner’s Cat. 16 and Cat. 22), which are the statues that are most clearly *Vestales* because they have a

head, as well as V3, V4, and V5 that form the periphery (see Lindner 1996, 73-4 for her criteria for identifying a Vestal portrait). Nowadays, eight headless statues and one torso (as well as some bits and pieces that cannot provide any information in this case) can be found at the Atrium Vestae. According to Lindner, six of those sculptures are clearly not *Vestales* (Lindner's Cat. 1, Cat. 3, Cat. 10, Cat. 19, Cat. 26, and Cat. 27) . Since to this study only statues that depict *Vestales* for certain are useful, these specific ones have not been included in the periphery. The statues of the periphery include, then, the three remaining sculptures (consisting of two headless statues and one torso) which are, according to Lindner, *Vestales* "without a doubt" (Linder's Cat. 12, Cat. 17, and Cat. 20).

After having investigated the statues of *Vestales*, five statues of *matronae* will be analysed. These include the sculptures of three empresses: Vibia Sabina, Lucilla or Faustina minor, and Iulia Domna. Next to that, two unknown female statues are part of this collection.

Next to the image analyses, some Latin sources on *Vestales* (particularly the ones used by the scholars that compare the *Vestales* to *matronae*) will be used. These are written by Festus, Ovid, and Plautus. These are an ancient grammarian, a poet, and an author of comedies respectively.

In the discussion, the results of the analyses will show whether the aforementioned scholars have associated *Vestales* with *matronae* correctly or have projected a modern view to these women from a ancient Roman social class.

2 *Vestales*

2.1 Archaeological background

“That was the golden age of Roman excavation, and we recall it as if it were a dream!”
(Lanciani on the discovery of the Vestal statues (Lanciani 1980, 197)).

The Atrium Vestae, located alongside the Nova Via in the Roman Forum, was discovered late in the second half of the nineteenth century by R. Lanciani, together with H. Jordan and H. Auer (Van Deman 1909, 1). Later excavation projects have been done by A. Bartoli in the 1930s, by G. Carettoni in the 60s and 70s, and by R. Scott and A. Carandini simultaneously in the 80s and 90s (Mekacher 2006, 82).

These excavations have shown that there have been several construction phases of the Atrium, dating from the republican period onwards, until it was abandoned by the *Vestales* in 382 AD (Van Deman 1909, *pass.*). The more than life-size statues of the *Vestales* investigated in this research have all been found during the first excavation, in 1882-1883. A brief description and discussion of these has been provided by E. van Deman, to whom primarily their present or absent originality is of interest (Van Deman 1908, *pass.*). She argues that V1, V4, and V5 are “clearly copies of well-known types”, whereas V2, and V3 “are so closely allied to other existing statues that their acceptance as originals is difficult” (Van Deman 1908, 326). This sort of research, using typology, is interesting because it might change the answer to the question whether *Vestales* can be associated with *matronae* or not: if certain statues turn out to be typological ‘copies’ of *matronae*, an association between the two can certainly be made. Whether these types are useful or not, or if the *Vestales* should be treated typologically at all, will be further discussed in chapter four.

Next to the recognition of certain types, another important subject concerns their dating. Since it is very difficult to determine in what period or under who’s reign a statue has been made (especially in the case it concerns a ‘copy’ of a certain type) I follow Lindner’s ascribed dates, who mainly based her study on physiognomic resemblances, but also on drapery configuration and resemblances in hairstyles (Lindner 1996, 246-7). Although she stresses that “others [i.e. statues from the Atrium Vestae] seem related to well-known types but with crucial changes in attributes (Cat. [...] 12, 16, [...] 20, 22). Still other statues resist easy identification, dating, and categorizing (Cat. 19, [...] and 27)” (Lindner 1996, 99), she has concluded the following: the statues of *Vestales* have been made in the second and third century AD, more specifically from the late Antonine to the early Severan period (see the specific statues in the catalogue in Lindner 1996, 257-405).

In the following, I will describe five particular statues of the *Vestales* from the Atrium Vestae. Sometimes, these descriptions and/or my own views are supported by Latin texts. The order in which they are presented is thus: first, I will discuss the statues of the core-group I defined. Secondly, the statues from the periphery are examined.

2.2 Statues of *Vestales* from the Atrium Vestae

2.2.1 V1

Today, this statue is standing on a base with an inscription about a certain Flavia Publicia, a *Virgo Vestalis Maxima*, the chief *Vestalis* in a specific period. Although this may be interesting information, I decided not to discuss the bases of any statues, as almost certainly none of them originally belonged to the statues they are supporting (Lindner 1996, 136-8. See for more information the whole of chapter four).

The statue is standing in a natural position, leaning on her right leg while the left one is slightly bent (Fig. 1). The foot is placed to the side and rear and the heel somewhat lifted. The left arm is bent and held before the body. The right arm, of which remains only part of the upper arm, is elevated and extended towards the right. The head is also directed towards the right, which gives the whole statue a kind of contrapposto effect because head and arms are oriented towards the right, whereas the left foot counters this by being placed in the left direction.

The dress this woman is wearing consists of two pieces: the head and torso are covered by a *palla*, which is draped around the left arm. The *palla* was a rectangular wrap generally put on when going outside (see Symons 1987, 24) Interestingly, the *palla* was not only worn by *Vestales*, but also by *matronae*.

Underneath the *palla* a long, sleeveless dress is falling down the body in pleats, touching the ground. The left knee forms a remarkable feature, as it is protruded because the leg is flexed, placing focus on the body itself like nowhere else in the statue. I do not think this deserves a far-fetched interpretation in the direction of sexuality (especially since no other parts put this kind of focus on themselves, although the breasts' nipples do shine through the dress!), but I do think that it draws the viewer's attention to the body beneath the dress. However, this may simply be due to the wish of the sculptor to show that the lower body does not only consist of a dress, but also contains legs creating aliveness and movement. The dress itself is a *tunica*, since this garment replaced the *stola* that went out of fashion from the second century AD onwards (for more information on this, see the description of V2). It is double-folded because it has been belted twice, after which the overfolds have been pulled over the fabric (Lindner 1996, 342). Unfortunately,

it is uncertain whether or not *matrona* also wore it in this manner, so no conclusions can be drawn from the dress.

Somewhat indistinctly the shoes the woman is wearing are visible, mainly underneath the toes. The soles are showing, which, in combination with the fact that the feet are clearly for the most part uncovered, indicates that they are *soleae* (sandals). Worsfold adds, although without providing a reference, that the *Vestales'* shoes were always white, "made from the skin of sacrificial animals" (Worsfold 1934, 58). Since the use of *soleae* is very common amongst all Roman women, only the difference in colour and specific material would offer evidence to compare with shoes of *matronae*. However, because the citation of Worsfold does not provide us with that information I cannot give any interpretation concerning the shoes.

An altogether different matter is the head of this statue (Fig. 2). As one of the two statues in this research that has a head, this is one of the most important features of the sculpture. The face is smooth, without any lines or wrinkles and with a rounded chin. The woman is slightly smiling (it almost seems like an 'archaic smile') and looks straightforward: her whole face appears to be rather serene. Because of this and the lack of movement in her position I would say that she is not looking at anything in particular (although it is clear that she is performing some kind of action, but I will discuss this later). This statue is a portrait for others to marvel at.

The headdress of this woman clearly shows that this statue is a *Vestalis*. Four *infulae* can be seen in the hair, and underneath the *palla* a small part of the *suffibulum* is visible (Lindner 1996, 343). The exact definition of the *infulae* is difficult to determine (see Fantham 2008, 167): according to K. Olson, a woman's hair tied in *infulae* indicates that the hairstyle consists of "fillets knotted with ribbons or *vittae* which loop down to her shoulders" (Olson 2008, 38). But this woman does not wear any *vittae*, so in this case, the *infulae* rather seem to be straps that are tied around the head. They are strongly associated with religious persons, as is the *suffibulum* (a hood). Both are discussed by Festus:

Suffibulum est vestimentum al<bum> praetextum, qua>drangulum, oblongum, quod in ca<pite> 5 virgines Ve>stales, cum sacrificant, semper <habere solent, i>dque fibula comprehenditur.

The *suffibulum* is an adorned, white garment, quadrangular, oblong, which the *Vestales* are always wont to have, when they are offering, and which is held by a *fibula*.

Fest., 523.3-6 (p. 474 Lindsay)

Infulae sunt filamenta lanæ, quibus sacerdotes et hostiae templaque velantur.

The *infulae* are woollen filaments, with which priestesses and the temples of the sacrificial animals are covered.

Fest., 113.7-8 (p. 100 Lindsay)

The only argument against this woman being a *Vestalis* is Olson's remark that *Vestales* traditionally sheared their heads (Olson 2008, 23). Yet this might be easily ignored because real people nor sculpture always depict what is 'tradition'. Worsfold adds that it is uncertain whether the hair was allowed to grow again after its cropping at the initiation of a *Vestalis* (Worsfold 1934, 53).

Finally, the statue shows the remains of a strut, placed at the right flank somewhat below the woman's waist. This suggests that the right hand held an attribute that was large or at least heavy enough to be supported by a prop. Lindner argues, after having compared this statue to various others of the same type, that the attribute might have been a spear, a staff or a torch (Lindner 1996, 348). Then, without clearly stating why, she proposes that it was probably a spear, mentioning that both a spear and a torch could be explained in association with *Vestales'* cultic activities. However, in my opinion a spear would not be a suitable attribute for a *Vestalis*, whereas a torch or perhaps a staff would be rather less peculiar. In any case, all these possible attributes fit the statue physically, as they might have been held vertically and supported by the strut. If we assume that this woman was holding a torch or a staff of some kind, what could be said about the activity she is performing? Her left hand is holding the *palla*, which is not a very uncommon thing to do: for instance, several women and men on the Ara Pacis (both on the frieze with the *Vestales'* procession and the south frieze) perform this same action: all seem to be rather passively waiting while talking or listening (Fig. 3). Although this statue is clearly not speaking to anyone because the mouth is closed, all of the statues' mouths on the Ara Pacis' south frieze are closed as well. Yet some of them seem to be having conversations, as they are turned facing the person standing behind them. However, I would propose that this statue is not speaking, as the only person she could be speaking to is the viewer or a different statue, but these possibilities seem rather far-fetched. Therefore, I would say that this statue is passive: she stands still and holds a staff or torch which probably relates in some way to her cultic activities as a *Vestalis*. Also, the left hand holding the *palla* shows that she is not doing anything active: the only thing she is doing is showing the viewer whatever attribute she holds in her right hand, perhaps while having part in a procession (like the people on the Ara Pacis).

In conclusion, I think this woman is a *Vestalis*, based on the *suffibulum* and the *infulae*. She is not doing anything or looking at someone in particular, except for presenting the attribute to the viewer. If this attribute was something that connected her to her cultic duties, this would be another piece of evidence to the presentation of this woman as a *Vestalis*.

2.2.2 V2

This statue is, next to V1, the only other statue that still has a head. Also, it is one of the few statues in the Atrium Vestae that allows modern viewers to take photographs of the flanks and backside, because it is not placed against a wall. This provides us with some extra information that may be useful.

Starting with the general position of the statue, this woman is leaning on her right leg, whereas the left one is slightly bent (Fig. 4). This is similar to the position of V1. Interesting differences between these two statues concern the fact that the knee and nipples do not shine as distinctly through the clothing. Also, the arms are different. The lower left arm is broken at the wrist and protruded straight forward, whereas the right arm has broken off somewhat below the elbow. Lindner argues that the break is placed “above the elbow” (Lindner 1996, 377), but from the side a curve in the arm can clearly be seen, indicating it is slightly bent. Seen from the front, the arm extends somewhat towards the right.

What is this woman wearing? The dress seems to be a *tunica* or a *stola*. However, several scholars argue that the *stola* as a garment was not in use anymore in the second century AD, or more specifically after the time of Faustina minor (Lindner 1996, 83; Olson 2008, 32) Instead, *matronae* and apparently, this woman, wore *tunicae*. Yet this division between *tunica* and *stola* is not as clear-cut as it seems to be: if the *stola* was replaced by the *tunica*, the latter may have developed an appearance with the incorporation of (some of) the *stola*'s distinctive aspects. Therefore, I propose a single category for both the *tunica* and the *stola* from the 2nd century AD onwards. In the following statue descriptions, I will explain if and why some dresses are more *stola*-like or look more like the original *tunica*. I would argue that the statue wearing a more *stola*-like dress is more likely to be associated with a *matrona*. A single point of qualification for this theory: the integration of the *stola*'s characteristics might also be a chronological development. Dresses might look more like a *stola* the longer it has been out of use. Unfortunately, I have no means of investigating this possibility, since the exact dates or even relative dates of the statues are known.

Returning to the dress of V2, I would call this a *tunica/stola* (like the dress of V1, where this whole discussion was unimportant). However, this time the dress has an extensive border at the bottom. This border, called the *limbus* or *instita*, was a sewn-on separate piece of cloth, and a very typical feature of the *stola* (Olson 2008, 30). The dress has long sleeves without buttons and does not have a belt. The rounded elevated part of marble on the right shoulder might be part of the headdress, but I propose that it is an over-the-shoulder strap with which the *stola* was fastened. Furthermore, the sculpting of

the whole statue does not seem to lay focus on emphasizing its bodily beauty: the *palla* accentuates the waist but not so much the hips, which are covered. Also, the statue is rather broad and straight, which can perfectly be seen from its backside, and the clothing seems to be made of very dense fabric (Fig. 5). These things differ greatly from the characteristics of V1.

Next to the *stola*, the woman is wearing a *palla*, which covers the back of her head, falls down along the left shoulder, goes around the waist and returns to the left arm, where it is draped around the lower part and falls down along the left side of the body. At the front, underneath the rolled *palla* at the waist, the *palla* is stretched out downwards. It comes together in a point, creating a triangular shape. This apron-like way of wearing the *palla* is very remarkable and a unique characteristic in all the sculptures of the Atrium Vestae. According to Lindner, this artistic feature “appeared first on statues of Flavian imperial women, the earliest surviving example of which is a late first-century A.D. portrait statue of Julia, daughter of Titus, in the Vatican” (Lindner 1996, 379-80). Therefore, I would suggest that this statue is very much like a *matrona*: the dress she is wearing is clearly more similar to a *stola* than to a *tunica*, and this kind of folding of the *palla* was first used by imperial *matronae*.

However, before drawing any conclusions, let us take into account the other characteristics of this statue. Not much can be said about the shoes, as they are very difficult to determine in both my own and Lindner’s photographs. Lindner mentions that the toes are visible and that the shoes “are carved to look like soft leather or cloth” (Lindner 1996, 378). Although the toes can indeed be seen (mainly on the darkened image), I do not think that the evidence is clear enough in order to deny or confirm the latter statement.

The head seems somewhat rounder and broader than the head of V1 (Fig. 6). Next to that, the (double) chin can clearly be seen and the eyes have not irises, but shallow holes in them (as opposed to V1, who has smooth eyes, but also visible irises). The woman of V2 also seems to be older than V1, because she has wrinkles around her mouth and underneath her eyes. Also, on her neck some lines are visible which might be interpreted as wrinkles or as the so-called Venus rings, possibly indicating beauty and/or maturity (see the discussion in the description of V3, who has several very clear rings around her neck). Next to that, the facial expression of V2 seems rather stern in comparison with the one of V1. However, both seem to be looking at something far away, while their heads are slightly turned towards the right.

When looking at several images (both regular and darkened ones), counting results in at least five *infulae* that have been tied around the head. Between the *infulae*

and the *palla* there might be a *suffibulum*, but this cannot be known for certain. The little hair that can be seen seems to be braided. Within the *palla*, next to the neck, *vittae* are shown.

What is this woman doing? At the right side of the body, three large struts are present, suggesting that the right arm held a colossal object that might even have been anchored in the base (Lindner 1996, 377). According to Lindner there is also a strut at the left flank, but I do not see it. Nor am I going to try to reconstruct what the attributes were in the right and possibly left arm or hand; Lindner suggests a *patera* in the left hand, the woman busy “sprinkling incense over a fire in a portable incense burner” that would be placed at her right side (Lindner 1996, 379). Yet if this were the case, the woman would not even be paying attention to what she was doing! I would propose that the purpose of this statue is the same as of V1: she has an exemplary function as someone showing one or more attributes to the viewers, while she herself is looking into the distance.

One other interesting matter that needs discussing concerns jewellery: seven holes have been drilled into the chest, just below the neck (Fig. 7). This strongly suggests that some piece of jewellery, probably a necklace, was attached to the statue. As none of the other statues from the Atrium Vestae show traces of jewellery, this is remarkable. Was the use of jewellery common among *Vestales*? No information is available on this topic. If it was not, it might indicate that this woman can be associated with a *matrona*. Not only the necklace would point towards this conclusion, then, but also the *stola*-like *tunica* and the possible Venus rings. An important argument against this are the *infulae*, which are evidence for this woman being a *Vestalis*.

2.2.3 V3

Only a torso is what remains of this statue (Fig. 8). The head is missing, as well as the lower left and right arm (with the exception of the left elbow). On the neck, three lines are visible, the so-called “Venus rings”. There is extensive discussion amongst scholars as to the function of these rings, which are primarily seen in female sculptures. The interpretations of what they represent vary from the idea that they “emphasize the turn of the head to the right” (Bikai *et al.* 2008, 2), to “attributes of femininity” (Younger 1997, 122), to a “sign of beauty” (Thompson 2007, 146) or “maturity” (Palagia 1982, 106; Welch 1996, 468), or even to the following: “The so-called Venus rings, lines around the neck of female portraits, may indicate the full physique of a woman in her reproductive years” (D’Ambra 2000, 114). This plurality of explanations can be ascribed to the fact that the notion of Venus rings and their representation and influence on the viewer is a modern idea projected onto ancient sculpture without being supported by ancient

literature or any other material to clarify their meaning. It might also be because the selection of the citations above refer to sculpture from both Greek and Roman times from different locations. Nevertheless, an interpretation of the marks in the direction of beauty and femininity (imagine, for instance, the corpulent women in Rubens' paintings, whose curves were a symbol of beauty closely associated with wealth) or as wrinkles of maturity seems sensible. Yet this does not detract from the fact that their mere presence on a *Vestalis* is at least remarkable! The Venus rings might plainly suggest that this *Vestalis* was not a youth. However, interpreting them as a sign of maturity and especially as an indication for the full physique of a woman in her reproductive years leads to the *Vestales*' association with *matronae*: why else would her reproductive function be important?

The clothing of this woman consists of a simple dress with sleeves (as can most clearly be seen from the right arm that is held naturally alongside the body) and a knotted belt beneath the breasts. These are even more pronounced by the way in which the dress falls around the body: the dress has pleats and almost 'sticks' to the body, as if wet. Moreover, the pleats are especially shown between and underneath the breasts. This focus seems, just like the presence of the Venus rings, rather odd for a statue of a *Vestalis*.

Around the protruded left arm a *palla* is wrapped. That this garment is a *palla* without a doubt becomes clear from the fact that it extends from above the right shoulder to the left one, before going straight down and folding below the belt. Evidently, the *palla* must have been pulled up over the head here, because the remaining ends up until the breaks of the marble are elevated above the shoulders. As I have already mentioned, the *palla* was worn by both *Vestales* and *matronae*.

Next to the *palla*, the woman wears a dress with sleeves, interpreted by Lindner as a *tunica* (Lindner 1996, 369). However, it could also be thought of as a *stola*, as both garments can be cut with or without sleeves. The most distinctive difference between a *stola* and a *tunica* as could be seen from only a torso would be the shoulder straps a *stola* featured (Lindner 1996, 218; Olson 2008, 27). However, since the shoulders are here covered by the *palla*, no such straps, if present, are visible. Also, the *stola* can be belted beneath the breasts, like this woman's dress (Symons 1987, 23). The question remains then, if a *tunica* can be worn with such a belt. If this is the case, there is inconclusive evidence if this dress is more like a *stola* or a *tunica*.

According to Olson, the *tunica* was indeed usually girded beneath the breasts (Olson 2008, 26). Therefore, I would propose that the *tunica* and *stola* are part of the same category (as explained above). This woman is wearing a dress that is not in any

distinctive in its characteristics of a *stola*. Thus, the garments suggest that this statue might represent either a *Vestalis* or a *matrona*.

Before deciding whether this *Vestalis* could be compared to a *matrona* or not, let us take a look at the final part of this woman's dress that has not been discussed yet: the *vittae*, the long loops that are showing from underneath the *palla* and must have hung down from the hair. Evidently, these are *vittae* and not *infulae*. Although hanging down from the hair is a possibility that is applicable to either, the latter are tied around the head, whereas the former were tied into the hair. Lindner states that they "leave no doubt that Cat. 20 represents a *Vestalis*" (Lindner 1996, 369). But, as I have mentioned before, *matronae* also wore these *vittae* (although probably not every day, see Olson 2008, 38-9). This can be proved, for instance, by citations from Ovid and Plautus:

*rite deam colitis, Latiae matresque nurusque
et vos, quis vittae longaue vestis abest.*

You worship the goddess according to religious usage, Latin mothers [i.e. *matronae*, too] and brides, and you, who lack *vittae* and the long robe [presumably the *stola*].

Ov. *Fast.* IV.133-4

790 PAL. *ut ad te eam iam deducas domum
itaque eam huc ornatum adducas, ex matronarum
modo, capite compto, crinis vittasque habeat
assimuletque se tuam esse uxorem.*

PAL. So that you lead her to your home and bring her here dressed like this, in the style of the *matronae*, her hair arranged, she should have plaits and *vittae* and pretend to be your wife.

Pl. *Mil. Gl.* 790-3

Therefore, I argue that Lindner is not entirely correct in assuming that this statue is a *Vestalis*. I would rather say that this statue might be a *Vestalis* because she has all the qualities to make her one, but perhaps even a few more: all the characteristics of the *Vestalis* (the dress with the knotted belt, the *palla* and the *vittae*) are in this case also applicable to the *matrona*'s attire. In fact, the Venus rings and the focus on the breasts suggest that this woman is very *matrona*-like.

2.2.4 V4

Lindner seems to make somewhat paradoxical statements in her discussion of this statue. She argues that it depicts a *Vestalis* because of the remnants of *vittae* on the neck and shoulders (Lindner 1996, 105), but also seems to imply that it represents an empress instead of a *Vestalis* (Lindner 1996, 251). In the end, she concludes that "possibly Cat. 17 was originally a portrait of another woman, and the torso was reused for a Vestal"

(Lindner 1996, 354). With this possibility in mind, let us take a closer look at the statue itself.

Like several other statues, this woman leans on her right leg and has placed her lower left leg a bit backwards, while the left foot is standing on the toes and facing outwards (Fig. 9). The lower left arm is protruded forwards and broken at the wrist, the right arm is complete. It is bent and the hand is holding the clothing at the height of the elbow. Overall, it is very interesting that neither the breasts or the legs are pronounced. In fact, when comparing this statue to V1, which is reasonable because the *palla* is worn exactly the same in both statues (leaving the left breast uncovered) and both show a protruded left knee, the sculpting seems much less ‘sexual’: the nipples of V4 do not shine through the dress, nor is the left knee really a viewpoint. The whole leg is covered in a thin layer of fabric, and subtle pleats cause that the leg disappears in the dress; yet the knee of V1 particularly stands out because the leg is somewhat more protruded and the pleats are deeper next to the leg. Therefore, I would say that V4 is probably more ‘modestly’ depicted than V1.

Furthermore, the woman is wearing a *tunica/stola* with long sleeves and a belt. According to Lindner, “the fabric [has been] pulled over the belt to make a single overfold that falls in a flounce over the right hip” (Lindner 1996, 350). However, if this were the case, the belt would not be visible anymore because it would be hidden underneath the dress. Therefore, I would rather think that the dress of this woman was shaped like a *peplos*, the traditional Greek dress, for which the piece of cloth was folded before it was cut, sewn and put on (see the images in Goldman 1994, 226). Afterwards, it could be belted, resulting in the same apparel as V4’s: a visible belt around the dress with continuous pleats underneath. Unfortunately, no conclusions can be drawn from the fact that this is the only *Vestalis* in the Atrium that wears the *tunica/stola* in this fashion, except that it shows that the *peplos* was still popular in Roman times (Goldman 1994, 223). Since it was the Greek dress for both married and unmarried women, nothing can be said about the association between *Vestales* and *matronae*.

Another feature of this woman’s attire is the *palla*. Like in V1, it is draped around the shoulders, covering the right breast and falling down to above the left knee. It is slung over the left arm and from there, it goes downwards and reaches the ground.

Also, this woman is wearing shoes. Once again, Lindner argues these are “the same soft shoes characteristic of the other statues of Vestal virgins” (Lindner 1996, 351), but the only thing that can be seen clearly are the soles of the shoes. As in the case of V1, this statue’s feet are bare, which suggests that the shoes are *soleae*.

Without a doubt, the most important feature of this statue are the two pieces of marble at the right and left side of the neck (Fig. 10). For Lindner, this is the evidence to prove that this woman is a *Vestalis*, because she interprets them as the remnants of *vittae* (Lindner 1996, 351). I do not deny this statement, but I would like to add that it is extremely difficult to know for a fact if these pieces of stone are indeed *vittae*. Lindner's only argument to identify them as such is that they are "too stubby to be locks of hair", which is not quite satisfactory. However, I have to concur with her conclusion, since they are certainly not part of the *palla*. Actually, in comparison with the *vittae* of V2, the pieces of marble might very well be the ends of *vittae*. However, this does still not prove that this statue depicts a *Vestalis*, as *vittae* were also worn by *matronae*.

A last point to discuss is the activity that is being performed by this woman. What is she doing? Lindner stresses the following: "Despite its closed composition, this Vestal statue is both statuesque and full of implied movement. The right half of the statue with its columnar, weight-bearing leg juxtaposes with the left half with its relaxed and obliquely placed leg" (Lindner 1996, 351). This is an interesting observation. Indeed, the right half of the statue is static, especially in comparison with the other statues described in the former sections. V3, V1, and V2 do not have their right hands placed on their bodies, but they are actively holding something. On the other hand, the left side of this statue's body is in movement: the leg is placed backwards and the lower arm protruded. The differentiation between the two sides of V4 would be even more intriguing if it was known whether the left hand was holding an attribute or not. Since this information is not available, I think there is not much to say about the activity of this statue.

Taking all these described features into account, I do not completely agree with Lindner's statements that I mentioned at the start of this description. I do think that pieces of marble on both sides of the neck are probably *vittae*, but this does not necessarily mean that this statue is a *Vestalis*. Therefore, in my opinion, this woman can be associated with a *matrona*, because she shares all the qualities of both the class of the *matronae* as well as the *Vestales*. In this case that refers specifically to the *vittae* and the depiction of the statue as a chaste or modest woman. On the other hand, one might say that there are no specific characteristics that make this statue more *matrona*-like, such as a *stola* or an emphasis on maturity. However, this absence of evidence by no means indicates that there is no association whatsoever between *matronae* and *Vestales*.

2.2.5 V5

This statue stands with the weight on her left leg and her right leg slightly placed before the other (Fig. 11). Also, the right leg is somewhat bent and the foot, although not

completely preserved, must have been standing on the toes. From the left foot, the kind of shoes this woman was wearing can be seen: once again, these must have been common *soleae*.

Both the arms have broken off: only a small part of the lower left arm is present, whereas the right arm seems to be broken at the elbow. Below the left arm there seems to be part of a strut, but this is not clearly visible.

This woman is wearing a *tunica/stola*, which appears to be shaped like the traditional *tunica*: a long dress, belted underneath the breasts, without a border at the bottom. However, there is a piece of marble on the right shoulder that Lindner identifies as *vittae* (Lindner 1996, 324), which might also be interpreted as a shoulder strap (Fig. 12). In that case this dress would be more *stola*-like, and the statue would perhaps more likely be associated with a *matrona*. Unfortunately, the breaks in the stone make any conclusions about this piece of marble very disputable.

Another interesting feature of this dress is the fact that the sleeves are not sewn, but created by the belt. This can be seen from the pieces of fabric hanging over the belt, that continue towards the arms, thus forming the sleeves (this can be most clearly seen at the right side of the body).

Next to the dress, the woman also wears a *palla*. This must have been wrapped in a complex manner around the body, because it extends from the left shoulder (also going upwards, indicating that it must have covered the head), it spreads over the whole back and comes back to the front from underneath the right arm. Then it covers the front in two layers, going from the waist to halfway across the lower legs, forming two diagonal lines at the bottom of each layer. This creates a *contrapposto* effect, which is increased by the protruding right leg and the slight turn to the left of the whole torso. Subsequently, the *palla* is twisted around the left arm before hanging down loosely.

Especially at the backside of the statue can be seen how complicated the *palla* is draped: it seems to cover the whole back, but another strand of cloth also covers the *palla* (Fig. 13). This strand can be nothing else than another piece of *palla*, which has been draped a second time around the body. Furthermore, the sculpting of the *palla* at the backside shows that more attention has been paid to the back of this statue than of V6. It is more detailed and the shape of the body can be seen, as opposed to the back of V6, which is a lot more rectangular. This suggests that V5 has stood in a place where the viewers could walk around it, although the back is not as detailed as much as the front.

A final point I would like to raise concerns the right leg. From ankle to thigh, it is clearly showing through both the dress and the *palla* with almost no pleats covering it. From all the statues described above, the leg of this woman is the most prominent. In my

opinion, this somewhat sensual feature might be more suitable for a *matrona* than a *Vestalis*. Both were chaste, of course, but since sexuality is involved more in the world of the *matrona* than of the *Vestalis*, it appears to be more logical for a *matrona* to have such a visible leg. However, more information on this topic and more comparative material might be provided in the description of the *matrona*-statues in the next chapter.

As to what this statue is doing, I would prefer not to make any assertions, since the activity someone is performing depends greatly on whether one has any attributes or not. As this is uncertain, there is no way of knowing what the function of this statue was.

Can this statue be associated with a *matrona*? I would certainly think so, as there are no distinct features that characterise her as a *Vestalis*, especially if one interprets Lindner's 'vittae' as shoulder straps. The fact that the complicated draping of the *palla* and the very prominent leg are unique amongst all of the Vestal statues in the Atrium make this statue even more interesting to compare to statues of *matronae*.

2.3 Conclusion

By describing five statues of *Vestales* from the Atrium Vestae, I have tried to show the similarities and differences between them (see Tab. 1). Specific types of clothing and headdress have been investigated and explained with the help of Latin sources, and I have critically discussed several statements of Linder, who has been the only scholar to describe these sculptures systematically with a broad scope. Some interesting results have come forth: the descriptions of the statues from the core group have offered information on the facial expression and the headdress of the *Vestales* from the Atrium. The periphery sculptures have been an addition to the core by providing a quantity of similar and different characteristics. Moreover, several features are unique amongst all of the *Vestales*, such as the Venus rings, the complicated *palla* with overfold (either with or without the apron-like front, the double-folded *tunica/stola* of V1, or the fact that V5 stands with her left leg straight and her right leg flexed instead of the other way around. These remarks will become even more interesting when they are set in a framework with the features of *matronae* to compare them to. Therefore, in the next chapter the characteristics of *matronae* will be discussed, after which all of the results of both this and the next chapter will be compared in the discussion.

3 *Matronae*

3.1 Introduction

As has been shown in the previous chapters, the *matronae* were supposed to be respectable, virtuous women. They were commonly dressed in a *tunica/stola* and *palla*, while also *vittae* were part of their attire (Sebesta 1994a, 48-9). In the following chapter all the aspects of five *matronae* will be described, in order to collect evidence that could deny or confirm this general view.

The statues M1 through M5 differ greatly from the five *Vestales* from the Atrium Vestae. For a start, three of the *matronae* statues depict women that have an actual name: based on mainly their facial characteristics, they have been identified as a specific person. Secondly, these same three *matronae* that have a name are empresses, while M4 and M5 are unknown women. Finally, all of the five statues in this chapter are located in museums. They have been found in different locations and contexts, most of which have not been transmitted. Since there is so little information available, I expect that it will probably not be possible to provide any interpretations as to what the function of the statues was or what activities they are performing.

One last point needs to be made concerning the selection of these statues. It has been tried to select five statues without paying too much attention to differences and similarities in clothing, position, and hairstyles, in order to not influence the outcome of the research. I have taken into account, however, the necessity of all the statues having been found in or near Rome, as well as their dating from the second and early third centuries AD.

With regard to the differences between the *Vestales* and *matronae*, I will give some brief background information on all the statues, before continuing with their physical differences and similarities, the descriptions. This will hopefully put the *matronae* statues into a framework that will help to interpret them.

M1 is an image of Vibia Sabina, the wife of emperor Hadrian, who lived from 83 to 136/7 AD. Nowadays, this statue is placed in the Villa Adriana, at Tivoli.

M2 is either a depiction of Lucilla, the wife of Lucius Verus, or her mother Faustina *minor* (who was married to Marcus Aurelius) (Lindner 1996, 319). Whichever the case, the statue is from the second century AD and can be found today in the Museo Nazionale Romano in Rome (specifically, the Museo Massimo alle Terme).

M3 represents Iulia Domna, Septimius Severus' wife, who lived from 170 to 215/7 AD. The statue dates from the early third century AD and is located in the Museo Archeologico at Ostia.

Both M4 and M5 are second-century statues of unknown *matronae*. M4 has been found at Antium (its modern name Porto d'Anzio) within a funerary context (Raia 2006). Today, it stands in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. M5 can be found nowadays in Rome's Museo Montemartini.

3.2 Statues of *matronae* from several contexts

3.2.1 M1

As mentioned above, this is a statue of the empress Sabina. She is leaning on her right leg, her left leg is slightly bent in a natural position, while both feet stand flat on the ground (Fig. 14). The whole body is covered with a thick layer of fabric, resulting in almost unnoticeable limbs. The left arm is held down, the thumb held straight and the tops of the other fingers are bent at a straight angle. This is a quite artificial fashion, but I suppose this was supposed to be natural, as the hand has clearly never been holding an attribute. The right arm is held alongside the body, but flexed at the elbow. The lower arm is placed across the front of the statue, covering the right breast with the wrist, while the hand is clutching the *palla*. This is a striking feature, because the right hand keeps the *palla* in place: if the woman would let go, the *palla* would fall off her shoulders. Among the statues of the *Vestales*, we have seen that two (V4 and V2) are touching their *pallae*, but never in the same way as M1. However, some of the other statues at the Atrium Vestae, identified by Lindner as empresses, are holding the *palla* to ensure it does not slip away. Of course, M1 is an empress, so this is a remarkable difference between the discussed *Vestales* and this *matrona*.

Yet for sculpted *matronae* this position is not uncommon: a statue of Sabina in the same style has been found in Perge (Boatwright 2000, 67; Trimble 2011, 170). Moreover, not only Sabina has been depicted like this, but this exact position (in which the head is directed to the left, the left arm is held down, the right arm holds the *palla* on the chest, and the right leg supports most of the weight) belongs to a specific type of statue: the so-called Large Herculanean Woman. J. Trimble discusses several statues of this type, and explains the similarities and differences. The statues' general features mainly provide an opportunity to idealise the heads and faces of the women and making them less personal (Trimble 2011, 157-205). Interestingly, none of the discussed statues in Trimble wear their hair in the same fashion as M1.

The dress of this woman is a *tunica/stola*. No details like shoulder straps or the *limbus* can be seen, as most of the dress is covered by the *palla*. From the back of the head, it falls downwards to the lower legs. It seems to be wrapped around the body twice, it covers both arms completely, and the remaining fabric hangs down along the left side.

The shoes have thick, somewhat pointed soles and the bare feet show straps, indicating the shoes are *soleae*. The straps are fastened to the soles between the first and second toes. Specific adornment is not visible, as half of the feet are hidden by the overhanging dress.

The head is directed towards the left and slightly downwards. The face is very symmetrical and smooth, with a round chin and a rather large nose (Fig. 15). The eyes do not have irises or drilled holes and the facial expression is very serious. As the woman is looking down, she seems to be looking the viewer in the eyes with a stern gaze. The hair seems to be braided and has a diagonal division in the middle. Next to the right and left ears a corkscrew curl is visible. On the head, it forms two thick 'rolls' before it disappears underneath the *palla*. The second roll has a complicated knot on top of it. This knot is placed exactly in the middle of the head (seen from the front) and as high as the length of the nose. It is almost pretzel-shaped and clearly draws the focus away from the rest of the body to the head. At first sight, it seems not to belong to the hair, like a diadem. The possible meaning of this hairstyle is uncertain. The braiding of the hair and the formation of rolls is quite common in Hadrianic times (perhaps because of Vibia Sabina's own hair), but a knot on top of the head is highly unusual (see Hurschmann 2012). One might associate this knot with the *tutulus*, the hairstyle of the *mater familias*, of which the appearance is still a topic of scholarly debate (Böttiger 1806, 132-3; Olson 2008, 39-40; Sebesta 1994a, 49-50; Siebert 1995, *pass.*). A point everyone agrees on is that it was put up in a high fashion (see Festus 534.32-5, p. 485 Lindsay; Varro *De lingua latina* 7.44). However, if we were to believe Festus, this style required the hair to be braided with purple *vittae*, which is clearly not the case here.

Another comparison might be made with the *cingulum herculeum*, the 'knot of Hercules' (see Symons 1987; 27). The belt of Roman brides was tied into this double-knot. Of course, in this case the knot is made of hair, nor is Sabina depicted as a bride. Yet the similarity between the two is striking. No literature has been written on this topic, but I propose that a possible interpretation of this likeness is the symbol of maturity, which is important notion for both brides and *matronae*.

As to what this woman is doing, it is remarkable how passive she is. There are no attributes, the hands have little function, and the legs show little movement. The viewpoint of the statue is obviously the head: the woman is looking at the viewer, who is in turn dividing his attention between her gaze and distinctive headdress. Of course, a more detailed function of the statue can only be given if the context where it has stood would be known. At least, she looks majestic, and seems to remind the viewer of her function as empress.

3.2.2 M2

This woman is leaning on her left leg, while her right leg is somewhat flexed and the foot placed outwards with a raised heel (Fig. 16). She is wearing *soleae* that are a bit more detailed than those of M1: thick-soled sandals with straps between the first and second toes. But especially from the right sandal it can be seen that the middle and the sides of the strap have been adorned with some kind of material, thus showing Lucilla's wealth.

The left arm is bent, the lower arm protruded forwards and broken before the wrist. The right arm has broken off just above the elbow, but it is still visible that the arm was extended slightly towards the right.

She wears a *tunica/stola* with a belt underneath the breasts. The fact that the nipples shine through the dress is an interesting point, as this is also the case with V3 and V1. Next to this, at both sides of the gown the fabric has been pulled over the belt, perhaps to be used for creating the sleeves. These are short and appear to be loosely seamed rather than buttoned, but this is not entirely clear.

Over the dress, this woman is wearing a *palla*. It covers the back of her head as well as both shoulders, has been draped around the elbows, and slung over the left arm before hanging down. Interestingly, a large hole has been drilled in the marble, approximately at the point where the *palla* is tucked under the left arm. This may indicate that there was a strut to support the hand, suggesting that it might have held a heavy attribute. However, these ideas are all speculative.

At the front, the *palla* seems to be folded into almost a roll, from which it hangs down with a diagonal bottom from the left knee to halfway across the lower right leg. The right knee evidently shines through the cloth, thus creating a focal point.

The head is oval-shaped and directed somewhat to the right, enhancing the contrapposto effect that has been created by the natural position of the legs and the slight twist in the torso that makes the right shoulder more elevated than the left. The face has a rounded and double chin, wrinkles around the mouth, and a very stern expression (Fig. 17). The lips are protruded in sullenness, giving the viewer the impression that this woman is sulking. It gives her a haughty look, which is intensified by the eyes: they are turned upwards (especially the right eye). They have irises, and tiny holes are drilled in them to function as pupils.

Undoubtedly, the most striking feature of the head and perhaps even the whole body is the hair. It reminds of the famous, extravagant hairstyles of the Flavian and Antonine women, with the curls on the front elevated extremely high and the back braided into a bun. Of course, this statue belongs to the Antonine period, but the hairstyle is less ostentatious. The hair is divided in the middle and the curls fall sideways instead of

upwards. However, it has been put up rather high, and part of the ears are hidden from the eye because of the curls that hang in front of them.

A final matter I would like to discuss before raising the subject of this statue's activity concerns the rather vague lines on the neck. Could these be interpreted as Venus rings? As they are not pronounced, it is very difficult to say something conclusive about them. However, they are visible from quite a distance and wrinkles on the neck are not often shown. On the other hand, this woman is not very young anymore and she has wrinkles around her mouth. Whatever the case, the lines seem to be related to the issue of maturity, or otherwise beauty. Perhaps this could be associated with the pronounced nipples?

What is this woman doing? She is not looking directly at the viewer, but slightly looking upwards with a displeased expression on her face. Her legs suggest movement, increased by the contrapposto effect: she is almost taking a step. There is the possibility that she held an object in her left hand, which is unfortunately lost nowadays. Without the arms and possible attributes, as well as lacking the context of the statue's find location, there is no more information available in order to interpret this woman's activity or function.

3.2.3 M3

This statue is different from the other *matronae* in two ways: it dates from the early third century AD, like V2 and possibly V4. Next to that, it is the only *matrona* in this collection that has been depicted as a goddess. Therefore, it is to be expected that there will be some style differences between this statue and the others, as well as one or more references to the goddess that has been personified here by Iulia Domna.

She is standing in the contrapposto position, slightly leaning forward (Fig. 18). The weight of the body is mostly supported by the right leg, the foot placed flat on the ground. The left leg is flexed, while the foot is placed outwards and the heel raised. On top of this foot straps are visible: the woman wears *soleae*.

The left arm is held down (although slightly bent), the hand touching the *palla*. The right arm is bent and the lower arm raised, while the hand is directed towards the body vertically. Both the hands are holding an attribute. The right hand is even supported by a strut, suggesting that the object must have been something large. I would argue that this must have been a staff, since part of it is still present in the hand. Also, the staff is one of the common attributes of Ceres, as are grains or flowers. In this case, Iulia Domna holds two poppy heads in her left hand, which identify her as Ceres, too.

She is wearing a short-sleeved *tunica/stola*, which is very indistinct because most of the dress is covered by the *palla*. The latter covers the back of the head and is wrapped around both shoulders and arms. It spreads over the left breast and falls down to above the left knee and halfway across the lower right leg. It is twisted around the lower left arm and from there hangs down to almost the ankle.

A remarkable feature is the sculpting of the dress on the left leg: there are not only fewer pleats (which is not atypical, since the leg is protruded) but they are very different from the others. Of course, usually there is a contrast between the pleats that cover the straight leg and the middle on the one hand and the protruded leg on the other, but in this case the effect is quite unnatural. The pleats are so thin that the leg almost appears to be naked. Moreover, the *palla* that otherwise would have covered this leg at least to the knee is lifted up by the left hand! This is a unique characteristic among the collection of statues here investigated, and will be discussed in more detail at the end of this description.

The head is directed somewhat to the left, looking straightforward or perhaps a bit towards the viewer. The face is rounded and Iulia Domna is looking serious, but she does appear to have a sort of 'archaic smile'. Also, the wrinkles next to her mouth and under her eyes are clearly visible. The eyelids are heavy and the eyes half-closed.

The hair is the most prominent aspect of the head, as is the case for all the *matronae* so far. This type of hair is distinctive for Iulia Domna, thus making the statue not only the impersonation of Ceres, but also clearly a portrait of the woman herself. The braids fall around the head, almost like the wig of a judge: the hair is divided in several strands of braids, going from the forehead all across the head to its back. At the sides of the head, there are curls that fall vertically in front of the horizontal braids. They frame the braids at the front and are incorporated in the rest of the hairdo at the bottom of the braids. On both cheekbones, two artistically sculpted curls are visible, too.

Another remarkable feature can be seen at the back of the hair, where the *palla* touches the hair. In between the hair and the cloak seems to be some kind of diadem or ribbon. Unfortunately, this is very difficult to see, but there is a possible interpretation that I would like to mention: perhaps the tress of cloth one can discern on the inside of the *palla*, hanging alongside the hair towards the right shoulder is a *vitta*. Yet again, there is no conclusive evidence for this.

Finally, what can be said about the function of this statue? Since it is a representation of an empress as a goddess, it is likely that there must have been a combination of a political and a religious reason to have it put up. Yet again, nothing is known about the context of the statue, so a more specific explanation as to why Iulia

Domna was depicted as Ceres or in what way the statue played a role within its context cannot be guessed.

However, I think it is important to determine to what extent this statue represents Ceres or a *matrona*. Since there are some evident differences between the position of this statue and the others, this might be simply explained as not belonging to the *matrona* in the statue but the goddess. I would like to argue that especially the attributes (that is the staff and the poppy heads) play a role in signifying this statue as Ceres. Perhaps the visible nipples and the raised-up *palla* can be associated with this representation of a fertility goddess. However, the nipples are shown in several statues of both *Vestales* and *matronae*, and the elevated *palla* has no parallel whatsoever, so this interpretation seems improbable. Unfortunately, it is unknown whether the showing of the nipples was associated with fertility by the viewer in Roman times, but perhaps some new insights can be acquired when comparing the description of all the statues, in the next chapter. The same goes for the raised *palla*: for now, the meaning remains ambiguous, but a hypothetical interpretation might be provided in the next chapter, when all the characteristics will be compared.

3.2.4 M4

As opposed to the former statues, this woman is not an empress but an ‘ordinary’ *matrona*. She is leaning on her left leg, while her right leg is flexed in a natural position, the foot placed slightly outward with a raised heel (Fig. 19). Her shoes are *soleae*, fastened with a strap between the first two toes.

Both arms are broken, the right one before the elbow and the left one halfway across the lower arm. The latter is bent and directed upwards from the elbow, while the former is held straight down and somewhat outwards.

The *tunica/stola* has a knotted belt underneath the breasts (of which, once again, the nipples shine through), simultaneously creating the sleeves. Those are buttoned and presumably reached the wrists. The long dress is partially covered by a *palla* that has been wrapped around the head and lower part of the body. It falls over the shoulders and is draped around the left forearm, from which it reaches down to the ankle, as well as going diagonally towards the right thigh. The bottom of the *palla* stretches from below the left knee to the elevated right heel. As in M2, the knee creates a focal point for the viewer’s eyes, because it evidently protrudes through the clothing.

The woman’s head is directed forward and she is looking straight at the viewer. Her face is round and smooth, and the facial expression is rather serious or sad. The hair is parted in the middle, the curls almost forming a sort of roll around the head. Within

the *palla*, next to the neck on the right side, a loop of cloth appears to be visible, which might be identified as a *vitta*.

On top of the head she wears a simple, unadorned diadem which is concave between the upper and lower rims. Perhaps this piece of jewellery, unique in this collection of statues, is related to the fact that this statue has been found in a funerary context. With regard to a statement of L. Shumka, this may well be possible: “[...] self-presentation was an integral part of the literal and metaphorical construction of a feminine identity, and [...] the capacity to design and maintain a look, whether stylish or conservative, was one of the few ways in a patriarchal society which women had available of expressing themselves as women” (Shumka 2008, 173). Thus, the diadem would be worn to create an ideal and embellished image of a person, an idea that is consistent with the fact that people in funerary sculpture were often idealised: this statue depicts a young, rich woman. Could the visibility of the nipples also be linked with this idea of perfection and self-presentation? This could be the case, but cannot be proved, because there are several statues of both *Vestales* and *matronae*, all from different contexts, that show the same feature. Perhaps more conclusions could have been drawn if it was known whether the arms had held attributes or not. This is not implausible, because the left arm goes upwards, whereas the right arm is removed quite some distance from the body: both arms must have been doing something.

3.2.5 M5

This statue depicts an unknown *matrona*. She leans on her right leg, while the left leg is very slightly bent (Fig. 20). Both feet stand flat on the ground, with the left foot placed outwards. The shoes are not clearly visible as they are almost entirely covered by the dress, but presumably they are a type of *soleae*: one can see the soles, the feet are bare and there are straps between the first and second toes.

The left arm is held down, the hand sculpted rather naturally with three bent fingers while the index finger is somewhat less bent and the thumb held straight. The right arm is flexed and lower arm placed in an upward position against the body. With the right hand the woman is clutching the *palla*. The latter has covered almost the entire body. Therefore, nothing more can be said about the *tunica/stola* except for the fact that it is a long-sleeved dress. The *palla* itself is draped in a complex fashion, because it hangs down like a dress, but is simultaneously covering the head and shoulders, as well as hanging down from the left arm. Like V5 and M1, it must have been wrapped around the body several times: for instance, the parts of cloth that cover the left shoulder are clearly

two layers of the *palla*, one hanging down from the head and the other coming from the front.

The head is directed somewhat to the left and the woman is looking directly at the viewer. She has wrinkles in her face and has a stern expression. Again, the most prominent feature of the head is the hair. It is combed backwards and has stylistic curls, although they are not as ostentatious as M2's or M3's. Furthermore, between the *palla* and the hair is an undeterminable piece of cloth. Evidently, this woman is not wearing *vittae* or *infulae*, so the most likely interpretation would be the *tutulus*. However, even this is not a satisfactory solution, as the hairstyle is not very elevated or braided with *vittae*. Therefore, the evidence remains inconclusive.

Once again, the activity of this woman is difficult to establish. She is standing still and does not have any attributes. The only thing she is doing is looking at the viewer sternly and holding on to her *palla*, in order to not let it drop off her shoulders. Therefore, I think that the function of this statue was strongly related to the context of the statue, which is unfortunately unknown.

3.3 Conclusion

It has been shown that the general view of a *matrona*'s attire is mostly correct. However, there is one point on which the reality presented by the five described statues differs from the common idea: among all the statues, the *vittae* are either absent or ambiguously present (see Tab. 2). This is striking, because the general view is partially based on Latin texts. The question remains whether the texts are wrong or whether these statues do not have *vittae* by chance. Of course, the quantity of this collection is too scarce to be representative, but Olson mentions that *vittae* are rarely depicted (Olson 2008, 39). Therefore, she suggests that they might have been painted on the heads in some cases, or that they were only worn on special occasions. The importance of paint in relation to the clothing and hair of *matronae* and *Vestales* is a topic that will be further discussed in the next chapter.

This said, there are also some differences between these five *matronae*. Among the most remarkable features that stand out are the fact that only M4 has directed her head forwards, that M2 is the only one who has a slightly raised chin and possesses adorned shoes, that M3 is raising up her *palla*, and that M5 stands flat on both feet instead of one, with the bent leg directed to the front. Most of these features are unique within the entire collection of both *matronae* and *Vestales*.

When opposing the features of the empresses against the unknown women's characteristics, the first result that appears is the fact that solely M2 and M3 have (had)

struts, suggesting that two of the empresses held rather large objects. This, however, does not seem to mean anything.

The other remark that must be made in comparing the empresses to unknown *matronae*, is that the dress of M1 and M5 is very much alike. When assuming that empresses wore their clothes in different ways than other women, this might indicate that either M1 is wearing her dress in a rather common fashion for an empress, or that M5 is dressed in a way that would befit an empress. Yet, of course, these interpretations are rather far-fetched.

In my opinion, all of these exceptional characteristics depend on the context they were located within, as well as on the exact period in time in which they were made, as well as on chance, and the preference of both sculptor and client. Yet, they might still be associated with the identity of the woman that has been represented, but this is difficult to determine without the statues' contexts.

Nevertheless, something might be concluded about the function the statue had within this missing context, when the statues' features are combined with the background information on the people that are depicted. Unfortunately, this only works for the empresses, as nothing is known about M4 and M5.

The function of the empresses' sculptures can possibly be related to politics. Empresses had to make sure that they were liked by the people, and that they maintained their power (see, for the empresses' power and their awareness of it, Alexandridis 2000, *pass.*; Kleiner 1996, 28-41; Siebert 2000, *pass.*). At the same time, they had to present themselves as a public person with authority on the one hand, and as a respectful *matrona* (who was not normally found in the public sphere) on the other. Therefore, propaganda and evidently self-representation were very important (Keltanen 2002, 141). With this in mind, the dress of M1 and its similarity with M5 can be explained thus: “[...] the depiction of Sabina in chaste [...] garb proclaimed that the imperial house was approachable, even as Hadrian's heroic nudity underlined his majestic power” (Boatwright 2000, 67).

4 Discussion

4.1 Results

In order to be able to know whether the scholars that think the *Vestales* can be compared to *matronae* are correct or not, the features of all the statues from the previous two chapters need to be opposed to each other. Before providing a general view of these characteristics, I would like to discuss some other issues first.

It is important to take into account the fact that all the statues in the collection must have been painted. This could have shed light on the differences and similarities between *Vestales* and *matronae*: for instance, it has been mentioned that Worsfold stresses that the *Vestales* were all dressed completely in white.

Since there were strict rules as to what clothing women should wear, the Romans also had ideas on the colours of clothing. The most common example thereof is the fact that the colour purple was only allowed to be worn by men of a certain political status. Women had a wide range of coloured clothes to their disposal, amongst which several hues of blue and yellow, but also pink, purple, red, brown, or beige (Olson 2008, 13-4; Sebesta 1994b, 70-1). Not much is known about specific colours worn by women of a certain class or on specific occasions, but an example of the latter would be the *flammeum*, a veil that was worn by brides of a yellow, 'flame-like' colour (Goldman 1994, 228; La Follette 1994, 55-6). More importantly, Servius tells us that the *Vestales'* *infulae* were, according to him, '*albo et cocco*', 'of white and scarlet-red' (Servius *In Aenaedem* 10.538). The most important difference between all of these colours must have been the price: some of them were much more difficult to acquire. The scarlet-red colour, for example, was extracted from a specific sort of insect and thus not easy to come by.

Moreover, paint can create things that otherwise are not visible: as said, all of the *matronae* lack *vittae*, although the literature indicates that they were commonly worn by them. This does not mean that the Latin texts are 'wrong', but merely shows us that nor ancient literature, nor sculpture reflects the reality. Possibly, the *vittae* were painted on the statues. However, two or three of the Vestal statues do have sculpted *vittae*, which is still strikingly different to the *matronae*. Therefore, perhaps the *matronae* only wore them when they dressed up for a special occasion.

Nonetheless, painted statues could have changed the entire representation of the statues. The same goes for fabric: silk was the most popular because it almost shows the nakedness of body underneath (Olson 2008, 14). Yet it was also the most expensive, even for emperors. Therefore, most of the wealthy people bought silk that was interwoven with threads of other materials. For the less opulent, there were several kinds of linen, cotton, and wool imported from several regions of the Roman empire (Sebesta 1994b, 71-2).

Again, we do not know if there were differences in textile in the clothing of *Vestales* and *matronae*, but this might have made them less or more distinctive to be identified.

A fourth important issue that needs detailed discussing is the use of the typological method to study statues. Lindner and Van Deman make use of this method in order to ascribe an identity to the *Vestales*. If modern scholars project an identity to a statue, should statues be treated typologically at all? Typology should be practised with caution, but in my opinion, it can be useful. If the data between several statues are cross-referenced, for example if a statue has been identified as a priestess because this has become clear from its context, and a different statue looks *exactly* the same and has been found in a similar context, it would be a possibility to interpret the latter statue as a priestess. But it is important that for typology to work, details such as attributes, facial expression, hair, and draping of clothing must be completely similar (as opposed to the way the scholars that have made the comparison between *Vestales* and *matronae* have come to this conclusion).

Let us now turn to the types of Van Deman and Lindner. Van Deman (1908, *pass.*) states that V1 and V4 represent the Demeter-type, and that V5 is an example of the Fortuna-type (that, according to her, dates back to the fourth century BC as a type that represents an unidentifiable goddess). V2 exemplifies a type of priestess, while V3 belongs just to a 'common' type. Next to these latter two types that are quite vague, the most salient problem in her article is the fact that she does not explain why these types are referred to as 'Demeter' or 'Fortuna'. There is no clarification concerning the statues on which these types are based in the first place, so how are we to know that the Vestal statues belong to these types?

Lindner (1996, *pass.*) partially solves this problem by ascribing some of the statues to a type that has been based on activity. Thus, she identifies V3 and V2 as examples of the type 'priestess burning incense', because she argues that the reconstruction of the arms, hands, and attributes indicate an interpretation like this. Interestingly, statues have been found where the position resembles that of V3 and V2 and which had a portable incense burner standing next to them. However, their drapery is different, so V3 and V2 might just as well have been doing something else. Nonetheless, this manner of comparing is possible, because reconstructing an activity can more accurately be done than determining one's identity.

On the other hand, Lindner still tries to construct the identity of some statues by means of typology: V1 and V4 are interpreted as belonging to the *peplophoros*-type. Although only V4 seems to be wearing a *peplos* (since the belt cannot be seen in V1), and I have proposed that this is because of the contemporary fashion (copying the Greek style

was fashionable), Lindner argues that both statues are wearing *peploi* for a different reason. Since goddesses or empresses sometimes were portrayed in a *peplos*, she states the following: “Was it unusual, an honor, that a Vestal was depicted in the same drapery configuration as a goddess and an empress?” (Lindner 1996, 349). Yet she does not consider that the fact that every Greek woman wore the *peplos* could have something to do with this! It is impossible to say something about identity when a few statues are merely wearing the same dress, whilst overlooking all the other characteristics.

In the introduction of the second chapter I wondered if certain statues would turn out to be typological examples of specific *matronae*, in order to determine whether the comparison between *Vestales* and *matronae* could be made by means of typology. It has been shown above that this is clearly not possible for V1 and V4. Another example is M1, who belong to the type of the ‘large Herculanean woman’, but this also proves to be useless, since none of the parallels for M1 can provide information about *Vestales*.

Notwithstanding these misinterpretations, Lindner shows us that typology is able to be fruitful: she identifies V5 as an example of the Fortuna-type, just like Van Deman. However, Lindner explains that a different statue has been positively established to be Fortuna, based on her attributes. Although we do not know anything about V5’s attributes, the comparison with Fortuna does not derive from nothing: V5 has exactly the same drapery and position. Although the head, and thus the hair and facial expression, is missing, it is certain a possibility that this statue would have been sculpted in the same way for a reason. This reason, however, we can only guess. I do not want to propose that this *Vestalis* represents Fortuna, but there must have been a connection. Lindner suggests that “the Romans conceived of strong parallels between Vesta and Fortuna: they are both fertility goddesses with strong procreative powers yet epitomize virginity” (Beard in Lindner 1996, 325). This might be a far-fetched interpretation, but no possibilities must be ruled out.

A final matter that needs to be paid attention to, before considering the actual characteristics of the statues, concerns the disparity in representation of the ideal or reality. It has already briefly been touched upon, but it needs to be stressed that Latin texts and sculpture often represent how something *should* be instead of how it is (see also Olson 2008, 40-1). Of course, art and literature have goals and these are often related to the viewer or reader who is influenced by them. Since people have the natural tendency of imitation, presenting a perfect woman would inspire others to become like her. In this light, the *peplos* that V4 is wearing can be interpreted as an indication that keeping the Greek style in mind is fashionable, almost like a ‘trend’.

Having shown that unperceivable elements like paint, fabrics and the discussions on typology and the representation of ideal and reality are important in researching the comparison between *Vestales* and *matronae*, let us now turn to the actual differences and similarities between the two groups. The points of comparison primarily include the position, hair, and facial expression of the statues, but also the way the *palla* and the *tunica/stola* are draped, the Venus rings, and the showing of the nipples. By means of these features, it will be demonstrated that a clear border between *Vestales* and *matronae* can be perceived.

Amongst all the *Vestales*, V5 is the only one who leans on the left leg instead of the right. Perhaps this is a trait that fits the *matronae* rather than the *Vestales*: there is more variation in the position of the legs and feet in the collection of the *matronae*. In two cases (M2 and M4), the women's left legs are straight. Also, whenever a leg is bent among the *Vestales*, the foot of this leg is raised and placed to the side and rear. With the *matronae*, this is not necessarily the case: M5 is standing flat on both feet, while the relaxed leg is placed to the front instead of the rear.

Next to that, all of the *matronae* are interacting with the viewer. All of them look rather stern and have their eyes directed towards the viewer, with the exception of M2. However, from her haughty expression it can clearly be seen that she expects to be marvelled at. These expressions contrast sharply with those of V1 and V2, who seem to be looking into the distance without being concerned by the viewer.

Also, the hair is an interesting point of comparison. Although generally, the hair of the *Vestales* is covered to a greater extent than that of the *matronae*, it is evident that the *Vestales*' hairstyle is much less complex. The hair of V1 has not even been curled, and while V2 has braids, the hair of the both of them falls sideways. Unquestionably, the hairstyles of the *matronae* are more elaborated and diverse, done up high, with a knot on top of the head or additional curls on the cheeks.

Furthermore, another disparity seems to be the holding in place of the *palla*. This appears to be solely connected to the *matronae*, as only M1 and M5 perform this action. Remarkably, these are the same two statues among the *matronae* that wear the double-layered *palla*. This, however, is also worn by V5, which makes this *Vestalis* somewhat *matrona*-like. Next to the layered *palla*, the sleeves of her dress are created by the belt underneath her breasts, which is also not the case with the other *Vestales*. Yet two *matronae*, M2 and M4, have their sleeves sculpted in the same way.

Therefore, some of the *Vestales* are more *matrona*-like than others. For instance, V3 is the only *Vestalis* whose nipples shine through the dress and who has Venus rings. If these can be associated with fertility or maturity (which is entirely uncertain), it suggests

that these are the traits that fit a *matrona*. Another example is V5, whose *palla* and sleeves have similar parallels among the *matronae*. Her feet are more suitable for the *matrona*-category, too, and she has a possible shoulder strap that makes the dress more *stola*-like. Interesting is also V2: her dress is the only one within the collection that has a *limbus*. It has a shoulder strap, and the buttoned sleeves are similar to those of M4. Her *palla* is rolled at the waist, just like the ones of M2 and M4. However, the triangular apron-like front of the *palla* is unparalleled, so no conclusions can be drawn from that. The fact that *infulae* are wrapped around the head make this woman both *matrona*-like and Vestal-like.

Unfortunately, new insights like the above have not been found for interpreting M3. She is raising up the *palla*, and I have tried to come to a hypothetical interpretation by combining this trait with others. Both M3 and V1 have the same ‘archaic smile’. M3 wears the *palla*, together with V1 and V4, in such a fashion that it only covers one breast. Yet these combinations do not seem to provide any more information, so ultimately, no solution can be found for explaining M3’s activity.

In the above, it has been shown that the scholars that have compared *Vestales* to *matronae* are partially correct: the clothing is similar, but there are important details that differ. Romans might have simply thought that the *stola* (which was, by the period this statue collection was made in, entirely replaced by the *tunica*) was appropriate for both classes of women, because both were important for the existence of society: the *Vestales* religiously, the *matronae* practically. The scholars that compare *Vestales* to *matronae*, however, try to interpret the likeliness in clothing as similarity in social role. Points of resemblance include the function of housewife (as both took care of the house), bride (as both stood under the authority of a man) or maiden (as both were supposed to be pure and virtuous). The fact that there are differences in facial expression, hair, standing position, and the interaction with the viewer is ignored. I have tried to determine these differences because apparently, the scholars in question have not based their comparison on the opposition of traits among *Vestales* and *matronae*. Yet especially these differences may be more important than clothing, because they might say more about self-representation, and thus similarity, than fixed regulations about clothes. If *Vestales* and *matronae* felt alike, why are the features in which they themselves had saying so different from each other?

When not compared to *matronae*, the *Vestales* have been juxtaposed to maidens or even men. Again, this has to do with their social role or ‘status’. Privileges were usually not given to women, people other than maidens were usually not virgins. But does this mean that *Vestales* are *similar* to the other groups? Why would it be impossible that

they form a group on their own? This is a discussion that will be further explored in the next paragraph. Generally, I strongly feel that the *Vestales* are compartmentalised by modern scholars. Olson seems to concur: “The use of discrete categories (girl, wife, bride, etc.) in the description and elucidation of clothing items, such as those below [colours and fabrics], is misleading inasmuch as it implies there were isolated kinds of appearance” (Olson 2008, 11).

Gender influence on modern research is clear from the sheer comparison of *Vestales* to either males or females: the scope is entirely focused on gender, in order to determine the *Vestales*’ role as a male or female one. Certainly, there was a strict division of male and female activities within Roman society, and yes, the *Vestales* had an extraordinary position. But is gender the only perspective to be used when defining their identity? Up to now, only the social role of *Vestales* has been investigated. Yet it has been pointed out that statues of *Vestales* can be regarded as a separate group that cannot be compared to *matronae*. Issues such as colours and fabrics of clothing, the fact that the statues have been painted, as well as the use of typology contribute to the differences between the two classes of women. Next to that, the facial expression, hair, position and perhaps also the relation to the viewer is different. Interestingly, all of these are connected to self-representation, since these details were the only ones that women could design to their own liking.

Therefore, a better idea about their identity would be provided by future research that examines the *Vestales* within their religious context: they have not been discussed as women in a cult that was special, but have been seen as special women themselves, with an exceptional status in comparison to other classes. Why not look closely at the *Vestales* within their cult, since Vesta was the one who was honoured? Why does the cult have such an important place within Roman society? How is this special cult *used* by emperors and politicians?

In the following paragraph the principal result of my iconographic research, that the *Vestales* formed a separate group and therefore must be considered as such, will be underscored by exploring the role of gender on clothing nowadays in comparison to Roman times. Thus, it has to do more with the social dimensions of my research question. As my study deals with the discrepancies between Roman society and modern views on it, the following is merely meant as a digression in order to broaden its perspective.

4.2 Gender influence on clothing in ancient and modern times

*spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur ut ipsae:
100 ille locus casti damna pudoris habet.*

They come to watch [the games], but they also come to be seen themselves: this place provokes the damaging of chaste modesty.

Ov. *Ars. Am.* I.99-100

“Women’s clothing was ideally bound up with notions of honour and ideals of relations between the sexes, and then as now played an important part in the cultural construction of sexual categories: gender-specific clothing and adornment formed the normal aesthetic codes for men and women.” (Olson 2008, 10)

“Dresses play a very important role when it comes to enhancing femininity through fashion and there are a variety of dresses styles to choose from just so you can look gorgeous.” (becomegorgeous.com)

For Roman women, there were strict regulations on clothing. In spite, or perhaps because of this, self-representation was very important, especially in the light of propaganda (as we have seen from the empresses’ sculptures) and eroticism (as is shown by the quote from Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*). Maybe some additional information about views on clothing can be acquired by looking at its role nowadays. How do we use clothing?

As Olson states above, both now and then clothing has always been gender-related. The traditional division in trousers and skirts is fading, but it is still unusual for men to wear skirts or dresses (with the exception of traditional or professional clothing, like the Scottish kilt, the Arabic djellaba or the religious habit). Nevertheless, times change and it becomes more and more common for everyone to ‘cross-dress’.

Nowadays, the influence of fashion is of great importance. When in Roman society, fashion was about imitating the dress of, for example, the imperial family, today it is about pushing boundaries. Like art, fashion must be constantly renewed and for the sake of invention, even gender-traditional clothing becomes less important (see, for further information, Barnard 2007).

Gender is still important, however, on a different level: it serves to enhance one’s identity as a male or female. According to a random Internet site the dress is the ideal garment to intensify (the body’s) femininity. Even so, when a man wears a dress or skirt, the goal is not to become less masculine: all clothing is starting to become suitable for everyone.

An exception to this, of course, is clothing for those who are required to wear something specific. Let us take the juxtaposition of Vatican nuns and Italian housewives as an example. To some extent, these can be seen as parallels for *Vestales* and *matronae*. In Vatican City, nuns (as well as monks and the pope) play an important role. They wear specific clothing and perform explicit duties. When they walk through the city, they are

recognisable as people that belong to a certain group. This might be a plausible sight for *Vestales*, too.

Italian housewives, however, to what extent they can even be seen as one group, are much more heterogeneous. They are free to choose their clothes and to change their apparel with every new fashion trend. This is why it is more easily for them to wear clothing as a means of self-representation, whereas nuns can only wear different religious necklaces, for example. *Vestales* are only able to present themselves by means of details like nuances in dress-draping or their hairstyle, their facial expression or their standing position.

Of course, the comparison of *Vestales* and *matronae* to nuns and housewives is not entirely applicable, because nuns do not wear the same type of dress as housewives do. Also, the housewives seem to be an appropriate parallel for *matronae*, but the latter had the same limitations as the *Vestales* did: they had a variety of colours and fabrics to their disposal, but still were obliged to wear the *tunica/stola*. Therefore, the details by which *Vestales* and *matronae* can change their apparel and look are the only variables with which they could present themselves as individuals.⁴ As such, things like facial expressions and position are surely not possible for comparing within the groups of nuns and housewives.

Yet only by means of these aforementioned details, people can nowadays be discerned from the 'group' they belong to, for instance their professional garb or clothes that can be associated with a certain subculture with similar clothing (such as goths). The latter are groups that have been formed because people have shared interests.

In the previous paragraph, I wondered if people are thought of as similar, when they were wearing the same type of clothing. Now it has become clear that they are seen as similar within their group, they fit into a category, but they are not seen as similar persons: they can be perceived as individuals because of these small details of self-representation.

Therefore, it can be concluded not only from the results of the previous chapters that determined the *Vestales* to form a separate group, but also from the comparison of views on clothing today and in Roman times, that *Vestales* (and nuns, for that matter) need to be examined in relation to their religious function, within their religious cult. A new conclusion that has not come forward so far concerns the difference between secular and religious context: in general, *matronae* are able to present themselves as individuals

⁴ Although it is important to note here that separately from the context of the statue collection that is researched here, *matronae* were able to distinct themselves by means of jewellery, make-up, etc. as well.

to a greater extent than *Vestales*, and because of their context (political motives considered), this might be even more important.

4.3 The comparison revisited

In conclusion, combining several features of the statues with each other has led to new insights with respect to the comparison of *Vestales* and *matronae*: although sometimes there are minor similarities, statues of *Vestales* can clearly be perceived as a separate group. Several factors contribute to this conclusion. First, the important issues about the clothing's colours, fabrics, the statues' paint, and typology show there are differences between *Vestales* and *matronae*. Secondly, there are some aspects (such as hairstyle, facial expression, standing position, and the relation to the viewer) that have been overlooked by means of which self-representation can be propagated. Next to that, although some statues of *Vestales* have turned out to be more *matrona*-like (which is not only because by that time, the *tunica* had probably taken over characteristics from the *stola*), the apparel of the *matronae* statues has shown to be different than expected because they lack *vittae*.

Gender influence has been a factor in the research of the scholars that make the comparison between *Vestales* and *matronae*, and I have argued that *Vestales*, as they are a separate group, need to be investigated within their religious context, instead of trying to determine their social status.

5 Conclusion

Although the sexual status of the *Vestales* in Roman society is not much of an issue anymore (an example of this being that Beard 1995 strongly criticises Beard 1980 on this topic), I have shown that the association of *Vestales* with *matronae* is still impetuously made.

I started with the descriptions of all the characteristics of five *Vestales* and five *matronae* and tried to interpret matters whenever necessary. Subsequently, the results of these descriptions have been opposed to each other, in order to provide a well-informed opinion on whether the comparison between the two groups of women could be made. I chose to specifically discuss the comparison between *Vestales* and *matronae* because there is enough concrete, iconographic evidence that enabled me to do this (as opposed to *Vestales* in relation to men), and because the association is not as obvious as that of *Vestales* with maidens.

Next to that, Latin literary sources have been used to acquire additional information about the definitions of, for instance, *vittae* and *infulae*. In hindsight, there was less literature on this topic available than was expected. This is partially because in general, not many texts pertain to the appearance of *Vestales* or *matronae*. However, this is mainly due to the fact that most of the texts that do touch upon this subject have been written by authors that concern themselves with lyric poetry. These kind of texts have not been included in this study, since they are less trustworthy because they have the tendency to describe the ideal rather than the reality. Of course, this is also an issue in other genres of Latin texts, but lyric poetry especially generalises and exaggerates with regard to women.

An issue of secondary importance within this study concerns the gender influence on the modern researchers: the scholars who think that the comparison between *Vestales* and *matronae* is a valid one have been influenced by gender, as can be clearly seen by the sheer comparison of *Vestales* with men and women. The focus has continually been laid on the social role of *Vestales* within the society, not so much on their role within the religious cult of Vesta.

Yet, it has been made clear that the comparison between the two classes of women cannot be made: the type of clothing that is worn is roughly similar, but studying the details of the statues' features demonstrates that the *Vestales* must have been perceived by the Romans as a separate group. Also, the aforementioned scholars argue that the hairstyle is the same, but although both groups traditionally wore *vittae*, the coiffure of the *Vestales* shows many differences from that of the *matronae*.

The results show that there exist for specific traits differ between the two classes of women: the hair, the facial expression, the position of the statues, and the relation to the viewer (see, once again, the tables in appendix B). Generally, the hairdo of the *Vestales* is less complicated, their facial expression is more serene, and their standing position as well as their interaction with the viewer (which has been included in the category 'position' since it concerns the direction of the head) shows less variety than those of the *matronae*.

It is striking that these four points of comparison can be seen as the only features being present or visible in this statue collection that are associated with self-representation. Since there is more variety among the *matronae*, these must have been more concerned with their self-representation than the *Vestales*. This makes sense, because *matronae* had an important social secular function (consider the empresses that used self-representation within politics), whereas the *Vestales* were only publicly important due to their religious function. Therefore, I think the relation between religious and secular spheres must take the lead in comparing the *Vestales* to *matronae*.

Further conclusions of this study include the fact that the appearance of the *matronae* has shown to be different from Latin and archaeological literature. They lack the *vittae*, which can be interpreted as an example of the Latin literature presenting an ideal situation instead of a real one, or as a case where the *vittae* have possibly been painted on the statues. Next to that, some *Vestales* seem to be more *matrona*-like than others. This, however, does not devalue my point that there is a border between *Vestales* and *matronae*: they still differ greatly.

Nevertheless, some new problems have also arisen from this research: besides the necessity of considering the issues of colour, fabric and paint of the statues and the typological method of researching them, the relationship between reality and sculpture is still problematic. This is emphasised especially by the ideal situation that has been portrayed by Latin texts and possibly also the statues themselves (take into account the *Vestalis* that is wearing the *peplos* (V4). Thus, it is very difficult to make statements about real *Vestales* when having investigated sculpture.

Another matter that must be paid attention to is the representativeness of this study, since the collection is rather small. Therefore, I do not wish to present results that are representative for all the statues of *Vestales* or *matronae*. I have intended to clarify and critically discuss the comparison between the two classes, and thus provided exemplary research which brought forward iconographic results. In order to prove my point of the *Vestales* forming a separate group beyond a doubt, further research is necessary. Many possibilities come into mind for future studies, for instance an

investigation similar to mine, but with use of a larger collection of statues. Also, problems that I have not been able to solve, for instance the reasons for M3's raised *palla*, can be investigated. Furthermore, research in the direction of paint remnants on *Vestales'* heads or comparative studies of Vestal statues and Roman frescoes would also be interesting. Yet, the most important future research that has shown to be necessary in the light of this topic is the investigation of the *Vestales'* identity within their *religious* context, since they are clearly a separate group.

Abstract

Several scholars argue that the ‘order’ of the Vestal virgins (the *Vestales*) can be compared to the class of *matronae*, because they are presumed to wear the same clothing and their social role is similar. In this study, the comparison between the two groups is critically examined and the exact differences and similarities are discussed. Investigating second and early third-century Vestal statues from the *Atrium Vestae* in the Roman Forum, comparing them to statues of *matronae* from the same periods but different contexts, I demonstrate that the *Vestales* have been perceived by the Romans as a separate group, clearly distinguishable from *matronae*. Differences in details such as hairstyle, standing position, facial expression, and the interaction with the viewer show that *Vestales* and *matronae* are not the same. Some *Vestales* are more *matrona*-like than others, and the expected characteristics of *matronae* perhaps need to be redefined. Furthermore, the four points of comparison in which the two classes of women differ are precisely those that can be used for display of self-representation. Thus, *matronae* are proven to be more concerned with this than *Vestales*.

Moreover, it is argued that the scholars that made the comparison between the two female groups have been subjected to gender influence. In conclusion, the comparison *an sich* is perhaps less useful with respect to the fact that *Vestales* need to be examined in relation to their religious group, whereas *matronae* should be regarded as part of a secular social context.

Glossary

This list includes items of Roman clothing and hairstyle, that have been addressed by means of Latin words throughout the whole text. Here follow concise definitions of each item, based on Latin literature as well as my own iconographic results.

Cingulum herculeum: the ‘knot of Hercules’, a double-knot into which the belt of the Roman brides was tied. M1 has a knot in her hair that seems similar to this *cingulum herculeum*.

Infulae: although a definite description is difficult to provide, they are most probably woollen straps tied around the heads of *Vestales*. An example of a *Vestalis* with *infulae* is V1.

Limbus or *instita*: the border on the bottom of the *tunica/stola*, which is a sewn-on separate piece of fabric. It was one of the most distinctive features of the *stola*. The dress of V2 shows an example of this *limbus*.

Palla: a rectangular piece of cloth, worn as a mantle. Differences in folding suggest different implications, possibly different identities of the people wearing the *palla*. All the statues of *Vestales* and *matronae* wear this item.

Soleae: shoes that left most of the feet bare, like sandals. They had a strap between the first and second toes, to which usually a horizontal strap on top of the foot was attached. All the statues of which the feet have remained wear the *soleae*.

Stola: a ground-reaching garment with shoulder straps, allowed to be worn only by *Vestales* and *matronae*. By the time the statues within this study were made, the *stola* was no longer in use and had been replaced by the *tunica*. A consequence hereof is that some *tunicae/stolae* look more *stola*-like than others. All statues wear this garment.

Suffibulum: a rectangular piece of cloth, used as a hood. It was strongly associated with religious people and thus worn by *Vestales*. V2 is the only statue of which can be said with certainty that she is wearing a *suffibulum*.

Tunica: a ground-reaching garment, worn by all Roman women. In the period in which the statues were made, it had most often the same appearance as the *stola*. Nevertheless,

some *tunicae/stolae* seem more *stola*-like than others, as mentioned above. All statues wear this garment.

Tutulus: the hairstyle of the *mater familias*, thus only worn by *matronae*. Due to discrepancies between the Latin description and the iconographic results, the exact appearance is unclear. One point of comparison is the high fashion it was put up in. Possibly, it contained pieces of cloth. The two *matronae* whose hair could be associated with the *tutulus* are M1 and M5.

Vittae: bands of cloth or wool tied into the hair. They hung down, sometimes even almost reaching the breasts and were worn by both *Vestales* and *matronae*. An example of a statue that shows *vittae* is V2.

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Sources of illustrations and tables

Fig. 1 V1 (26-01-2012).

Fig. 2 Detail of V1 – head (26-01-2012).

Fig. 3 South frieze of Ara Pacis (30-01-2012).

Fig. 4 V2 (26-01-2012).

Fig. 5 Detail of V2 – backside (26-01-2012).

Fig. 6 Detail of V2 – head, image darkened (26-01-2012).

Fig. 7 Detail of V2 – chest (26-01-2012).

Fig. 8 V3 (26-01-2012).

Fig. 9 V4 (26-01-2012).

Fig. 10 Detail of V4 – neck (26-01-2012).

Fig. 11 V5 (26-01-2012).

Fig. 12 Detail of V5 – shoulder (26-01-2012).

Fig. 13 Detail of V5 – backside (26-01-2012)

Fig. 14 M1 (<http://www.ablogtoread.com/sinn-model-243-ti-m-ladys-watch/>).

Fig. 15 Detail of M1 – head (after <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jesst7/278590516/sizes/z/in/photostream/>).

Fig. 16 M2 (after http://www.flickr.com/photos/bob_cates/3131896889/sizes/l/in/photostream/).

Fig. 17 Detail of M2 – head (after http://www.flickr.com/photos/bob_cates/3132725074/sizes/l/in/photostream/).

Fig. 18 M3 (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/carolemage/6685773521/sizes/z/in/photostream/>).

Fig. 19 M4 (http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/index5.html).

Fig. 20 M5 (http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/matrona2.jpg).

Tab. 1 Characteristics of *Vestales*.

Tab. 2 Characteristics of *matronae*.

Appendix A: Images of *Vestales* and *matronae*



Fig. 1 V1 (26-01-2012).

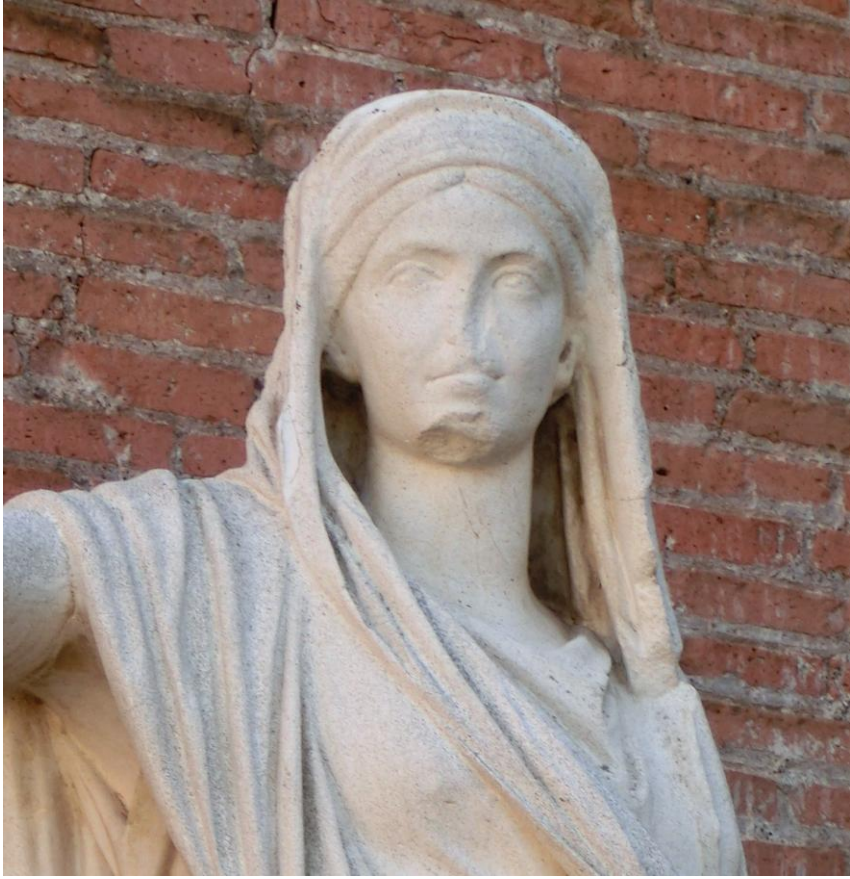


Fig. 2 Detail of V1 – head (26-01-2012).



Fig. 3 South frieze of Ara Pacis (30-01-2012).



Fig. 4 V2 (26-01-2012).



Fig. 5 Detail of V2 – backside (26-01-2012).

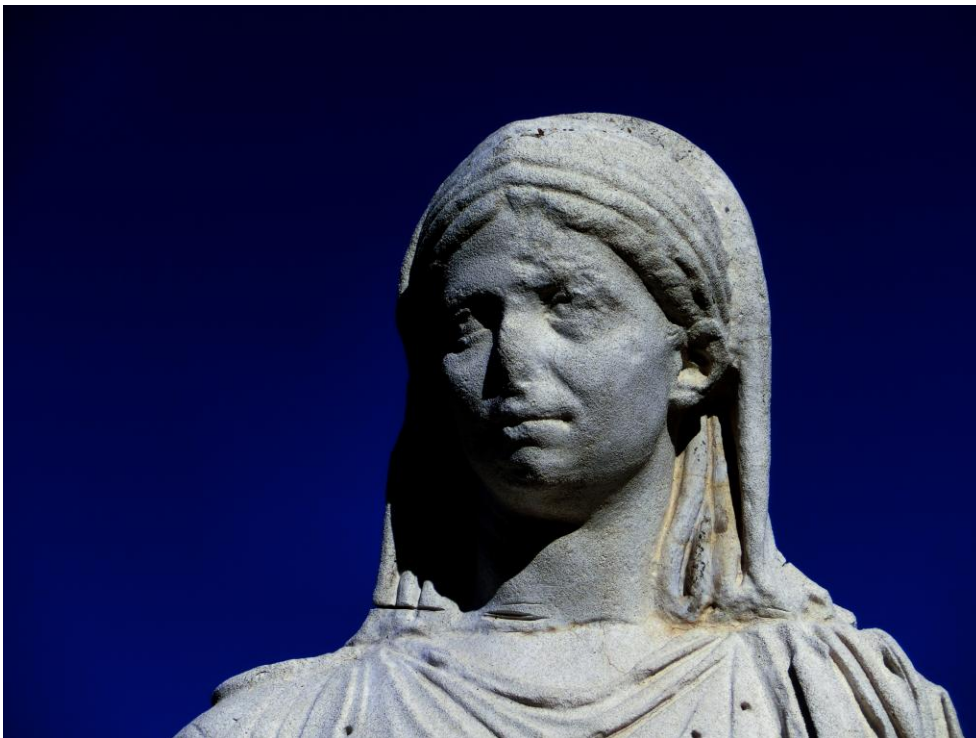


Fig. 6 Detail of V2 – head, image darkened (26-01-2012).



Fig. 7 Detail of V2 – chest (26-01-2012).



Fig. 8 V3 (26-01-2012).



Fig. 9 V4 (26-01-2012).



Fig. 10 Detail of V4 – neck (26-01-2012).



Fig. 11 V5 (26-01-2012).



Fig. 12 Detail of V5 – shoulder (26-01-2012).



Fig. 13 Detail of V5 – backside (26-01-2012).



Fig. 14 M1 (ablogtoread.com).



Fig. 15 Detail of M1 – head (after flickr.com).



Fig. 16 M2 (after flickr.com).



Fig. 17 Detail of M2 – head (flickr.com).



Fig. 18 M3 (flickr.com).



Fig. 19 M4 (vroma.org).



Fig. 20 M5 (vroma.org).

Appendix B: Tables

<i>Vestales</i>	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
Head	directed towards the right	directed towards the right	absent	absent	absent
Face	smooth, round chin	round, double chin, wrinkled	absent	absent	absent
Facial expression	serene, "archaic smile", looking straightforward	somewhat stern, looking straightforward	absent	absent	absent
Hair	divided in the middle, mostly covered by <i>palla</i>	divided in the middle, probably braided, mostly covered by <i>palla</i>	absent, must have been covered by <i>palla</i>	absent	absent
Vittae	no <i>vittae</i>	present, touching the shoulders	present, extended towards above the breasts	possibly present, touching the collar-bones	absent
Infulae	four	at least five	absent	absent	absent
Suffibulum	present	uncertain	absent	absent	absent
Tunica/stola	sleeveless, double-folded	long sleeves with buttons, <i>limbus</i> , shoulder strap	with sleeves, and a knotted belt	long sleeves, single-folded, with a belt	with a knotted belt, and possible shoulder strap
Palla	wrapped around left forearm, diagonal, from both shoulders to above the left knee, covers right breast	wrapped around left forearm, from left shoulder downwards, triangular apron-like front, rolled at the waist	wrapped around left forearm, falls down from the waist	wrapped around left forearm, diagonal, from both shoulders to above the left knee (and the ground), covers right breast	wrapped around left forearm, from right arm and left shoulder downwards, at the waist diagonally downwards to halfway across the lower legs, double-layered
Left arm	bent, lower arm held before the body	bent, lower arm protruded	bent, lower arm protruded	bent, lower arm protruded	bent, lower arm protruded
Left hand	holds the <i>palla</i>	absent	absent	absent	absent
Right arm	elevated towards the right	held alongside the body, somewhat extended towards the right	held alongside the body	bent, lower arm held before the body	held alongside the body
Right hand	absent	absent	absent	holds the <i>palla</i>	absent
Left leg	bent, knee takes focus	bent	absent	bent	straight
Left foot	placed to side and rear, heel raised	placed to side and rear, heel probably raised	absent	placed to side and rear, heel raised	flat
Right leg	straight	straight	absent	straight	bent
Right foot	flat	flat	absent	flat	placed to the side and rear, heel raised
Shoes (Evidence for) attributes	<i>soleae</i> strut at the right side, below the waist	<i>soleae</i> three struts at the right side, from the waist down; holes in the chest for a necklace	absent	<i>soleae</i>	<i>soleae</i> possible strut below the left arm
Comments	nipples shine through dress; contrapposto effect	possible Venus rings	nipples shine through dress; three Venus rings	-	sleeves are created by the belt; contrapposto effect

Tab. 1 Characteristics of *Vestales*.

<i>Matronae</i>	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Head	directed towards the left	directed towards the right	directed towards the left	directed forwards	directed to the left
Face	smooth, round chin	round, double chin, wrinkled	rounded, "archaic smile"	smooth	wrinkled
Facial expression	very serious, looking downwards at the viewer	stern and haughty, looking somewhat upwards	straightforwards, perhaps towards the viewer	serious or sad, looking straight at the viewer	stern, looking straight at the viewer
Hair	partially covered by <i>palla</i> , diagonally divided in the middle, braided, two rolls of which one with a complex knot, corkscrew curls next to ears	partially covered by <i>palla</i> , divided in the middle, sideways falling curls, put up high, curls in front of ears	partially covered by the <i>palla</i> , divided in the middle, horizontal braids with a 'frame', corkscrew curls on cheekbones	partially covered by <i>palla</i> , divided in the middle, simple curls	partially covered by <i>palla</i> , combed back, put up rather high with curls
Vittae	absent	absent	perhaps a <i>vitta</i> on the right side	perhaps a <i>vitta</i> on the right side	absent
Tunica/stola	long sleeves	with sleeves, possibly loosely seamed, and a knotted belt	short or no sleeves	with buttoned sleeves, and a knotted belt	long sleeves
Palla	wrapped around left forearm, covers the body from shoulders to the left knee and right lower leg, double-layered	wrapped around left forearm, from shoulders to elbows and down to left knee and halfway across lower right leg, rolled at the waist	wrapped around left forearm, from shoulders and arms to above the left knee and halfway across the lower right leg, covers left breast	wrapped around left forearm, falls down from the shoulders and from the left arm and right thigh to below the left knee and the right heel, rolled at the waist	wrapped around left forearm, covers the body from shoulders to below the left knee and halfway across the right lower leg, double-layered
Left arm	held alongside the body	bent, lower arm protruded	held alongside the body	bent, lower arm elevated	held alongside the body
Left hand	thumb straight, fingers bent at straight angle	absent	two fingers and thumb straight, two fingers bent, raising up the <i>palla</i>	absent	three fingers bent, index finger slightly bent, thumb straight
Right arm	bent, lower arm held before body diagonally	held alongside the body, somewhat extended to the right	bent, lower arm raised and slightly extended away from the body	held alongside the body, somewhat extended to the right	bent, lower arm held before body diagonally
Right hand	holds the <i>palla</i> in place	absent	fingers somewhat bent	absent	holds the <i>palla</i> in place
Left leg	bent	straight	bent	straight	bent
Left foot	flat	flat	placed to the side and rear, heel raised	flat	flat, placed to the side and front
Right leg	straight	bent, knee takes focus	straight	bent, knee takes focus	straight
Right foot	flat	placed to side and rear, heel raised	flat	placed to side and rear, heel raised	flat
Shoes	<i>soleae</i>	adorned <i>soleae</i>	<i>soleae</i>	<i>soleae</i>	<i>soleae</i>
(Evidence for) attributes	no attributes	hole for possible strut next to the left forearm	strut between right shoulder and hand, two poppy heads in left hand	absent	no attributes
Comments	possible sort of <i>tutulus</i>	nipples shine through dress; possible Venus rings; sleeves are probably created by the belt; contrapposto effect	nipples shine through dress; contrapposto	nipples shine through dress; sleeves are created by the belt; unadorned diadem on top of head	possible sort of <i>tutulus</i>

Tab. 2 Characteristics of *matronae*.